



TILES

CHOOSING, DESIGNING, AND LIVING WITH CERAMIC TILE



OLIVIA BELL BUEHL • PHOTOGRAPHS BY LISL DENNIS

Gibraltar, Avonite, and the like), and other materials. The play of textures and colors can add interest, warmth, and personality to the room that is the heart of most homes.

As legions of restaurant kitchens show, tile is the chef's material of choice not just for its decorative qualities, but for its practical virtues. Durable, fireproof, water- and usually stain-resistant, hygienic, and easy to keep clean, ceramic tile satisfies the workhorse demands of any kitchen. In today's increasingly high-tech kitchens, tile also fulfills an important role, adding warmth and personality to spaces that can all too easily become sterile. Happily, in its infinite variety, tile works as beautifully in a country-style kitchen as it does in a sleek contemporary setting. Whether cladding a ventilation hood, surrounding a commercial range, or framing an over-the-sink window and sill, tile is always at home in the kitchen.

While tile can be an important element in kitchen design, it must be considered in conjunction with other surfaces. This principle of design applies to any material and cannot be stated too often. The most beautiful tile in the world won't look good if it is competing for attention with several other components of equal weight. When thinking about tile color, remember that your choice may have an impact on the lighting in the room. A large expanse of a dark color will absorb light, requiring compensation with natural and artificial light. Remember also that the kitchen is first and foremost a place to prepare and serve meals. There is no doubt that certain colors offer a more appealing backdrop for food than others.

FLOOR ESSENTIALS

As discussed in chapter 3, *On the Floor*, a ceramic tile kitchen floor does have some drawbacks, as does any flooring material. Tile can be cold underfoot. It is less forgiving on the legs than more resilient materials and likewise will not spare plates and glasses dropped on it. But without a doubt, tile is practical, long lasting, and easy to keep clean. It is more durable and more water-resistant than wood and more attractive and permanent than vinyl. If you spend a lot of time cooking, you may want to use rugs or mats in front of the range and sink to add a measure of comfort.

Put your money into the back-splash. It's the first thing you see when you walk into a kitchen.

—Gail Green, Interior Designer

A few practical considerations also bear repeating with respect to selecting floor tile for your kitchen. Check with the salesperson to be sure the tile is appropriate for this use. Choose a product that is slip-resistant when wet. Most terra cotta must be sealed for kitchen use or it will stain when grease and other foods are spilled on it; some people seal quarry tile and other unglazed tile as well. (See *Seal for Satisfaction*, page 179.) White or other pale hues will show dirt more readily, as will extremely dark colors. Heavily textured or pillowed tile will collect dirt and should be avoided in kitchens. Pass up any tiles that are extremely uneven. If your feet aren't firmly flat on the floor, you will tire more quickly. In other words, comfort and health should not be sacrificed to a "look."

Crucial Tolerances

Installing tile will raise the height of a floor slightly, which may have an impact on adjoining rooms, requiring that new doorsills be laid once a tile floor is installed. Existing doors will usually have to be planed down and rehung. When laying a new kitchen floor, you'll have to decide whether to tile under all the appliances or up to them. The former is preferable, but it will raise the height of the appliances slightly, which could create a problem with a slide-in stove or built-in dishwasher (if you are not planning to install new counters also). If you opt to tile up to the edge of the appliances rather than under them, be sure that you are not raising the floor to a height that makes it impossible to slide them out for repair. Drop-in stoves and built-in ovens will not present any difficulties, but slide-in ranges, dishwashers, washing machines, and clothes dryers do require a margin of space for access. In a complete remodeling, it is best to tile under where the appliances will be installed to protect the substrate from leaks.

PREVIOUS PAGES, LEFT: Translucent glazes on reproductions of English Victorian tiles, used here as a backsplash, reveal delicate relief designs. **CENTER:** Under-cabinet lighting highlights the crackle glaze of reproduction delft tiles. **RIGHT:** *Culinarios* are a perennial kitchen favorite. **OPPOSITE:** Based on a traditional patchwork pattern, "Sailboat," a single graphic design by Native Tile, is rotated in different directions to form a dramatic floor quilt in an otherwise vintage kitchen.





Types of Tubs

The standard bathtub is designed to sit against a wall, exposing its front panel, or apron. Except for old or reproduction freestanding tubs, which rest on feet or a base, all tubs are designed in two parts, allowing you to omit the apron and cover the area with tile or another material instead. Whether made of porcelain-enameled steel or cast iron, acrylic, or fiberglass, most modern tubs can also be

ordered with one or more sides unfinished for custom installations. For a completely built-in treatment, drop-in models are also available.

When tiling around a tub, it is essential that access to the workings of the tub be provided in case of a blockage or leak. Your tile installer can devise a removable tiled panel that blends into the surrounding tile. Likewise, whirlpool tubs require access to the electric pump, which can be hidden behind a tiled panel located in the apron area or nearby.

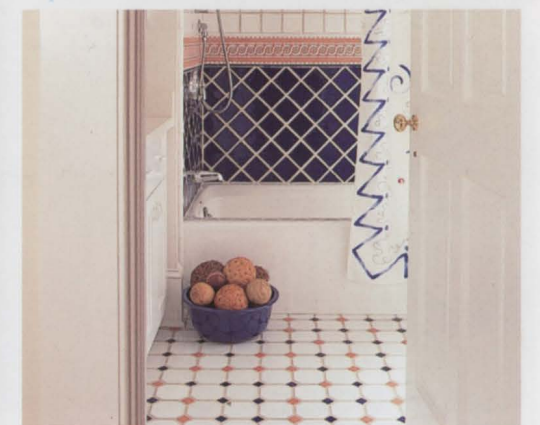
three-quarter-height treatment is preferable to tiling only halfway up the wall, which creates an awkward tension between two similar-size areas.

A well-chosen tile can make a small bath seem larger; another could make a large space seem cozier. One design used in quantity can produce a wonderfully serene environment; another used in the same space could convey luxury. A small amount of superb tile can create great drama—for example, a mural in a shower, surrounded by simple white squares. A delicately hand-painted tile could be used in a tub surround, then reappear as a chair rail on the other walls dividing two colors of paint. On a tub wall with a nondescript window, the tile could frame the opening on the sides and top it off with a dramatic zig-zag. Beyond covering areas subject to water, each use is a response to the shape of the room and the tile itself. Treatments need not be identical on all walls or parts of the room. The same

two or three tiles, used in varying arrangements, could effectively zone different areas and functions, yet retain a harmonious look.

AROUND THE TUB

The tub surround—the three walls above and around a tub that is installed against a wall—is the most commonly tiled area and often the one that allows the greatest creative license, thanks to its large expanse. Here is the place for a special treatment, whether a mural, a pattern created from two or more tiles, a series of tiled panels inset into field tile, or mirrors on one or more sides bordered in tiles. When a tub is used only for taking baths—thanks to a freestanding shower—it may not be necessary to tile the whole wall. Likewise, a whirlpool tub placed in a wide deck or against a window does not require a full tile treatment on surrounding walls. A single or double course of tiles immediately



OPPOSITE: Elaborate borders by Native Tile distinguish a tub surround and apron and frame a tiled niche. A row of trim smooths the transition to the drop-in tub. **ABOVE LEFT:** Another built-in tub gets a tiled deck of hand-molded Mexican tile. Multicolor tile accents the curved windows. **TOP RIGHT:** In lieu of a front tub panel, tile provides a unified look. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Three tile colors add visual excitement on the surround behind a standard tub.