

Trends in Commercial Tile Design

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Bisecting vertical and horizontal details add drama and focus to this guest bath. Tile by Metropol, Essence.

A quantum shift is taking place in the design of commercial projects today that reflects urban planners' desires to reduce car-based transportation with its associated pollution and congestion, counter suburban sprawl and introduce better mixed-use strategies into single-use isolated developments. These design priorities address America's changing lifestyle and demographics and our shared vision for more convenient, healthy, social and culturally vibrant cities or "life centers."

For many reasons, ceramic tile is a product that very successfully knits together the disparate parts of the urban fabric and provides a reliable solution to a variety of different goals. Ceramic tile is a versatile finish, seamlessly flowing across interior spaces and capable of spilling into and integrating exterior areas. It is a building material that lends itself to a myriad of translations. Its scale varies from small humanistic proportions to monumental ones. Ceramic tile animates many places in the world and has the design variety to articulate any local theme, geography, heritage or story. While aesthetically improving any surface, it is the longevity of ceramic tile, far exceeding many other surface finishes, that greatly enhances its place in sustainable design.

The ceramic tile industry has had a dramatic role in commercial design for the past decade. The introduction of porcelain tile has literally revolutionized the palette and potential for innovation in airports, retail centers, hotels and office towers. The latest line-up of products is bound to have creative juices flowing in design firms across the country.

The speed of innovation at ceramic tile manufacturing companies since the launch of the first 8-inch through body, single color porcelain tile has been meteoric. Each year new techniques and technologies have led to a dizzying array of new aesthetic decorations. From its almost humble start as a rather industrial looking tile, we now have: textured matte, honed, polished and semi-polished porcelain, striated stone designs achieved with soluble salts or minerals, double loaded and multi-pipe three-dimensional surface effects, rectified edges, and combinations of all of these techniques which provide us with porcelain tile in any conceivable color, texture, profile and finish imaginable.

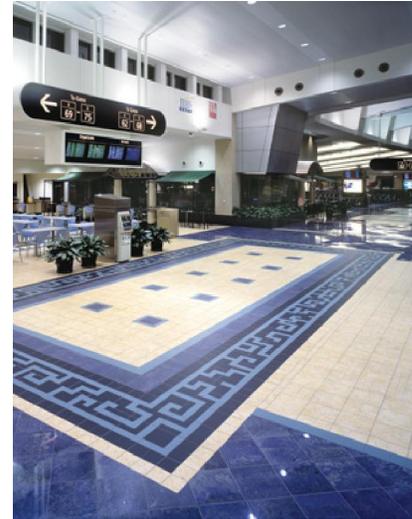
Manufacturers and designers have stretched the design potential further by using water jet and laser technology to achieve graceful curves, complicated patterns and corporate or landmark logo insets, that are strategically set within a field of tile. The available size of porcelain tile has increased from the original 8- and 12-inch formats to sizes exceeding 2-feet-by-2-feet. In the rectangular format, it is not unusual to see one-foot-by-three-foot panels. Even larger custom sizes are possible with the ventilated façade and raised panel flooring systems that are just making their debut.



Visibility and Identity are easily achieved with the vast array of ceramic tile colors.

These engineered systems with their economic, environmental and design benefits could launch ceramic tile utilization into a vastly expanded growth cycle.

Airports across the United States are currently undergoing expansion and renovation. In many cases, through-body or unglazed porcelain tile in large format is the flooring of choice. Priority is given to a floor finish that is able to withstand abusive pedestrian traffic as well as wheeled luggage and vehicles. Ceramic porcelain tile in modular sizes with its wide array of colors and textures provides the distinct traffic patterning required to identify and control access to boarding areas, shops, restaurants, concourses and people movers. Creating designs, patterns, images or logos in the floor affords the airport authority an opportunity to display features of the local area, express the mood of the city and to create an image for newly arriving guests.



Tampa International Airport, designed by Florida-based Kelly Taaffe Design Inc. (KTD Inc.), used 21,000 square feet of Crossville Porcelain Stone to create the Spectrum 2003 Commercial award-winning environment that welcomes visitors from across the globe.



Columns clad in polychrome mosaics. Custom colors and patterns can be created and mounted on 12-inch sheets.

Designers are interpreting airports as the "gateway to the city" and as such often create cultural and ethnic wall murals and art sculpture using ceramic mosaics.

Tampa International Airport, designed by Florida-based Kelly Taaffe Design Inc. (KTD Inc.), used 21,000 square feet of Crossville Porcelain Stone to create the Spectrum 2003 Commercial award-winning environment that welcomes visitors from across the globe. The flooring was designed as a series of intricate tile "stepping stones" connected by floating tile bridges in a matte finish. The bridges are set atop a sea of blue polished tile, which simulates the shimmering effect of the ocean.

