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OCTOBER 2025

TileLetter

LATICRETE INTERNATIONAL INC.

Art and endurance in the
Sierra: seven luxe baths
by Morgan Tile

The
KITCHENS
AND BATHS
ISSUE

TROWEL & ERROR VIDEO:

*NTCA Technical
Committee addresses
mortar coverage
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ESSENTIAL FOR
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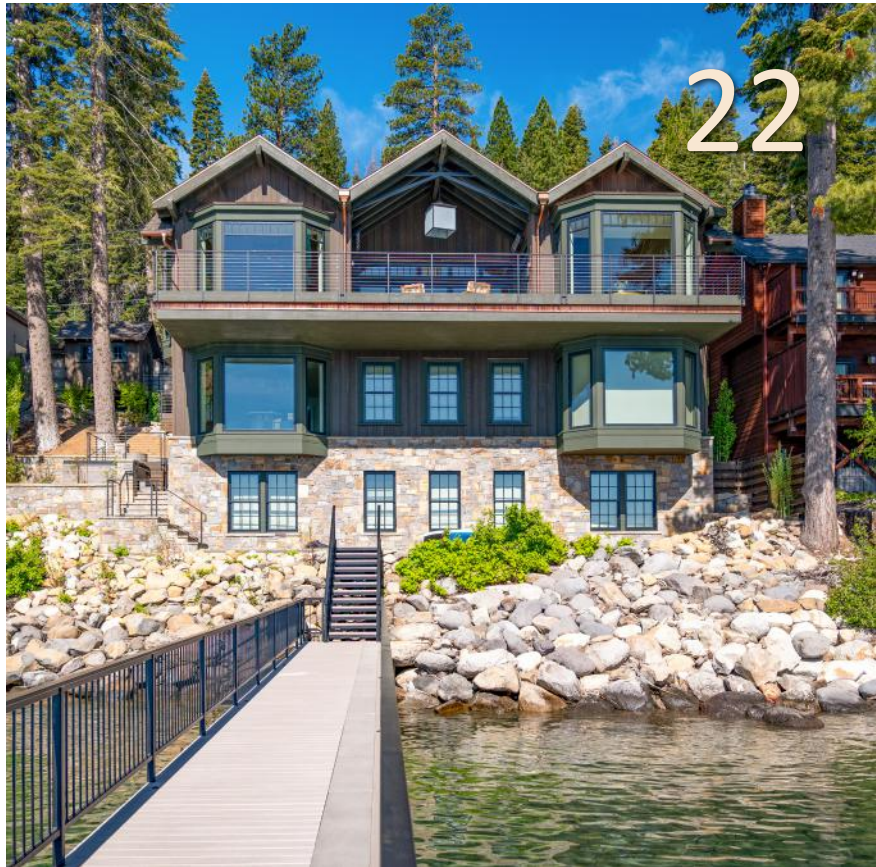
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TileLetter

TileLetter is the official monthly publication of the National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA), and the industry's leading tile installation magazine.

Production:

Elena Grant, *Publisher*
elena@tile-assn.com

Lesley A. Goddin, *Editorial Director and Senior Writer*
lesley@tile-assn.com

Scott Carothers, *Contributing Writer*
Academic Director for CTEF
scott@tilecareer.com

Michelle Chapman, *Media Sales and Production Director*
michelle@tile-assn.com

Barbi Phillips, *Circulation Manager*
barbi@tile-assn.com

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 13629
Jackson, MS 39236 U.S.A.

Shipping Address:

626 Lakeland East Drive
Jackson, MS 39232
Tel: 601-939-2071
Fax: 601-932-6117

Websites:

www.tileletter.com
www.tile-assn.com



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Training Department
Manager



Randy Fleming



Chad Jones



Kate Koerber



Bill O'Connor



Amber Fox
Director of Strategic
Initiatives



Anthony Oliver



Robb Roderick



Alex Smith

2025 NTCA Workshop Programs *

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OCTOBER

- 1 **Louisville Tile** – Louisville, KY
- 2 **Louisville Tile** – Evansville, IN
- 7 **Louisville Tile** – Chattanooga, TN
- 7 **Floor & Decor** – Thornton, CO
- 7 **Architessa** – Rockville, MD
- 8 **Louisville Tile** – Nashville, TN
- 8 **Floor & Decor** – Bakersfield, CA
- 9 **Floor & Decor** – Kennesaw, GA
- 9 **Daltile** – Grand Junction, CO
- 9 **Daltile** – Los Angeles, CA
- 13 **Floor & Decor** – Henderson, NV
- 15 **Daltile** – Scottsdale, AZ
- 16 **Daltile** – Tucson, AZ
- 20 **Floor & Decor** – Albuquerque, NM

- 21 **Floor & Decor** – North Charleston, SC

- 21 **Daltile** – Burr Ridge, IL
- 22 **Daltile** – Greenville, SC
- 23 **Daltile** – Charlotte, NC
- 28 **Floor & Decor** – Mesa, AZ
- 28 **Floor & Decor** – Maple Grove, MN
- 29 **Hank's Specialties** – Fargo, ND

NOVEMBER

- 4 **Daltile** – Louisville, KY
- 4 **Floor & Decor** – Denton, TX
- 5 **Floor & Decor** – Lexington, KY
- 5 **Daltile** – Fort Worth, TX
- 6 **Daltile** – Nashville, TN
- 6 **Daltile** – Houston, TX

- 11 **Daltile** – Scranton, PA

- 11 **Daltile** – Plano, TX
- 11 **Daltile** – San Antonio, TX
- 12 **Floor & Decor** – Oxnard, CA
- 12 **Daltile** – Allentown, PA
- 12 **Daltile** – Carrollton, TX
- 13 **Floor & Decor** – Springfield, PA
- 13 **Floor & Decor** – Sugar Land, TX
- 18 **Floor & Decor** – Homewood, AL
- 18 **Floor & Decor** – Wilmington, NC
- 18 **Daltile** – Austin, TX
- 19 **Floor & Decor** – Atlanta, GA
- 19 **Daltile** – Myrtle Beach, SC
- 20 **Daltile** – Charleston, SC
- 20 **Daltile** – Knoxville, TN

