



the guild

DIANA MAUSSER
Native Tile & Ceramics
 Torrance, California
 (310) 533-8684
 nativetile.com



Diana Mausser

RENEWING A CALIFORNIA TRADITION

EVEN THOUGH IT WAS BROKEN, one Ernest Batchelder tile had the power to change someone's life. Diana Mausser was working as an assistant glaze technician in the 1980s, when a customer brought in a matte-green tile depicting a medieval knight slaying a dragon. Just out of UCLA and working at her first job, "I knew nothing about Batchelder," Mausser tells us. "I took one look and just fell in love." Mausser got permission to help the customer, and re-created the tile and matched the glazes. The experience opened her eyes to the rich and diverse tile history of Southern California, where more than 50 tile-makers were busy creating Spanish- and Moorish-inflected art tile in the 1920s and '30s. Among the most famous was Malibu Pottery, known for its Moorish and Egyptian interlocking florals and geometrics. Mausser soon found a job with a tile-maker doing reproductions in the fabled style. Through that experience, this lover of textiles and tile learned that the two media were often related: Cultures that had weaving traditions usually had tile-making traditions as well.

When she launched her own business in 1990, Mausser started on a shoestring budget. A friend suggested she look for studio space in the boatyard area in Marina del Rey. After Mausser scraped up \$1,200 to buy her first kiln, Native Tile was open for business. "In the beginning I had to have a second job. Growth was slow." It helped that she was able to buy the clay supplies of the Metlox Pottery factory when it closed—all for a dollar. Her company has always had an informal vibe, a counterpart to the high standards of its product. Mausser hired relatives and musicians; cats and chickens wander through the workspace. The shop expanded and moved to Old Town Torrance.

Through small restoration jobs, Native Tile established a reputation for reproducing complex California art tiles broken beyond repair, and for creating new sections of tiles to flawlessly match the old. The patterns began to add up. Now there are 1,400 in the Native Tile catalog. All have been produced at least once. Recent lines added a Craftsman series of relief tiles. "We're doing a job with Turkish-Persian columns with carved capitals," Diana says. "I'm really excited about carving!"

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A 1930s house now has tile in the California tradition. • Founder Diana Mausser in the showroom. • Decos with plain tile. • The Vintage California series is *cuerda seca* work inspired by the old D&M and Hispano-Moresque tile companies. • For a 1913 bungalow, Native Tile used custom corbels from its Craftsman series to replace damaged fireplace tiles.

