



Photo courtesy Icon Stone & Tile.

The tile files

Make a (back)splash in your kitchen

■ By Pepper Rodriguez

Tile 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 —

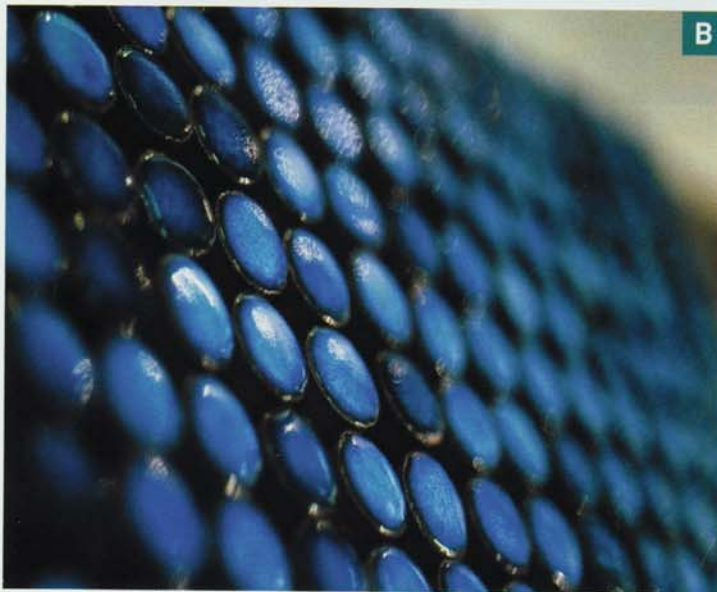
choosing the right tile and how it works with the rest of your home design can make or break your vision for the home.

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.

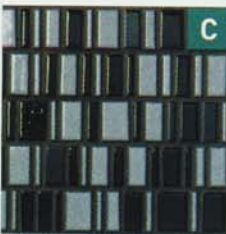
“Even during the economic downturn, stone and tile continue to remain popular »



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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.

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.

“Try to compliment your flooring, countertops and cabinets. The colors don’t all have to match, they just have to flow together.”

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)SPASH

“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.

- A Comtempo. Photo courtesy Design For Less.
- B Cava Handmade (Italy). Photo courtesy Icon Stone & Tile.
- C LE MURRINE: Mysterious and Seductive Tile Collection. Photo courtesy Icon Stone & Tile.
- D Slimstone natural stone wall tile. Photo courtesy Icon Stone & Tile.
- E Glass + stone wall tile. Photo courtesy Icon Stone & Tile.

Morales says glass tile backsplashes are getting more popular. “Glass tile adds an extra layer of sparkle and visual texture to your kitchen. The thicker 8 millimetre 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)

is one of Calgary’s best known suppliers 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) 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. **NL**

TIPS TO STAGE YOUR KITCHEN

What potential homebuyers notice in your kitchen

Have you been in a restaurant where you caught a glimpse of the kitchen and it was so disorderly and dirty that actually put you off your meal? The same can happen when potential buyers tour your home, often kitchens are the make or break room ... if it’s disorderly and dirty that can turn buyers off the sale of your house.

Here are a few tips that will lead to a delightfully palatable kitchen:

- Take out the trash – scrub out that garbage can and the cabinets around it, as leftovers thrown in the can sometimes miss and stick to the sides of your cabinets.
- If you have windows in your kitchen, clean them (in/out and the screen). Wash smudge marks off the walls, backsplash and cabinets.
- Kitchen appliances are one of the most expensive items in your kitchen — they need detail cleaning — all the knobs, buttons and glass. Pull them away from the wall and wash the sides and floor underneath.
- You can email me for a list for a detailed clean (jdempsey@cirrealty.ca).
- Remove all “art” from the fridge including magnets.
- Decide which small appliance will stay out and which will be hidden. Julie’s rule of thumb: no more than two (toaster and coffee maker — fingerprint- and smudge-free).
- Recycle those plastic bags and Tupperware with missing parts — declutter the inside of your cabinets.

HOME STAGING
with
Julie Dempsey

If you're like me, you probably watch a lot of DIY reality television. Those TV shows make it look so easy and for 30 glorious minutes we are made to believe that we're going to take an afternoon course at a hardware store, call in a few friends and our home will be transformed in no time. And who knows, maybe you can pull it off. But when it comes to your kitchen, cutting corners can get you in a lot of trouble.

Kitchens are notoriously problematic renovations and if you've got one on the horizon, be sure that you have the right person for the job and enough budget to cover what needs to be done. There is nothing worse than trying to do a quick fix, and then having to pay twice as much to mend problems that could arise from it later on.

But fear not, this month's column isn't all doom and gloom! Even on a modest budget there are ways to take your kitchen from doom to dazzling, and most of it you really can DIY, or at least have someone else do it without putting you in the poor house.



Photo courtesy Icon Stone & Tile.

BACKSPLASH

Changing up the backsplash in your kitchen can really transform the space. With the availability of such an abundance of tile from marble, ceramic, stone, and glass, the possibilities are endless of what you could choose. The trick is to make sure that whatever you choose works with your existing kitchen. Think about contrast: if you have dark cabinets, I would choose a lighter backsplash. Also, if your kitchen is feeling a bit drab, a backsplash is a fab place to introduce some colour. If you have a smaller kitchen, consider a glass that will reflect light and make the space feel larger.

CABINET DOORS

There are a few ways of going about the door situation. You can either paint out your existing doors or replace them with new ones. This will really help your budget as you are not purchasing all new boxes and ripping out your whole kitchen, rather you just put a fresh face on what's there. Re-surfacing your cabinet doors can be an easy DIY but I like it to leave it to the pros that can spray the cabinets for an even coat. I would consider sanding them down and priming them first and then getting the pros to paint to save you money.



Photo courtesy Icon Stone & Tile.



LIGHTING

Lighting is the most basic trick of them all. Most of us have dated fixtures that really could use an update. Builder grade lights need to go and replace them with sleek new modern ones. Pendant lights are a great way to add some bling to your space so be sure to pick ones that have character. Under-cabinet lighting is another way to add some style to your space. They are easy to install and add a really great design touch to the space. And if you've already done your backsplash the lights will really make it pop.

HARDWARE

This is where you add some pizzazz to your kitchen. More often than not, kitchen cabinets have uninspired knobs, leaving the whole kitchen looking plain and ordinary. Swap them out! A visit to the hardware store will open your eyes to some great alternatives for your kitchen. If you have knobs, opt for a big change and add handles instead. Plumbing fixtures can also be easily changed for a new look. Try a chic industrial style faucet or a cleaner, modern version. You will be surprised at how a little change like this can go a long way.

Happy Decorating **NL**



Alykhan Velji

Having a successful design career for the last several years, Alykhan Velji has definitely made a name for himself on the Alberta design scene. Coming in as one of the top three finalists for HGTV's Designer Superstar Challenge in 2006 and then landing a role as a Stylist/Design Assistant on The Style Dept. also was a great boost to his career.

As well as having his own design business, Alykhan Velji Design, Alykhan has been featured in many local and national publications, offering his expertise on design and trends. Finding inspiration in his travels and keeping abreast with the design industry's new and innovative trends ensures his design aesthetic is always fresh, all the while remaining original and timeless. In its fourth year as a design firm, Alykhan Velji Design specializes in both residential and commercial projects.

www.alyveljidesigns.com

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