2025 NTCA Regional Programs *

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OCTOBER

- 2 **Daltile** – Anaheim, CA
- 2 **Floor & Decor** – Levittown, PA
- 9 **Louisville Tile** – Mt Juliet, TN
- 9 **Daltile** – Las Vegas, NV
- 9 **Floor & Decor** – Glen Burnie, MD
- 15 **Stone Tile Group** – Orlando, FL
- 16 **Floor & Decor** – Hilliard, OH
- 23 **United Tile** – Orange, CA
- 23 **Floor & Decor** – Chicago, IL
- 30 **AHF** – Phoenix, AZ
- 30 **Daltile** – Plymouth, MN

NOVEMBER

- 4 **Floor & Decor** – Murrieta, CA
- 6 **Floor & Decor** – North Richland Hills, TX
- 13 **Floor & Decor** – Parmer, TX
- 13 **Floor & Decor** – Downey, CA
- 20 **BPI** – San Antonio, TX
- 20 **Floor & Decor** – San Diego, CA



NTCA maintains an ongoing list of training events through an interactive map on its website. Check it out by visiting www.NTCATraining.com.

**Dates are subject to change*

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Lesley Goddin

Welcome to October. How did we get here so fast?! I refer you to the Table of Contents for more information on the amazing lineup of stories and imagery on tap for this month. Meet Alek Tsituk of Trimworks, Inc., in our Member spotlight, and revel in the three stunning projects Hawthorne Tile’s Dirk Sullivan details in our Artisan feature. Noble’s Dean Moilanen writes about the essential “parts and pieces” necessary for a watertight installation in our Webinar feature, and Chris Woelfel of J.G. Woelfel & Associates, Tile and Stone Consultants, walks us through the new *NTCA Trowel & Error* video – its history and importance – in our Technical story. And our Technical Team answers member questions in the Ask the Expert section.



On location in Tahoe: (l. to r.) Ron Nash, Dustan Morgan and Ava Nash.



When stars align: Ron Nash (off camera) photographs his daughter Ava as she photographs Dustan Morgan, serenading them from the shower he just finished installing!

Tile Solutions Plus is at the end of the month and our Business story gives you a preview of this all-industry event. NTCA President Rod Owen introduces you to Negotiation Acumen in his letter, and offers tips on using it to best effect.

Our One-to-One feature focuses on John Merola of Merola Tile Distributors of America, giving you a peek into the origins, evolution and strategies of this important company and its innovative CEO and products. Then, page on over to the Product Focus section to get information about products for heated floors and baths that can make your installations easier and more enduring.

This brings me to our cover story, penned by Dustan Morgan of Morgan Tile in Nevada City, Calif. A casual conversation I had with Dustan months back led to the discovery of an incredible Lake Tahoe project he was working on, and its multiplicity of tile showers and details. Enter LATICRETE (our cover sponsor for this month) and its stellar products used in this project – but wait, there’s more! Many of you may know that LATICRETE CEO and President Ron Nash is an accomplished photographer and his daughter Ava has decided to pursue that path as well. The Nash duo traveled to Tahoe to photograph the project, and the photos in this feature are a testament to their excellence and artistic eye. Enjoy the precision and beauty of the installs – and the dazzling imagery captured by the dad-and-daughter team.

Those of you heading to TSP – I look forward to meeting up with you in Phoenix at the end of the month for an opportunity to learn, connect and have some fun. See you soon!

God bless,

Lesley
Lesley

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Rod Owen

BUSINESS ACUMEN SERIES: Negotiation Acumen

As we continue our journey through the 10 Essential Acumen Skills, this month we explore Negotiation Acumen. This is a skill that touches nearly every part of your business, whether you realize it or not.

When most people hear “negotiation,” they think of haggling over price. But effective negotiation goes much deeper. It’s about creating value, building trust, and achieving outcomes that benefit everyone involved. Contractors negotiate constantly with clients, suppliers, employees, GCs, inspectors, and sometimes even within their own teams.

At its core, Negotiation Acumen comes down to preparation, clarity, and confidence.

It starts with knowing your value. What sets your business apart? What quality, reliability, or craftsmanship do you consistently deliver? When you’re clear on your worth, you negotiate from a place of strength, not desperation.

Next, it’s about listening. Great negotiators don’t just talk, they ask questions, gather insights, and identify what matters most to the other party. That knowledge becomes leverage. It turns a tug-of-war into a real collaboration.

And finally, set boundaries. Not every deal is worth taking. Some jobs come with unrealistic timelines, unsafe conditions, or margins that don’t make sense. When you know your numbers and your long-term goals (remember Strategic Acumen?), it’s easier to say no to work that doesn’t align.

A few practical reminders:

- Prepare for every negotiation. Know your costs, timelines, and ideal outcomes.
- Put everything in writing. Verbal agreements invite confusion and risk.
- Don’t rush to fill silence. Sometimes, the best move is to wait.
- Look for the win-win. Long-term relationships matter more than short-term wins.

This month’s *TileLetter* theme -- Kitchens and Baths -- spotlights some of the most design-driven, detail-intensive spaces in the industry. Clients investing in these areas expect high performance and elevated aesthetics. These projects also demand tight coordination with plumbers, electricians, designers, and inspectors. Negotiation in these conditions isn’t optional, it’s essential.

So, this month, I challenge you: sharpen your negotiation skills. Practice in small conversations. Prepare for the big ones. And remember, negotiation isn’t about winning; it’s about aligning values and setting your business up for long-term success.

Next month, we’ll explore Risk Acumen, how to identify, assess, and prepare for what’s ahead.

Until then, stand firm, speak clearly, and as always, Educate for Excellence!

A stylized, handwritten signature of Rod Owen in black ink.

Rod Owen
NTCA President
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By Lesley Goddin, Editorial Director and Senior Writer



Arizona Grand Resort & Spa in Phoenix, October 27-29, 2025, hosts TSP 2025



TSP – now known as Tile Solutions Plus – is the celebrated industry conference that brings together all the different segments of our industry – manufacturers, distributors, and contractors. Taking place October 27-29, it's designed to give industry members time to network and forge advantageous new bonds with each other against a backdrop of motivational speakers and educational sessions. The event is brought to you by Partners in Progress: the National Tile Contractors Association, Ceramic Tile Distributors Association, Tile Council of North America, and Tile Contractors' Association of America.