Crossville's color and design consultant, Barbara Schirmeister sees a continuing popularity for all shades of blue. "These colors related to air and water are popular because of their soothing and calming effect," Schirmeister said. "We are also seeing a trend in using ceramic and porcelain tile with waterfalls and other natural elements to create spa-like settings in hotels, restaurants, corporate lobbies and retail environments. The clean, uncluttered look of ceramic and porcelain tile is a natural stress-buster."

A similar revitalization is taking place in shopping malls. With the same type and level of anticipated traffic, the deep abrasion resistance of porcelain tile is mandatory. As mentioned, urban planning concepts are encouraging expanded use for single purpose retail sites. New hybrid centers often include exterior spines housing movie theatres, fitness centers, restaurants, hotels and multi-media entertainment facilities. Ceramic tile paving is being used to integrate the existing interior mall with the new exterior components of these shopping complexes.



Water jet or laser technology used to inset logos into porcelain tiled field.

Park Place, Hunstville, Alabama

Client: CBL & Associates Properties Inc. and Colonial Properties Trust

Architect: KA Architecture

-Atlas Concorde & Mirage tile supplied by Dal Tile, installed by Shannon Brothers Tile, Inc.

A sea of asphalt and concrete cannot compete with the upscale image and park like amenity ceramic tiling provides. Similar to the function in airports, the tile pattern and changes in color and texture effectively identifies traffic corridors and distinguishes areas such as food courts and service kiosks. The graphic nature of shopping center design combined with the visual imagery of retail signage demands a floor and wall finish that can unify the color scheme and add proportion and scale to the vaulted interiors.

These vibrant energetic spaces personify action and movement. The revitalization of Parkway Place in Huntsville, Alabama by KA Architecture exemplifies how porcelain ceramic tile can breathe life into an under performing retail project.

The custom laser cut curvilinear tile patterns form a perimeter border that meanders throughout the entire length of the mall.

Project manager Craig H. Wasserman included the Parkway Place logo in the Italian porcelain field and used large sweeping curves of tile in the center courts for warmth, interest and intrigue. The southern inspired design motif reflects local interest and includes environmental graphic elements inserted in the floor and wall tile areas.

Rivertown Crossings Mall in Grandville, Michigan also designed by KA Architecture used porcelain tile to establish a theme that recalls Michigan lakes, rivers, bridges and lighthouses. The floor pattern includes nautical flags in the circulation areas. These elements along with other graphic treatments, tell a story about the Great Lakes locale that involves and informs visitors while providing an architectural framework where tenants can creatively express their own individual look. Rivertown Crossings offers retail shopping, a 20-screen cinema and a number of large restaurants and specialty stores. Other retail centers are adding fine cuisine and entertainment spokes creating multi-functional lifestyle centers that are vital and utilized day and night.

Far from the maddening crowds of airports and shopping malls are the serene environs of 21st century hospitality design. "Boutique hotels" utilize many of the same homogeneous porcelain tiles in lobby and dining areas. However, the complete range of glazed ceramic tiles is seen in guest suites. Designers also dip into a deeper palette of color in the suites and use some of the largest format tile (20-by-20-inches) and smallest mosaic tile (1-inch-by-inch) on the market today. A minimalist approach fusing concepts from Asian and Euro-Style design inspires the mood of guest rooms and public spaces alike. The cool hygienic surface of ceramic tile creates the spa-like qualities these hotels strive to achieve. In the guest baths, 12-by-18-inch and even 12-by-24-inch rectified glazed ceramic tile grace every surface, creating a monolithic envelope of comfort. Carved bas relief trim tile adds depth and texture to the installation while adding layers of luxury to the overall experience. According to Susan Poletti, New York architectural design coordinator for Crossville, "We are seeing subtle but rich neutrals used – think milk, bamboo or complex browns such as mocha and coffee." These rich red-based browns are married with classic black and cream and often punctuated with citrus hits of color. The interiors resonate with all of our senses and form a cocoon-like space perfect for contemplation and relaxation.

Corporate America is another commercial enterprise that seeks to create a unique image: quiet, stately and professional. To achieve this, granite, marble and other natural stone were once the obligatory surfacing finish. Much of this stone is being replaced with high quality glazed ceramic or through-body porcelain tile. Tile technology has achieved such a high level of realism and variation that it is virtually impossible to distinguish the natural stone from the ceramic tile rendition. With this aesthetic quality achieved, features such as budget, ease of maintenance, stain resistance and the availability of exotic faux products such as lapis lazuli make ceramic tile a natural floor and wall alternative.



