

# TILE STYLE

## STYLISH TILES BRING DESIGN HEAT TO THE KITCHEN

**T**ile is king in the kitchen. Whether for your backsplash or for your flooring or both, nothing can beat the sheer glamour and elegance that these thin plates of kiln-fired clay can lend to the entire home.

But like everything else today, the sheer amount of tile styles available can overwhelm anyone. Especially for new homebuyers trying to map out their interior finish with their designers in a short, pressure-filled time span — choosing the right tile and how it works with the rest of your home design can make or break your vision for the home.

To make it even more complicated, there are plenty of tiles available now too, and not just the traditional ceramic and porcelain products. Tiles (especially for the backsplash) now also include glass tiles (an increasingly popular choice), stone tiles, and even wood and metal ones.

“Even during the economic downturn, stone and tile continue to remain popular material choices when designing various spaces, especially in the residential sector,” says Icon Stone & Tile marketing director, Sophie Belanger. “While these materials create an aesthetically pleasing setting they also have the ability to increase value to one’s home, which is important for long term investment.”

Ana Morales of U.S.-based Design-For-Less online designer tile store agrees. “Think of your product selections as an investment not an expense! The kitchen is one of the most used rooms in the home so you don’t want to skimp. You have to love the materials surrounding you because you will look at them every day and if you ever go to sell the house, the reaction people have to a gorgeous kitchen always gets your money back and a lot more.”

### DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

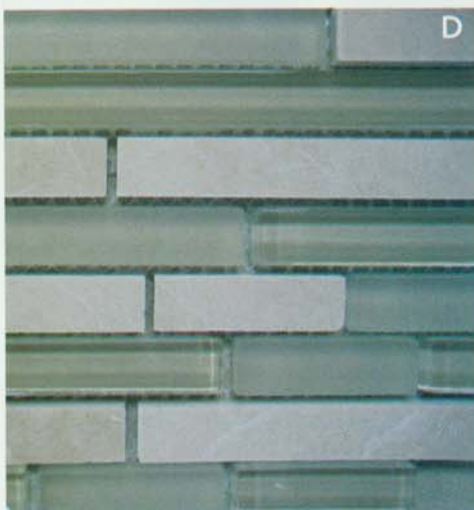
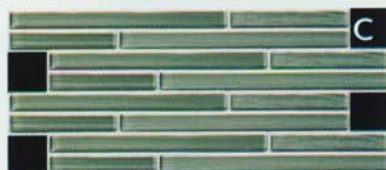
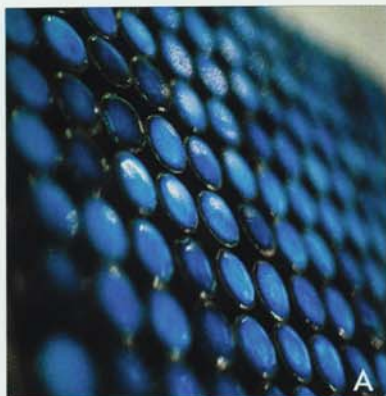
Ceramic or porcelain? That is the question. And the answer isn’t as easy as a coin flip. The main points of consideration are budget and usage. Ceramic tiles are the less expensive of the two (if your budget is limited to \$10 per square-foot or less), but porcelain is what every designer loves to work with. >>





Bold colours from Icon Stone & Tile.

“WHAT YOU SHOULDN'T DO IS INSTALL THE TILE YOURSELF. HIRE PROFESSIONALS, BECAUSE ODDS ARE YOU AREN'T GOING TO DO A VERY GOOD JOB UNLESS YOU DO THIS FOR A LIVING.”



Ceramic or non-porcelain tiles are generally made from red or white clay fired in a kiln. They are almost always finished with a durable glaze, which carries the colour and pattern. These tiles are used in both wall tile and floor tile applications, are softer and easier to cut than porcelain, and are usually suitable for light to moderate traffic. These generally have a relatively high water absorption rating making them less frost resistant and they are more prone to wear and chipping than porcelain tiles.

