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ON THE TILES...

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On the tiles...

19 Nov 2012



JANE PRICE-STEVENS, INTERIOR DESIGNER

Did you know that the phrase ‘a night on the tiles’ refers to the noise, or ‘unholy din’ that cats used to make on British rooftops at night? Apparently the phrase originates from the early 1900s and we use it now to describe the aftermath of a big night out (a night usually fuelled by copious amounts of alcohol and involving ‘throwing some tasty shapes’ on the dance floor). Anyway, all very interesting, but absolutely nothing at all to do with my blog this week. This week I am going to provide an introduction to choosing tiles for inside your home - it can be a bewildering and time-consuming process (read ‘soul destroying’ if you are a bloke), simply due to the wide variety of tiles available, variability in quality, size and finish and complicated further by the sheer cost of it all. A daunting prospect... well, maybe...

Here are some of my top tips to bear in mind when tiling your home...

I'll start by stating the obvious (as usual) - within the home there are four main areas where you might consider using tiles; the entrance hall (high traffic so need for something durable), the bathroom (waterproofing), the kitchen (both for cleaning and durability) and outdoors (well, you aren't going to use carpet, are you?). Below are the key considerations for each of these different areas.

BATHROOMS

The bathroom is the most obvious place in a home to find tiles and, as noted above, this is mainly for waterproofing, cleaning and hygiene factors - and to be frank, wallpaper isn't really going to do the trick. In fact, many paints (unless designed specifically for use in a bathroom environment) won't last long either.

Many people don't realise that the size of the space you are planning to tile (either in full or in part) will drive some specific considerations that you need to take into account, primarily the size of the tile and the colour.

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SIZE OF TILES

When it comes to tiling your bathroom size really does matter (although my husband might disagree). If you choose your tiles wisely you can make your bathroom look larger and more airy than it actually is. Obviously, if you make a foolish decision you can successfully achieve the exact opposite of this...

Tiles come in a wide range of shapes and sizes, ranging from the 'accepted standard' up to very large field tile formats - that said, the 'standard' tile is fast disappearing as most manufacturers provide a huge menu of size options (which can make decisions even more difficult). While it's not wise to use very large tiles in a small space (they will dwarf the room), a medium-format tile will give a much sleeker look than smaller tiles, which inevitably show more grout lines... However, it's important to look at the positioning of the fixtures and fittings before deciding on a tile format. If the bath, toilet and basin are all in close proximity with very limited wall area between them, smaller tiles would actually create a much better flow and coherence to the design.

That said, a big trend for 2011 is to use large statement tiles to create a seamless look (so, very few grout lines, which is also a good thing from a hygiene and cleaning perspective). Stating the obvious once again, but large tiles are particularly suitable for large, spacious bathrooms (including those with high ceilings) or en-suites where you can carry the tiling through into the bedroom.

It is also worth noting a more subtle point - large areas of tiling look more convincing than small ones (relative to the size and scale of the room and its features). A bathroom tiled floor to ceiling looks elegant, whereas a rectangle of three deep tiles along the length of the bath just looks cheap (remember your student accommodation or your first rented flat in London).



(Image from Furniture Fashion by [Group 41 Architects](#))

COLOUR OF TILES

G44 in Hall 1 – open to both exhibitors and visitors.

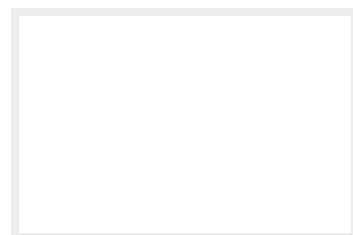
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There are several ways in which you can make a small bathroom feel larger. Light coloured bathroom tiles (i.e. white or cream) can make small spaces feel much bigger as they reflect the light much more effectively than darker colours - this in turn gives an airy and spacious feel to the room. However, if plain white is a bit too bland for your tastes and you need something a bit more Marmite, try adding interest and contrast with tiles that have an unusual surface texture. You can always add colour in the form of towels and accessories later.

Using the same colour for the wall tiles and the floor tiles will also give your bathroom a more spacious feel (note - they don't have to be the same sized tiles). To enhance the seamless effect within the space, you can also use a similar coloured grout with the tiles (which also helps blend in the grout lines more effectively).

TYPE OF TILES

If you're talking floor tiles, texture is an absolute must. It sounds like common sense (because it is), but many buyers are still seduced like magpies (or is it cuckoos?) by lovely shiny tiley things and then end up skidding around all over the place every time the floor gets wet - great for a laugh on occasion, but only until someone who watches daytime telly (usually carrying a box, a ladder or something sharp) gets a minor injury and sues for damages, which seriously increases the expense associated with the tiles. Generally, the rougher the texture, the less slippery the tile when wet. Alternatively, choose smaller format tiles such as mosaic where the grout joints and tile edges themselves lend the extra grip.

When it comes to the walls (where it is harder to walk and to fall over), shiny tiles look 'tres chic' ('very chic' if you don't speak French), sleek and reflect light very effectively - as a result, they are a good all rounder (and another candidate for small or dark spaces).

KITCHENS

These days, tiles are found in the majority of kitchens, ranging from small splashback features behind hobs and sinks, to fully tiled kitchen floors and walls.