THE VENUE

This year, the industry will gather at the Arizona Grand Resort & Spa in Phoenix, Ariz. This AAA Four-Diamond property is an all-suite sanctuary situated at the gateway to 17,000 acres of the South Mountain Preserve. Enjoy its stunning landscapes and distinctive Southwestern charm as you soak up wisdom and practical tips from the conference programming. A range of activities such as a desert hike, horseback riding, a tour of Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West and a golf tournament are woven into the schedule to give you a chance to revel in the magnificence of the desert setting. Scan this QR code for full details on the conference.



MEETINGS OF THE MINDS

Mark your calendar for a few highlights. Various groups will meet the weekend of October 25-26 – the NTCA Executive Committee, NTCA Membership Committee, MMSA, NTCA Technical Committee, CCTS Testing. And there's a pre-conference reception sponsored by Virginia Tile.



Martin Brookes, former NTCA president and current Director of Installation at Fireclay Tile, will receive the prestigious NTCA Ring of Honor in a special member-only reception.



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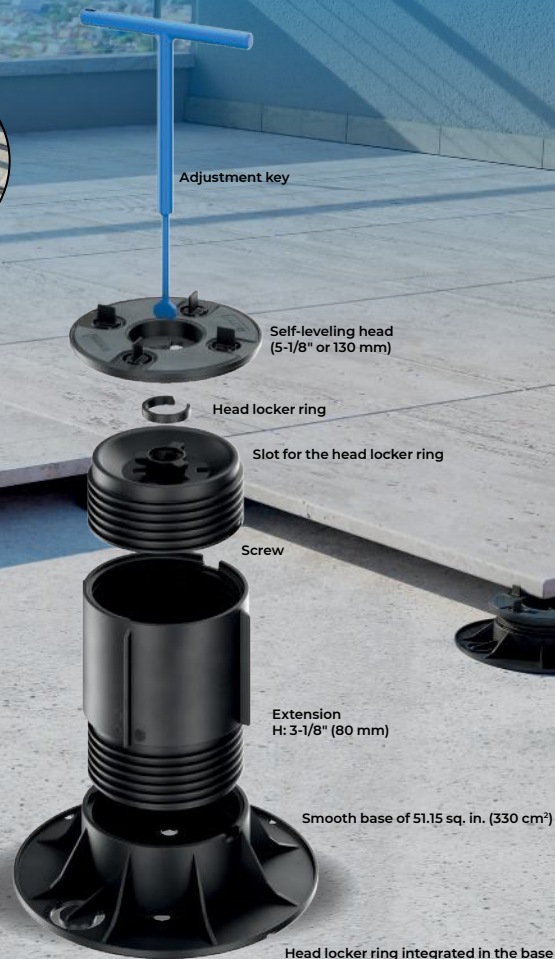
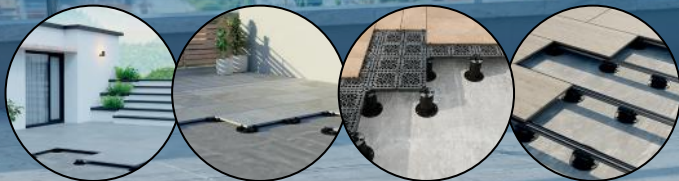
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Board and business meetings take place on Monday morning for NTCA, TCNA, MMSA, and TCAA, with an MMSA powwow held in the afternoon. From 1 pm - 4 pm, enjoy the planned tours, activities and golf tournament. NTCA's Women in Tile group will meet poolside during this time for a tour of a different kind – an inspirational exploration of creativity, artistry, and mindfulness led by NTCA Five-Star Contractor Gianna Vallefucio of Vallefucio Contractors. Later, first-timers at TSP will be welcomed at a special reception in the early evening, followed by an opening reception for all.

Tuesday, the conference kicks off with breakfast and a Joint Industry Round Table Discussion followed by opening keynote speaker Marcus Sheridan of Marcus Sheridan International. Sheridan is a communication expert and bestselling author, specializing in



NTCA Women in Tile Chair Elizabeth Lambert staffs the 2024 NTCA booth at the Tabletop event.



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The Joint Industry Round Table offers opportunities to hear different perspectives and arrive at new solutions.

transformational communication. Various forums will take place, including a Distributors Forum as well as a Contractors Forum that will feature Mike Gillett, CEO, Commercial Ceramic, Inc.; Preston Riveras, Okland Construction; David Lee, General Superintendent, Kitchell Contractors, and Ken Ottinger, Director of Quality, Kitchell Contractors. TCNA, NTCA, CTDA, and TCAA will all hold meetings on this day.

Then from 3 pm - 6 pm, Coverings is sponsoring a Tabletop event and reception, an opportunity to discover new products and establish new relationships in a mini-tradeshow format. Afterwards, Martin Brookes, former NTCA president and current Director of Installation at Fireclay Tile, will be honored with the

NTCA Ring of Honor in a special member-only reception.

Wednesday dawns with breakfast, followed by a keynote by Hannah Ubl, consultant and co-author of *The Future of Work is Human*. Afterwards, CTDA has morning committee meetings. And then breakouts throughout the day address a range of business and technical topics.

Business breakouts include: Exit and Family Succession Planning with Trace Udall, CFP, AIF, CEPA, of Udall Wealth Management and Bruce Hosler of Hosler Wealth Management; A Proven Way to Unify, Inspire and Elevate through the RISE Framework from Doug Harrison, The Rise Club; and a Tile Industry Outlook with Bruce Zwicker, Zwicker Advisory.



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CTEF provides a valuable service to the tile industry through local, regional and national training programs as well as through the Certified Tile Installer program. The CTEF has numerous educational and training courses available covering all facets of tile and the installation process. Classes and certifications are conducted on a year-round basis at the CTEF facility in Pendleton, SC, in addition to numerous satellite programs elsewhere in the United States.



www.tilecareer.com



Tom Carr (l) and John Merola at the TSP 2024 Tabletop event.

TECHNICAL PROGRAMS

Technical breakouts focus on LHT Mortar Coverage, Trowel Selection and Proper Troweling Techniques with Lupe Ortiz of IMTEF and James Woelfel, NTCA Technical Committee Chairman; Increasing Profits and Reducing Liability through Total Quality Management (TQM) with Vince Moiso and Donato Pompo of Ceramic Tile and Stone Consultants; and Tile Installations Utilizing Pedestal Systems – Opportunities and Challenges.

