

Fashion-forward tile for walls and floors

Kim Cook
Associated Press

One of the oldest materials in home design is now trending like a hot newcomer.

Shelter magazines, design blogs and home renovation stores are featuring tile for surfacing floors and more: Designers are opting for a high-impact effect by cladding stair risers and entire rooms in tile, from interiors to the terrace.

On Instagram, an account called "I Have This Thing With Floors," where people post pictures of their feet standing on cool floors, has over 840,000 followers.

The appeal stems from an explosion of creative designs and new manufacturing techniques, producing everything from charmingly imperfect artisanal tiles to sleek, sexy slabs. If you can dream it, you're likely to find a tile that looks like it.

"I'm loving patterned tiles with hand-painted designs," says Los Angeles designer Amy Sklar. "I've seen some really stunning ones



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This undated photo provided by Refin show's Refin's Voyager ceramic tile collection, which was inspired by the aged and rusted metal bridges of Genoa, and the architectural elements of Victorian buildings.

that are truly like works of art."

Sklar also likes ethnic patterns that have been given a modern interpretation: "A continuation of

the lovely handcrafted trend we've been seeing, but realized with brighter colors. We're also seeing florals but in a more abstract way, and again with a stronger palette."

Joan Craig of Lichten Craig Architects in Manhattan has worked with some dramatic marble slabs recently.

"Over the past year, we've been selecting many of the vivid and highly figured Italian marbles for walls, floors and tubs," she says, including "a gray and white marble called Capraia Arabescato with striking veining in the powder room, and a burgundy and cream marble in the bar."

Italian company Sicis has a collection they call Electric Marble, in which veins of vivid color are sandwiched between panels of glass.

Mia Jung of the architecture and design firm Ike Kligerman Barkley has 3-D tiles on her radar.

"I see more and more collections from Japan, Italy and other countries. At the simplest level, they're used to add some texture to plain

walls," she says. "A more elaborate arrangement of 3-D tiles can function as an architectural element like a wall-like screen between two rooms. One can even have an art piece constructed with 3-D tiles serving as a focal point of a space."

"I think texture in ceramic tile right now is really exciting," says Nigel Maynard, who tracks builder industry trends as editor in chief of Products magazine.

"There are so many ways the architecture and design community can use it, from fireplaces to indoor and outdoor accent walls," he says. "And there's a lot to choose from, including subtle textures, fabric-inspired and deep-relief patterns."

Metallic detail, a hot commodity in fashion fabrics, is also adding flair to tile — anything from bold swaths to subtle accents.

Walker Zanger's Ellington collection, inspired by the Jazz Age and Art Deco, traces geometric outlines in gold on an ebony background.

At Italy's Cersaie tile fair last fall,

architects and interior designers noted how far digital printing and manufacturing has advanced. It can create 3-D designs; scallops, hexagons and other unique shapes; realistic weathered wood looks; oxidized metal finishes.

Ceramica Sant'Agostino had a porcelain collection inspired by tailoring fabrics; digitally printed tweeds and plaids had not only a nubby look, but texture.

Ceramiche Refin showed a collection called Voyager, inspired by the aged and rusted metal bridges of Genoa, and the architectural elements of Victorian buildings.

Here in the U.S., at January's Kitchen and Bath Industry Show in Orlando, Florida, New Ravenna debuted Sara Baldwin's Ikat tile collection inspired by Uzbekistani textile leaf patterns and crafted of colorful jewel glass. For ceilings or walls, New Ravenna's Astronomy, Michael and Orion patterns have dream-evoking starry patterns on light or dark background.

Floors and walls, get ready for your close-up.

Complete these home improvements over the weekend

Metro Creative

Home improvement projects ramp up when the weather warms up, as homeowners channel the rejuvenating feelings of spring and tackle their home to-do lists. Large-scale renovations can greatly affect a home, but smaller projects can yield impressive results and be completed over the course of a single weekend.

If time is of the essence, these weekend or one-day projects may satisfy homeowners' desires to fix up their homes.

■ **Create an accent wall.** Painting a focal wall in a home can create a serious impact. The bonus is it will not take as long or require as many materials as painting an entire room. Accent walls frequently feature a bold

color, so decide on placement and tackle this project in less than a day.

■ **Install stair runners.** Dress up hardwood stairs with decorative carpet runners. Runners come in elongated pieces of carpeting or individual pieces that can be placed on each step. If carpeting doesn't fit with the home's design, painting individual stair treads also can create visual appeal.

■ **Dress up the entryway.** An entryway is a guest's first impression of a home. Many entryways can use a minor overhaul, both inside and outside. Paint the front door a different color so it pops from the curb. Install a new mailbox or decorative house numbers. A new welcome mat can change the look as well. Inside, consider laying a new floor. Resilient vinyl tiles come in many different

patterns and can mimic the look of wood, travertine or marble. Installing a floor can take a day or two.

■ **Install a new faucet.** Instantly improve a kitchen or a bathroom with new fixtures. New faucets can provide aesthetic appeal and low-flow faucets can help conserve water.

■ **Create a gallery on the staircase.** Gather and arrange framed photos, artwork or wall accents so that they ascend the wall of a staircase. This creates a designer touch and can dress up an often barren area of wall space.

■ **Install a fresh light fixture.** Improve drab spaces with a little illumination. Better Homes & Gardens suggests replacing an existing fixture with something new and vibrant. If hanging a new fixture is not within

one's skill set, free-standing table or floor lamps also can cast a new glow on a space.

■ **Add molding.** Molding can add instant aesthetic appeal to a room. Molding is appropriate near the floor, at the top of walls where they meet the ceiling, or even mid-wall as a chair rail. Some homeowners like to create framed molding on walls in formal living spaces.

■ **Update kitchen or bathroom hardware.** Replacing hardware is a fast and easy project, but one that can have immediate impact. Swap out tired or outdated hardware for newer brushed metals and more impactful shapes and designs.

Home renovations do not need to take weeks or months. Many projects can be completed over the course of a weekend.

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