(Image from *Style Files*)

Given that the kitchen is perhaps the most frequently used room in the home (I think I may have said that about quite a few rooms), often an entrance to the garden, a sleeping area for pets (as well as a zone for systematic destruction of the home from the inside out) and storage for heavy domestic appliances, it is important to choose a floor tile that is hardwearing, scratch resistant and easy to clean.

SIZE OF TILES

As with bathrooms, for very small kitchens you should consider small/medium floor tiles to create a better and more effective flow. Larger format tiles look best in kitchen areas that are fortunate enough to have a lot of floor space - so, where a large number of tiles can be laid without cuts.

TYPE OF TILES

Due to its hardwearing properties the most common choice is a porcelain floor tile (no, not quite like teacups) for the kitchen. Alternatively, natural stone tiles (travertine, quarry, slate) can offer a fantastic and distinctive effect.

A further consideration is cleaning and hygiene; grouts can now be bought with antibacterial additives - these are great in food preparation areas as they prevent the growth of bacteria such as E. coli and Salmonella. They also help prevent

discolouration of the grout over time (which is also an issue in the bathroom given the amount of water flying around and the fact that it is often damp and humid or 'hot... damn hot... hot and wet...' as Robin Williams would have eloquently put it in Good Morning Vietnam).

ENTRANCE HALLS

Hallways receive the highest footfall in the home, hence it is important to choose a floor that is supremely hardwearing. Check that the tile wear rating (PEI rating) is suitable for the area in question. Also make sure that the tile is scratch resistant and easy to clean.

If outdoor shoes are going to be frequenting the floor (for those people who don't freak visitors out by asking them to remove their shoes immediately when they arrive), then it may be preferable to choose a darker coloured floor grout, which will in turn influence your choice of colour for the tile or stone itself.

Wall tiles are also a great way of making a statement at the entrance of your home. I love the image below, particularly as it also combines stone and wood...



(Image from *Houzz Jessop Architects*)

OUTDOOR FLOORING

If tiles are for outdoor use then they need to be able to resist the weather - this doesn't just mean water (but it doesn't include wind and it would be stupid to include earthquakes because they're just destructive). If you live in the UK or another part of the world with frost conditions and temperature variability/volatility, then you will need to ensure your tiles do not absorb too much water (which can expand and damage the tile when it freezes and cause serious cracking). These types of resilient tile for outdoor use are known as vitreous or impervious. A vitreous tile typically absorbs less than three percent of its weight in water and an impervious tile less than half a percent.

TYPE OF OUTDOOR TILES

Your best bet is to choose a porcelain tile for outdoor use because of their very low water absorption; alternatively, some types of natural stone are also suitable, including

slate which has very low water absorption levels (even less than 1%). A considered choice will ensure that your tiles don't crack during the deep and bleak UK winters that we have become accustomed to.

OTHER IMPORTANT GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. TILE CO-ORDINATION: This sounds rather obvious but do not ignore the surrounding colour scheme when choosing tiles. Simply bearing in mind the colours that will match well with the overall design can make the task of choosing floor tiles so much easier.

2. UNDERFLOOR HEATING: Floor tiles may feel cool on bare feet, but this can often be driven by the surface underneath the tiles (more often than not concrete). So, for example, tiling onto wood (which can 'breathe') will create a warmer feel than tiles that are placed on top of concrete. Underfloor heating will add luxury at a surprisingly small cost. It adds little to the thickness of the floor tiling so can be installed in most instances and it frees up valuable wall space.

3. MAINTENANCE: If you are purchasing natural stone tiles (i.e. travertine, marble, slate), they tend to be quite porous, so you may need to apply a seal to stop the tiles absorbing water (particularly if using outside). Make sure you get the right advice for sealing and treating the tiles before and after fixing (and then work out if this is the right tile for you).

4. PRICE: At the least expensive end of the scale is a standard-sized ceramic floor tile. Moving up in price you are getting into the territory of porcelain tiles and larger formats (or indeed mosaics). Luxury natural stone is likely to be at the top end of the price scale and can also be a little more expensive to install due to the extra labour involved in fixing and sealing. View tiles as an investment, not a cost - according to the 'trusted estate agents' (who we haven't heard from for a few weeks - they've been on 'oleday'), tiles can add value to your home so be prepared to invest money and time. Pay a little more and get something that really makes your bathroom special. Never compromise on quality, which can still be picked up at great prices if you know where to look and what to look for.

5. CONTINGENCY: Always purchase an additional 5-10% more tiles than you actually need. This allows you (or the tiler) to compensate for cuts and breakages and ensures that you have the same batch/shade should you ever need additional tiles (or have a little mishap). Most companies will offer a refund on unused boxes of tiles if you do want to return extras after the work is complete.

6. ATTENTION TO DETAIL: In the end the success of all tiling in the home depends on thorough preparation, careful calculation and attention to detail. Enough said.

So, that's it for tiles. As it's work, work, work tomorrow no 'night on the tiles' this evening for me. You never know, next week we may start thinking about 'painting the town red'. Sorry. Best I could do. Very long blog this week. Tired.

Jane Price-Stephens runs her own interior design business, to find out more visit: www.janepricestephens.com, <http://janepricestephens.blogspot.com/>, follow Jane on Twitter @jpricestephens or call 07970 547433.

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