A general session on Industry-Wide Updates and Opportunities closes out the day, and conferencegoers have the opportunity to attend the closing reception and themed dinner.

Both days are punctuated by Award Lunches, sponsored one day by Turkish Ceramics and the other by Ondustry.com. Daltile is sponsoring all the networking breaks for both days.

This is a not-to-be-missed event. Wrap up the year with inspirations, insights, and new connections that will give you a firm foundation as a springboard for 2026. **TL**



The NTCA Technical Committee Meeting is open to all and gives the contractor a voice in developing standards and technical solutions.



Turkish Ceramics will sponsor one of the Award Lunches this year.

2026 CID

COVERINGS INSTALLATION & DESIGN

AWARDS



Celebrate Industry Excellence at the 2026 Coverings Installation & Design Awards

The 2026 Coverings Installation & Design (CID) Awards are now open for entry! The CID Awards honor exemplary projects that showcase outstanding tile and stone design and installation in residential and commercial projects. All projects must have been completed between January 2024 and December 2025. Submission categories include:

Ceramic Tile Installation
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Stone Installation
Stone Design

Artistic Installation
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TileLetter

ART AND ENDURANCE IN THE SIERRA:

*seven luxe baths
by Morgan Tile*





Jim Galletto's design incorporates lots of natural light, and interior designer Catherine Kwong brought her signature blend of refined minimalism and material richness to the space. Photo: Ron Nash.



FEATURE ■

Dustan Morgan isn't your typical tile guy. With roots in music, foothill grit, and a love of cats, he brings a unique tempo to tile. In his early years, Morgan was a professional touring musician. The focus, discipline, and creativity required onstage shaped his tile style, balancing artistic flair with execution.

Morgan founded Morgan Tile in his hometown of Nevada City, located in Northern California's Sierra foothills. His work in the area is a natural extension of that home base. Nestled along the shoreline of Lake Tahoe, a recent custom home project Morgan completed is as much a feat of architecture as it is of craftsmanship. Morgan relied on LATICRETE products and systems – the professional's choice – to deliver stunning aesthetics to the home's seven bathrooms, each a distinct experience unified by thoughtful detail.

The home was built by Jim Galletto, a longtime collaborator known for precision, unwavering standards, and a world-class team. On the interior, designer Catherine Kwong brought her signature blend of refined minimalism and material richness, creating spaces that feel both grounded and elevated. Architecture firm Fergus Garber masterfully balanced bold expression with site-sensitive restraint.

"Dustan and his team brought both expertise and a true sense of craft to this project," said Kwong. "Precision is essential in stone and tile work. But it's having an artist's eye that reveals the beauty in handmade material."



A view of the boathouse from the main floor of the custom home. Photo: Ron Nash.



Pierre Noir nosing, with Bleu Chinois tiles, leads down from the main-door entry to the home. Photo: Ron Nash.

The “artist’s eye” is something Morgan continues to sharpen. In 2024, he was selected for the A.R.T. (Artisans Revolution in Tile) mosaic making training and class, which is sponsored by NTCA and LATICRETE and supported by LATICRETE onsite products. The hands-on workshop, a rare opportunity to learn from some of the trade’s most respected mosaicists, deepened Morgan’s artistry, precision, and detailing, which are present throughout this home.

Unique challenges, elegant details

The home’s primary suite features limestone, while the neighboring bath showcases rustic zellige, imported from Morocco. The bathroom floors and the tiled hallway spaces feature basalt, Bleu Chinois, and Pierre Noir – exotic stones chosen for their texture and depth. These layouts, dictated by precise plans, demanded alignment and flow to complete the home’s visual story – areas where LATICRETE products deliver.

The project wasn’t just about setting tiles. It was about integrating form and function in a mountainous environment where freeze-thaw cycles and moisture control are critical. Physically, the build included entry at the top of the four-story home, with three bathrooms on the lowest floor, two above, and one on the main level.

“There were days when it felt like I was hauling stone through a canyon,” Morgan said. “Working top-down on a four-story home is no joke, but that’s part of the craft. You’ve got to show up for the hard stuff.”

Each bathroom balances design and execution. Four showers were clad in glazed thin brick, paired with bold layouts and minimalist color palettes. One of the exceptional spaces was a tiled shower in the boathouse at the end of the dock – literally on the lake. With every layout dictated by plans, there was no room for improvisation, only alignment and precision.

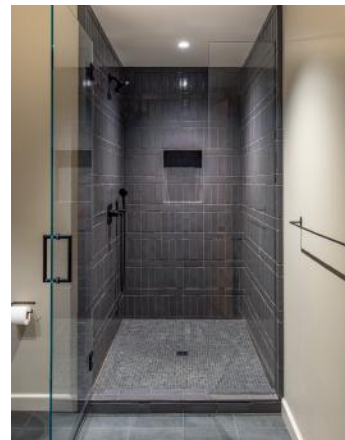
A LATICRETE-led installation

With the stakes high, Morgan relied on LATICRETE system solutions to serve as the backbone of the installation. Morgan Tile chose LATICRETE for its adaptability in demanding conditions. Kyle Mayer, the local LATICRETE technical sales representative, provided expert support in every phase.

That collaboration reflects Morgan's long-standing relationship with the brand, which extends beyond products into advocacy for the craft. This shared passion also strengthened his friendship with Ron Nash, President and COO of LATICRETE North America. The two connected in 2020 over a mutual love of art and photography, a connection that later brought Nash and his daughter Ava to the Tahoe home to capture the project's craftsmanship firsthand.



This shower in the primary suite features Eco Outdoor Limestone with light channel detail. Photo: Ava Nash.



Thin brick from Fireclay adorns the shower in the bathhouse. Photo: Ron Nash.



Thin brick tile from Fireclay shines in four baths, here in bright tones. Photo: Ron Nash.



The neighboring shower to the primary suite features zellige tile, imported from Morocco. Photo: Ron Nash.



*Dustan Morgan of Morgan Tile works on the Fireclay bathroom in the boathouse.
Photo: Ron Nash.*

“I’ve used LATICRETE for over 15 years,” said Morgan. “On a project this complex, their systems delivered exactly what we needed: reliability, versatility, and consistent performance at every step.”

