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Porcelain Dolls

Large sizes and wood replicas are glamming up tile

BY MATTHEW MARIN

While there are many types of surfaces to choose from, designers today are often turning to porcelain tile not only in bathrooms, but other guestroom areas and public spaces within their projects. Not only is it versatile, but it's also easy to maintain.

For guest bathrooms, a popular trend is the use of large-format porcelain tiles. Sizing options have recently changed from 12 x 12-in. formats to larger, more rectangular sizes such as 12 x 24 in., according to Alena Capra, industry ambassador for Coverings, a global tile and stone trade show. "Large-scale, thin porcelain tiles offer alternatives to heavier slabs of marble for cladding," she said.

Ryan Fasan, technical consultant for Tile of Spain USA, which represents 125 manufacturers, agreed, adding that new shapes and patterns created with large-scale porcelain tile in thin formats would be too costly and dangerous if created with stone. "Thin tile is making an impact with groutless bath designs," he said. "Tile can be anti-slip, but stone cannot."

Tile isn't just limited to the guest bathroom, though today's focus on wellness and comfort has fueled ceramic tile's use in areas of the guest bedroom such as the headboard, according to Vittorio Borelli, president of Confindustria Ceramica, the Italian Association of Ceramics. "We believe it is because the decorative ranges are so appealing while also being easy to clean and maintain, and are a very hygienic solution when considering issues like bedbugs," he added.

A popular alternative to carpeting in guestrooms is porcelain tile that resembles wood. This trend has also been influenced by wellness and comfort. "Guests want to feel their surroundings are fresh or new, which lends itself to contemporary styling and cutting-edge designs they wouldn't find at home," said Fasan.

Wood porcelain has also become a widespread flooring choice for public spaces. "With the surface being so durable, and the look so realistic, it is an increasingly popular choice for higher-traffic areas," said Capra. "It is being used as wall treatments as well. The design options for using wood porcelain planks are limitless. More and more sizes, shapes and colors have emerged on the market."

Large-format, wood-look tiles in long, linear plank sizes up to 6 ft. in length have gained momentum, added Borelli, while black and white tile flooring is making a comeback. "To divide one space into multiple functions, designers are using tiles with different textures and colors to create vignettes and various zones," he said.

Ceramic floor tiles in planks that resemble distressed wood and, in some cases, look "worn down" give the sensation of a lived-in space, observed Fasan. "These pieces are perfect when paired with simple-lined decor and furniture," he added.

For hotel lobbies, restaurants and bars, mixing and matching ceramic tile with other materials, textures, colors, formats and graphic motifs offers new solutions and combinations. Stacked stone is also a popular feature wall or column choice in lobby or dining areas. Other accent wall options are three-dimensional and multidimensional stone, porcelains and glass tiles.

"Mixing materials gives the impression of something new and something comforting at the same time," said Fasan. "Tile's ability to mix and match vintage with modern, wood with stone or glass, lends itself to the mix-and-match concept."

Solid surfaces and improvements in quality production, combined with flexibility in product size, makes porcelain a good fit for high-traffic public areas such as lobbies in business hotels, according to Lauren Rottet, founding principal of Rottet Studio. "It is very durable, easy to clean and cheap to install," she said.

Rottet Studio used natural stone, hand laid in an intricate mosaic, for the lobby of The Surrey, a boutique hotel on New York City's Upper East Side, to create a very personal environment with a high-end look. "The use of natural stone is still prevalent in upscale hotels, but we see more use of porcelain tile for its contemporary, large monolithic look and cost-effective installation," said Rottet.

In terms of finishes, classic neutrals such as gray, charcoal, beige, coffee, cream and dark tan are the desired choices. "Highly polished finishes are popular in main flooring areas, and an even mix of polished and honed finishes is used in the bathrooms," said Capra. "A lot of the color seems to be added with beautiful mosaics on large columns and other surfaces, including blends of all types of glass from mirror to a mix of bold hues in a variety of finishes."



Above: The Surrey, a boutique hotel in New York City designed by Rottet Studio, uses natural stone, hand laid in an intricate mosaic, in the lobby (shown) and guest bathrooms.



Right: Porcelanosa's XLight is a collection of large porcelain slabs with minimum thickness.

Below: Atlas Concorde offers Bord, a series of wood-effect tile with subtle veining and shade-on-shade hues.