Porcelain tile is generally double fired and made by the dust pressed method from porcelain clay. It is dense, impervious, fine grained and smooth, with a sharply formed face. Porcelain tiles usually have a much lower water absorption rate (less than 0.5 per cent) making them frost resistant or frost-proof. Glazed porcelain tiles are much harder and more wear- and damage-resistant, making them suitable for any application from light traffic to the heaviest residential and light commercial traffic.

“Huge technical advances in production of tiles has made them more affordable and has allowed for a wider array of designs available. You can even have porcelain tiles that look like luxurious Italian marble,” Belanger says.

“Porcelain tile tends to be a little higher in price than traditional ceramic tile, but it is definitely worth paying a little more to have a more durable material,” Morales adds. “The other thing that drives people to porcelain is that because of the density, manufacturers can get very creative with the finishes. The most popular finishes include wood, polished concrete, grass weaves, metal and glass looks.”

#### SHAPE/COLOUR YOUR WORLD

Another huge consideration in purchasing the right tile is much more subjective. You simply need to know what

shape and colour you want your tile to be. Colour is obviously a personal preference, although Belanger says “white is the new black.” Although she notes that grey is also becoming popular as designers look to mimic the look of concrete.

The only real rule here is to make sure it matches with its surroundings. Shape, while not overly important, can make a difference in price. If you choose a shape that requires a lot of cutting, the installation price will go up.

Tile is not the only expense. Depending on the type of job, mortar and grout are almost always needed. Retailers and contractors often have good suggestions for grout colour when it comes to matching it with the tile, but you will want to think about this as well just in case you don't like their suggestions. “As a rule of thumb, look for grout colour that closely approximates the tile colour,” Belanger says.

“What you shouldn't do is install the tile yourself. Hire professionals, because odds are you aren't going to do a very good job unless you do this for a living,” Belanger notes. She is also an advocate of super large-format tiles, which she says works even for small spaces, and loves to dream up new tile patterns, enjoying to mix them up.

Morales says getting matching colours isn't as important as making sure they all blend. “Try to compliment your flooring, countertops and cabinets. The colors don't all have to match, they just have to flow together.”

#### MAKING A (BACK) SPLASH

“If you really want to change the look of your kitchen but are on a limited budget, start with changing your backsplash, it can really make an impact without breaking the bank,” Belanger adds.

Morales says glass tile backsplashes are getting more popular. “Glass tile adds an extra layer of sparkle and visual texture



E

- A Cava Handmade (Italy). Photo courtesy Icon Stone & Tile.
- B Slimstone natural stone wall tile. Photo courtesy Icon Stone & Tile.
- C Muretto bamboo wall tile. Photo courtesy Icon Stone & Tile.
- D Glass + stone wall tile. Photo courtesy Icon Stone & Tile.
- E Contempo. Photo courtesy Design For Less.
- F Affordable make-over simply with backsplash. Photo courtesy Icon Stone & Tile.

to your kitchen. The thicker 8mm glass has so much more dimension and color range.”

She adds that the benefit of using glass tile is that it isn't porous, which makes it very easy to clean and maintain. “It is also typically only installed on walls in the kitchen so chipping would something I could not imagine. As for cleaning, glass tile can be cleaned by using a regular (non - abrasive) household glass cleaner along with a damp cloth.”

Icon Stone & Tile ([www.iconstonetile.com](http://www.iconstonetile.com)) is one of Calgary's best known supplies of tile products with a huge collection readily available from their show room just off Macleod Trail. “We have the largest collection of Italian marble and exotic stone products in the city, we have 165 stone colours and 80 tile collections. Costs are low because we source everything ourselves,” Belanger says.

Morales says her company ([www.design-4-less.com](http://www.design-4-less.com)) can offer very competitive prices too. “Prices range from \$9.00 to \$20.00 per square-foot which includes a portion of the shipping cost to Canada,” she says. **CL**



F