Collaboration with LATICRETE was instrumental to the project’s substrate preparation. For efficient radiant floor heating, the brand’s STRATA_HEAT™ system was installed first. Morgan Tile then ensured a level floor with a full-home pour of NXT® Level Plus, a premium self-leveling underlayment that provided superior flatness for subsequent flooring additions.

In shower installations, Morgan Tile relied on quick-setting 3701 Lite Mortar to float and smooth the shower floors and walls, creating a perfectly plumb, even substrate for waterproofing.

This step ensured proper slopes and flatness for precise tile alignment, while delivering the same coverage at half the weight of a conventional thick-bed mortar. For waterproofing, HYDRO BAN® Sheet Membrane was installed over the mortar bed on the shower floors and pans. This was paired with versatile LATICRETE bonding flange drains for secure, adaptable connections. On the shower walls, HYDRO BAN® Board served as both the substrate and the waterproofing layer. Its lightweight,



Mitered zellige curb, with 2" x 2" of Bleu Chinois, all cut and fabricated from large stock 24" x 24". Photo: Ava Nash.



reinforced construction simplified handling and eliminated the need for cement or fiberglass-based backers. Due to the large format and weight of tiles used throughout the bathrooms, installers set them with TRI-LITE®, a lightweight, high-performance adhesive mortar designed for large and heavy tile, thin-bed, and wall installations.

A standout feature was the edge detail. Master fabricator and owner of Czarnowski Marble And Granite Works, Patrick Czarnowski, executed miters and stair nosings, tackling the challenge of handmade tiles and limestone. His craftsmanship elevated the project's finish.

This full suite of LATICRETE products handled elevation shifts, varied substrates, and mountain weather – all without compromise.

It takes a team

It took a team to bring the project across the finish line. Alongside Morgan Tile, Dave McGuirk of California-based DLM Flooring contributed his expertise in floor preparation and setting, while Kris Kemp of Louisiana's Kemp Tile brought specialized skills in large-format stone installation. The tile itself was provided by Youngs Carpet One of Grass Valley, Calif., ensuring access to the premium materials that defined the project's finish.

Reflecting on the collaboration, Morgan noted, "This craft is built on the backs of artists. I'm working to make sure we don't forget that – and that we keep pushing the art form forward."

The completed home is a unique statement carved into granite, standing firm on its foundation, nearly touching the lake – wrapped in tile work that's as enduring as it is expressive. And while this Lake Tahoe home is private, it holds sway as a public example of tile artistry meeting technical excellence, trusted partnerships, and a relentless commitment to the craft. **TL**



(l. to r.) LATICRETE's Ron Nash, on site as one of the project photographers, architect Jim Galletto, and tile contractor Dustan Morgan. Photo: Ava Nash.

ONE *to* ONE



In the One-to-One column, NTCA Executive Director Bart Bettiga interviews industry leaders about pertinent topics.

John Merola has been in the tile business for nearly 40 years. Born and raised in Brooklyn, N.Y., John joined his brother Kevin in a local tile store, making sample boards, working in the warehouse, and eventually selling tile and installation materials to local hardware stores. In 1988, Kevin founded Merola Sales Company Inc. from his bedroom office. John joined him in 1989. They were a small New York distributor, focused on selling adhesives, tools, and ceramic tile. Over the years, their passion and commitment to quick delivery and excellent service have helped them evolve into Merola Tile, one of the fastest-growing tile distribution companies in the U.S.

In 1999, Merola Tile experienced a breakthrough when John secured a special-order tile program with a major big-box retailer. The relationship began with unique, curated tile collections and grew steadily, thanks to outstanding customer service and timely delivery, eventually leading to a nationwide program. This success also enabled Merola Tile to expand its reach to independent retailers, setting the stage for John's leadership growth and becoming the eventual Owner/ Partner and CEO of Merola Tile Distributors of America.

**JOHN
MEROLA**
Owner/Partner
and CEO,
Merola Tile
Distributors of
America

↓
*Embracing
technology leads
to national
prominence in sales
and distribution*



Menorca ceramic wall tile evokes a biophilic mood.

What was the most significant development that helped springboard your company to national prominence?

Our opportunity to create a special-order program in 1999 was a game changer. We started in the New York area, gradually adding stores as sales and trust grew. Eventually, we launched a national program. That volume gave us the ability to expand our offerings and build strong relationships with both retailers and dealers.



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The Merola team at Coverings, and the expansive Merola booth below, ready to greet visitors.

Balancing national retail with independent dealers was challenging. We eventually divided the business into two divisions: my brother Kevin continued with traditional dealer channels, while I focused on the big-box program. By 2006, we had moved to New Jersey, built a staff of 15, and were generating nearly \$6 million annually. When the 2007 recession hit, we had to reinvent ourselves – expanding our dealer outreach under the SomerTile brand.

You are very humble about how you built the special-order program you parlayed into a national distribution company. To what do you most attribute your success?

I've always loved technology. When the industry began shifting online, I embraced it. I taught myself how to code and design digital experiences, which allowed us to be among the first to sell ceramic tile successfully online.





The Sound of Silence:

Vesper Sets a New Standard in High-Rise Living



Ruben Villanueva from Fabulous Floors checks thin-set coverage under DITRA-HEAT-DUO

Austin, Texas — In the heart of the city, the Vesper condominium tower redefines how material selection and expert collaboration can elevate multi-family construction. Developed by Pearlstone Partners, designed by STG-Austin, and built by AECOM Hunt, the 283-unit high-rise faced two critical challenges: ensuring waterproofing in every bathroom and minimizing impact noise between floors.

A Proven Approach

Fabulous Floors, the project's tile contractor, had already seen the performance benefits of **Schluter®-DITRA-HEAT-DUO** on a previous build. With its integrated sound control and thermal break, the uncoupling membrane was the natural choice for Vesper. The team partnered closely with Schluter representatives to refine the installation sequence. This approach maximized efficiency, kept the project on schedule, and raised the quality bar.

"Any high rise can be a real logistical nightmare. Efficiency and ease of installation are a necessity. This makes things so much easier on the guys working."