Exterior ceramic wall mural using "trencadis" or the broken tile technique of Antonio Gaudi. Charlotte, North Carolina

Similar techniques are used to create a new world of textured wall tile finishes such as grass-cloth, bamboo and linen to name just a few. These textures in ceramic tiles are a permanent and protective surface for walls and are making their way into corporate boardrooms, reception areas and public lobbies. In fact many soft surface materials are being replaced in an effort to improve the indoor air quality of office towers. It is becoming increasingly well known that ceramic tile can actually improve indoor air quality as it is neither an original nor secondary source of indoor air pollution.

Other commercial office sectors such as multi-media corporations are electing to create a different look and feel to their corporate headquarters. Values such as open communication and spontaneous interaction of employees, along with the traditionally youthful demographic of this sector are inspiring a more graphic approach in office design. Zones of color to define related activities are created using strong bands of glazed subway tile. Inspirational messages are being custom screened onto large ceramic panels and metallic and pop art tile are used to suggest an edgy, out-of-the-box mentality that these firms wish to perpetuate. All wired connectivity can run beneath the floor when a raised floor ceramic system is used. Re-positional access tiles support the type of flexibility required and provide for moveable workstations enabling limitless future re-configuration of the space.

Exterior cladding finishes and specific color palettes are often used to create brand recognition, corporate identity or to simply make a development property highly visible. Ventilated ceramic tile façade systems, which have been used throughout Europe on all types of commercial projects, are finally appearing in the U.S. and are creating some striking visual statements. Although innovative aesthetics and effects are one of the systems attributes, environmental benefits substantially add to its viability. The ventilated chamber is an exterior insulation system that creates a "chimney effect" which is caused by the heating of the exterior covering, producing a variation in density of the layer of air in the intermediary chamber compared to outside air, thereby bringing about the consequent upward movement. During the summer, radiant heat is reflected towards the exterior with the insulating layer minimizing heat gain to interior walls. During the winter the system works in reverse, with the bearing wall acting as an accumulator of interior heat, and the insulating layer reducing heat loss to the exterior.



Custom laser cut curvilinear tile patterns are repeated at different scales. The border curves and meanders throughout the entire length of the wall.

Park Place, Hunstville, Alabama

Energy consumption is reduced between 5 and 10 percent. Acoustic comfort is enhanced by 10 to 20 percent through reduction of noise penetration. Surface condensation is eliminated. The system is rapid and easy to install, safe and less effected by UV degradation and acid rain compared to other cladding materials. As very thin panels are used (9mm-3/8inch/30Kg- M2), there is a considerably lighter load than with natural stone facades (30mm-1inch/70Kg-M2).

One of many projects currently on the boards comes from the award-winning offices of Michael P. Johnson Design Studio Ltd. in Arizona. The firm will soon be re-vitalizing a series of vacant non-descript box stores and creating a recognizable national presence with polished black porcelain panels and bold horizontal bands of color mounted to the ventilated tile façade. According to Mr. Johnson, "The reflective nature of the polished solid black porcelain tile is phenomenal and the luster will survive long after other finishes have started to degrade." Johnson specifically likes to use the cladding system on spandrels where metal materials can start deteriorating before the project is even

completed. One of the greatest challenges to the architectural and design community in Johnson's opinion is the "need to stay aware of emerging new systems and technologies." He believes attending industry shows in the United States and Europe has kept his office on the leading edge of innovative design.

Fluid curving arcs and serpentine forms are also more prevalent on many of today's commercial projects.



Separation and Direction are skillfully created using tile patterns.

Rivertown Crossings,
Grandville, Michigan

Client: General Growth
Properties Inc.

Architect: KA Architecture

-Ceramica Casalgrande
Padana tile supplied by Tile
by Design, Plymouth,
Minnesota, and installed by
Granitogres.

Glass and ceramic mosaic tile have experienced a resurgence on exterior applications for their ability to mold to any geometry. Manufacturers have added mosaics in every size and shape to tile programs. These small-scale tile form an exterior skin on a building following any amorphous shape, curved detail or column that may be incorporated into the design. The final domain where ceramic tile is emerging is in the urban spaces that connect various commercial projects - the streets of our cities. More and more cities are legislating or negotiating with developers of all types of commercial projects to provide public art, street furniture, promenades and meeting places for their citizens. Downtown cores are following a more European approach to town center use. Wider boulevards invite strolling pedestrians and encourage active use of the city during the day and night. Activity by all generations leads to a reduction in crime and a greater sense of security for all who use the venues.

This new urban design imperative combined with increased community consultation is putting a new priority on place making and quality of life. The functional and mechanical attributes of ceramic tile combined with its colors, shapes and versatility will see its increasing use in the public realm of North American cities.