



# Tile Trends

*Designer Emma Rees gives her tips on an area of interior design that can leave some of us feeling floored*







Tiles have been around for thousands of years – if you have had the good fortune of visiting the Blue Mosque and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul you will be truly awed by the exquisite colours, vibrancy and patterns. This is a reminder that tiles are actually squares of treasure, and artworks in their own right.

It is a fact that tiles are amongst the earliest examples of man's use of ceramic material. Britain led the world both creatively and technically in tiling in the 19th Century. Following the decline of the beautiful Dutch delft tiles, there was a resurgence in tile production with renowned firms such as Minton and Pilkington. Today, tiles are not deployed as widely and artistically as they once were, but this is changing and tiles are now making a revival in design terms.

So what should you be considering concerning tile selection and functionality? Tiles can be heavy so always check that your joists are strong enough to carry the load. You could consider laying hardboard first.

Tile choice is a potential minefield. First, consider natural stone. A natural limestone floor will transform a bland space into an eye-catching delight. Limestone is particularly resilient and has proved popular in recent years. Natural travertine tiles are a cheaper option to limestone. Travertine is made from sedimentary rock that takes thousands of years to process. There is a downside to both of these options, however, and that is they require considerable maintenance – it is imperative for them to be sealed properly and this needs to be repeated on a regular basis. In bathrooms they can become water stained. On the plus side, natural stone is beautiful, durable and non-slip, although you are likely to pay a premium.

For a more earthy and industrial look slate is another option. Slate is durable and waterproof and comes in honed and non-honed finishes. The Amazonian honed slate tiles from Walls and Floors in Kettering, Northamptonshire are a good choice that will suit a variety of rooms and are priced economically. The advantage of the honed version is that they avoid dirt collecting in the cracks making them difficult to clean.

If you like the look of a stone floor but don't want the expense or maintenance issues, stone-effect tiles may work for you. These come in either a ceramic or porcelain tile. Ceramic tiles are waterproof, affordable and easy to clean but they can also be cold and liable to break if something is dropped on them.





One of the hottest trends this year is wood-effect tiles. These can work particularly well in kitchen areas. The colours tend to be neutral lending universal appeal that aids in value. Natural wooden flooring can be expensive - with wood-effect tiles they don't require the extra treatment or maintenance that traditional wood requires.

For something slightly less common, cork tiles offer both insulation and sound proofing qualities and are very hard-wearing. They are also one of the most environmentally-friendly coverings available, suitable for both floors and walls.

When it comes to purchasing tiles, always buy from a reputable supplier. The last thing you want is a mixed batch of honed and gloss tiles that don't match. Fired Earth is a high-end supplier of tiles and their range is inspiring and extensive, although the quality is reflected in their prices.

Mandarin Stone has an extensive range of contemporary tiles and they also cater for smaller budgets with their economy range. Walls and Floors, an online store with a showroom, also offers a large selection of tiles at affordable prices. Alternatively, buy from a local independent outfit to lower delivery costs.

As with any property-related work, ensure your tiler is competent and professional – a fantastic tile laid or maintained incorrectly can be an expensive mistake. ■



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