— John Saye, *Fabulous Floors*

Schluter® Products Used

KERDI-LINE Linear Drain
(tileable grate)

KERDI Bonded Waterproofing
Membrane

DITRA-HEAT-DUO Uncoupling
Membrane with Sound Control
and Thermal Break

ALL-SET® Specialized Modified
Thin-Set Mortar

Quiet Confidence

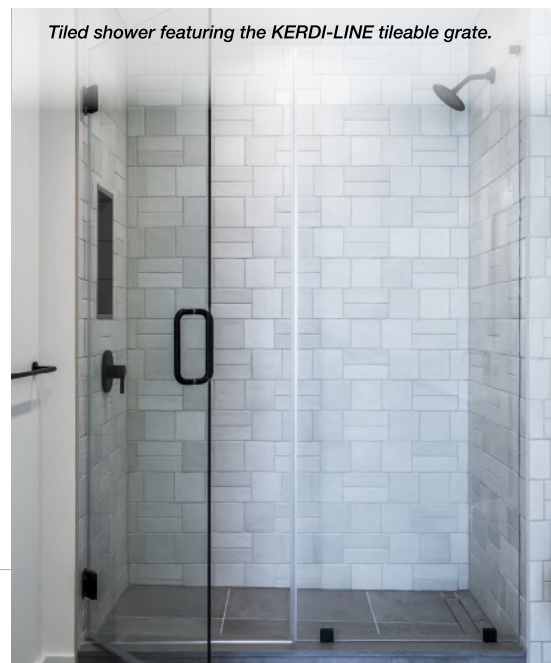
Impact sound tests following ASTM E1007-21 confirmed the results. The Apparent Impact Insulation Class (AIIC) rating came in at 64, which is significantly higher than both the typical building code requirement of 50 and the high-end condominium benchmark of 55.

This result means Vesper residents enjoy noticeably quieter homes with reduced noise transfer between floors. Acoustic comfort has become a key factor in luxury multi-family living, and Vesper delivers on that promise.

Built for the Long Haul

Every bathroom in Vesper features Schluter's complete waterproofing system. This includes **KERDI-LINE** linear drains with tileable grates, **KERDI** bonded waterproofing and vapor-retardant membranes, and **DITRA-HEAT-DUO** uncoupling membranes with sound control and thermal break.

The system passed rigorous flood tests and is backed by a lifetime warranty. This combination offers lasting peace of mind for owners while ensuring long-term performance.



Tiled shower featuring the KERDI-LINE tileable grate.



This mood board in the Merola booth illustrates the design possibilities of the company's many lines.

From 2010 to 2017, our sales grew from \$6 million to \$32 million because we weren't afraid to innovate.

At the same time, I stayed true to what makes us unique: offering bold, distinctive products. We've never chased trends. Instead, we've introduced styles – like patterned and encaustic-look tiles in 1995, or wood planks in 1999 – years before they became industry staples.

This sounds easy but I am sure the challenges were significant. What hurdles did you have to overcome, and how did this help you to succeed in distribution to your traditional channels?

Logistics was one of our biggest challenges. Tile is heavy, fragile, and costly to ship. We invested heavily in packaging, freight expertise, and fulfillment systems to ensure our products arrived in perfect condition.





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Sunset - Jade



Two of Merola's iconic products: the elegant tones of marble-look Touche porcelain tile (l), and the vibrant, glossy rustic look of Viva.

We also doubled down on unique products – mosaics, geometric shapes, penny rounds, encaustic-look patterns – styles many suppliers abandoned but we believed in. Those choices paid off, as they helped define the Merola look: distinct, creative, and timeless.

What led to your acquisition of Pan American Ceramics in California?

Online retail companies moved to a supermarket model, and it became increasingly difficult to maintain premium shelf space in stores and top page visibility on the internet. Our sales suffered in this process. I knew we had to continue to diversify our customer base and our product offerings.

California was already our top state in sales, but all our distribution was from New Jersey. To be viable on the West Coast, we needed a local presence. When the

opportunity came to acquire Pan American Ceramics, it was an easy decision. Tom Carr, Owner and President, had built a culture and a team that matched our drive and commitment. We purchased their assets, hired their talented employees, and welcomed Tom Carr into our leadership team. This move positioned us to serve customers nationwide more effectively.

How does your company approach the tile contractor and installer as part of the process?

Installation is critical. If tile isn't installed correctly, the customer suffers, and the entire trade's reputation suffers with it. That's why we support organizations like the Ceramic Tile Education Foundation (CTEF) and the National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA). Our goal is to give back by helping train and recruit the next generation of professional tile installers. **TL**



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ALEK TSITUK
Trimworks, Inc., Shrewsbury, Mass.

By Lesley Goddin, Editorial Director and Senior Writer

Alek Tsituk, Owner Operator of Trimworks, Inc., in Shrewsbury, Mass., rooted his business trajectory in ingenuity, curiosity, creativity and the ability to connect well with people.

After emigrating from Belarus in 2002, he started working in the exterior residential remodeling industry as a subcontractor. In 2019, he saw an opportunity to carve a new path by starting his own independent business as an interior remodeler of kitchens, floors, and finished-basement construction.



*Alek Tsituk,
Owner of
Trimworks, Inc.*

His affability and ability to connect with his clients propelled his business forward. “I realized I was good at building warm, no-pressure relationships.” Attentive to people’s needs, he “often surprised them with an understanding of what they want even when they couldn’t explain it themselves,” he said. “I always overdelivered ‘without permission.’” His business soared.

In 2023, he subbed out the few bathroom jobs that came his way. He didn’t have the skill set for bathroom work, but he became intrigued by tile and committed to learning the trade.

“I flew around the country taking all the training I could find: Schluter, wedi, MAPEI, Ardex, and NTCA Workshops,” he said. “Math and physics were not obstacles, since I went to technical college, but I needed to know how everything comes together and to learn how to choose the right methods and materials before doing anything myself.”



The owners of this shower relied completely on Trimworks for design. Incorporating grey tile was the right decision to create an eye-catching look. Miterring niche corners created a seamless look. This project was an investment in new skills. Working with large-format tiles and creating miters was a first-time experience for Trimworks – Tsituk and two helpers – and it delivered something that shocked the client (in a good way) when they returned.

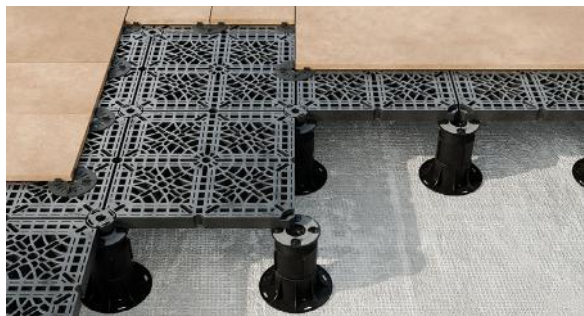
ONLINE LEARNING

NTCA University is a comprehensive online platform offering tile installation courses designed for individuals new to the industry or those seeking to refresh their skills. These courses are an excellent resource for training or apprenticeship programs, ensuring that learners are equipped with industry-standard methods and practices before applying their knowledge through hands-on or on-the-job learning. Additionally, these courses are beneficial for sales associates and professionals in other roles within the tile industry, providing valuable insights into the principles and processes of tile installation. NTCA University also features business courses tailored to small business owners. Accessible 24/7 via computer, tablet, or smartphone, NTCA University allows learners the flexibility to study at their convenience.

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MAPEI's PP level GRID System is used in combination with pedestals to offer an extra degree of stability, safety, and protection. In the unlikely event of pavers breaking, the grid will prevent anything from falling through. Further, the grids of the system are connected to each other through locking connectors, giving the system stability and strength. The use of PP level GRID System allows the installation of ceramic pavers, natural stone* and concrete pavers of different sizes. In addition, because the installation is free of the constraints of the pedestals underneath and because of movable head spacers, pavers can be placed on top of the grid in any pattern desired. Designed for use in residential and commercial applications, the PP level GRID System can be installed in combination with pedestals on terraces, balconies and roof decks. The system is also recyclable. The safety grids, connectors and head spacers may be removed and recycled at the end of their service life.

For more information about MAPEI's PP level GRID System, scan to visit.



* Consult with the natural-stone manufacturer as to whether its products are suitable for heavy pedestrian traffic.



Tile could be art if there's a vision

Coverings in 2024 revealed “endless opportunities for imagination, craftsmanship and skill. I realized tile could be art if there's a vision!” Tsituk said.

His Coverings experience was a turning point. Upon his return, he focused on building a tile and bathroom remodeling business, while continuing to build his skills. He ended the year with 11 bathroom remodels. Demand for his work continued into 2025.

Intent on setting himself apart and elevating his business, he offered custom layouts – sometimes providing up to 10 different drawings for his customer to choose from – at no extra charge. This enabled him to build a premium portfolio.

He ratcheted his game up another notch by establishing a collaboration with designers at The Tile Shop.

Once the contract is signed, one of the designers reaches out to Tsituk's clients for an in-store consultation. They all meet there and “start creating harmony of colors,” he said. After selecting the tiles, Tsituk customizes the look with different sizes, patterns, and decorative strips. “The customer ends up with a perfect bathroom of their dreams with no regrets.”

Tsituk brings his clients to The Tile Shop, too, and he is at the top of their recommended contractor list for walk-ins, based on glowing reviews from customers. “I constantly receive calls from people who were directed to me by The Tile Shop.”



This bathroom remodel in a circa 1960s house still preserves original features in classic and elegant style.



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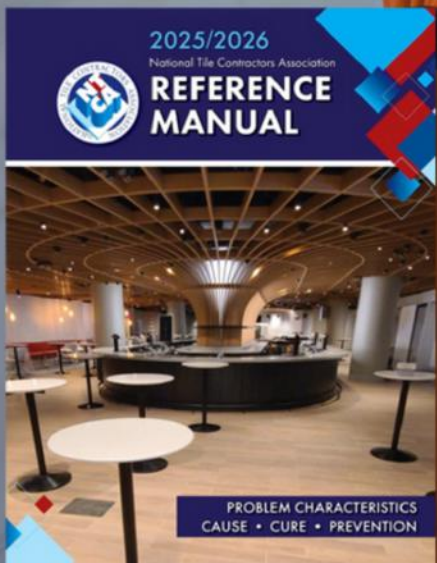
NTCA REFERENCE MANUAL

In conjunction with the NTCA Technical Committee members, industry allies, and ceramic tile contractors, distributors, and manufacturers, we produce the *NTCA Reference Manual*. One of the most highly-valued tile industry documents, this manual identifies recurring installation challenges, recognizes potential problems, and offers expert solutions. The *NTCA Reference Manual* is a comprehensive culmination of knowledge, research, and development that addresses common installation obstacles and issues in the tile and stone industry.

The *NTCA Reference Manual* is released annually and a **printed copy is mailed to all active members**. PDF and print are available by visiting the [NTCA Online Store](#).

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His growth reflects his dedication and ingenuity. “My average price to remodel a bathroom doubled in two years, and I find myself among the top players,” he said. “I’ll be busy for the rest of the year and into 2026. Statistically, 75% of my business is returning customers and referrals. Tile and bathrooms are 60% of my business this year; I’d like it to be 75% next year. I plan to grow my business further in 2026 by offering custom mosaics.”

Tile family; becoming an artist

He joined NTCA in 2023, finding value in learning and training. But the value of the membership escalated when Robb Olson of Minnesota’s Footprint Wood & Stone introduced him to the concept of “Tile Family.” Tsituk said he felt a sense of belonging.

“I realized that other members probably feel the same love for the industry and artistry in tile – and we all share that feeling – and NTCA is a home for that family. People communicate, help each other, support each

other, and celebrate each other’s accomplishments,” he said. “A lot of times, they’ve never even met in real life. I love the opportunities for growth and achievement the association offers, like becoming a Five-Star Contractor, CTI certification, annual awards. There’s always something to look forward to.”

Tsituk is also enthusiastic about being in the Artisans Revolution in Tile (A.R.T.) training this fall, a program co-sponsored by NTCA, LATICRETE, Daltile and others.

“I always appreciated art in all forms and love artistic people, but I never thought of myself as an artistic person,” he said. “I’ve always been original in many things but didn’t think I could be an artist.

“Then I started to hear from former A.R.T. participants that in many cases an artistic person needs to be awakened, and started thinking that maybe it’s the case with me,” he added. “So I believed, got excited, and started looking forward to finding my way into A.R.T. I hope A.R.T. will help me become a true



The client of this bathroom was told it was not possible to create an ADA-compliant bathroom. But Tsituk serendipitously found her in one of the Facebook groups. The main challenge was in installing a shower door that complied with accessibility requirements. Trimworks’ solution was to attach a cast-iron plate outside the left shower wall, bolt the door track to it, then embed and hide the plate inside the wood trim. The doors slide beyond the wall with a 32” opening. Counterspace was created with the same wall tile.



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artist, become like many talented students of A.R.T., become one of them, and be part of that community. I'd like to create bathrooms with mosaic inlays like other guys do." And after the A.R.T. training? Tsituk wants to pursue his CTI credential!

Mottos and joys

Tsituk revels in the "freedom of imagination, the ability to use imagination and opportunity to make every project unique, and feeling the pride of accomplishment with every

project. And I love how what I do reflects on my clients: they share my satisfaction too and become loyal customers."

"What you reap is what you sow" has long been his philosophy, emphasizing that "selflessness, care, kindness, and altruism always pay." Two other mottos near and dear to his heart are: "Everything is possible for the one who believes," and "Hard work beats talent."

Tsituk is living proof of the power of vision, imagination, risk, education, hard work, and connection. The sky is the limit when he is inspired! **TL**



Tsituk began offering custom-designed and cut shower floor patterns starting in 2025 to elevate his business to the next level and separate it from others with an artistic approach. The diamond pattern on the left was cut out of 12" x 24" tile. Basket weave on the right was offered in 6', 7' and 8' – and the client chose 8'.

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TROWEL & ERROR VIDEO: the NTCA Technical Committee continually works to address mortar coverage challenges



By Chris Woelfel,
J.G. Woelfel &
Associates, Tile and
Stone Consultants
Member, NTCA
Technical Committee

Achieving 80% mortar coverage, or 95% in exterior and wet areas, is the minimum tile mortar coverage standard in ANSI A108.5. It is also the purpose of the *Trowel & Error* video produced by the NTCA and members of its Technical Committee. Yet larger tile sizes, evolving thixotropic properties of mortars, development of specialized trowels, and the complexities of labor keep mortar coverage a consistent topic of conversation in NTCA Technical Committee meetings and in our industry overall.

With the release of the new *Trowel & Error* video in both English and Spanish, it's important to recognize that achieving proper mortar coverage has always been a challenge for installers. When tile grew to 24" x 24" – considered very large in the mid-1990s – NTCA Executive Director Emeritus Joe Tarver knew improper mortar coverage was a challenge that would injure the industry if he didn't do something about it.

Sleuthing out proper mortar coverage

Tarver devised a system to demonstrate troweling techniques in the back room of his NTCA office. Using specially-cut large-format plexiglass and tempered glass that would reveal mortar coverage, he kept experimenting with troweling techniques.

At the time, it was standard procedure to apply bonding material with a notched trowel in a figure 8 motion. But despite trying different mortars, different mortar consistencies, conventional and latex modified mortars – and a variety of trowel sizes and notch sizes and configurations – Tarver could only achieve 40% to 60% coverage at best. But late one night, with enough mortar to make one more try on a large glass tile, Tarver troweled it on in a parallel manner, put the glass tile in place, and slightly moved the glass forward

and backward, collapsing the ridges and reaching 95% coverage. Success!

Troweling in one direction, short side to short side, then moving the tile to compress the ridges and let air escape, were the key to achieving proper coverage. It would soon become the predominant lesson to be shared with NTCA members in the *Trowel & Error* video. The concept was true when first documented on film by Tarver and his friend Bob Roberson of David Allen Company, and it remains true today. By the way, Roberson also came up with the catchy title for the video, which he copyrighted on behalf of the NTCA in 1996.



The above title card identifies this video as the new version of *Trowel & Error* in English. In Spanish, it reads: "Errors When Smoothing the Surface," not "Trowel & Error."



[&]



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Back in the day, NTCA's Joe Tarver with a tile panel that demonstrates the proper troweling techniques for proper coverage.

Continuing challenges to proper coverage

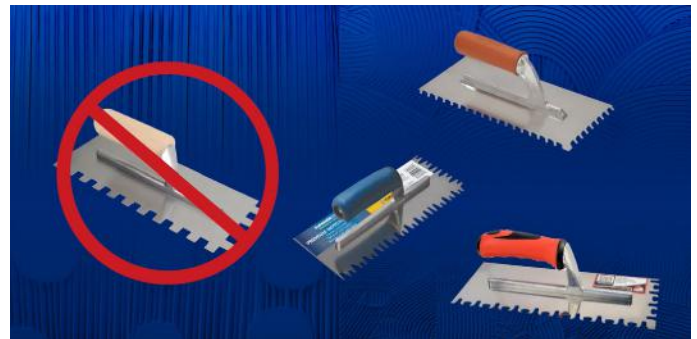
Yet, the challenge of collapsing mortar ridges under tile continues to cause problems due to tile installers failing to apply the tile mortar properly with parallel ridges. Many also fail to embed the tile properly by moving it perpendicular to the mortar ridges.

The use of the 1/2" x 1/2" x 1/2" square-notched trowel further hinders proper mortar coverage. This 1/2" trowel became popular with large-format tiles due to its ability to spread more mortar over the substrate. However, the distance between the notches makes it virtually impossible to collapse all the ridges properly, especially with rectangular tiles in an offset pattern. These trowels are no longer recommended, and the new *Trowel & Error* video illustrates why. The NTCA Technical Committee also put a precautionary statement on the use of 1/2" x 1/2" x 1/2" notched trowels in the *NTCA Reference Manual* this year, and most tile mortar manufacturers do not recommend their use.

The updated *Trowel & Error* video, now in its fourth version thanks to the production support of Custom Building Products, continues Tarver's tradition of using glass tile panels to illustrate the collapsing trowel ridges behind the tile. It also shows larger tiles than the previous version of the video. Though the original *Trowel & Error* video was initially distributed to members on VHS tape as a training tool, today any installer, contractor, manufacturer or consultant can access it on their phone. Now this valuable information can be put to work right in the field where it is needed most.



The video illustrates the correct troweling technique – short side to short side.



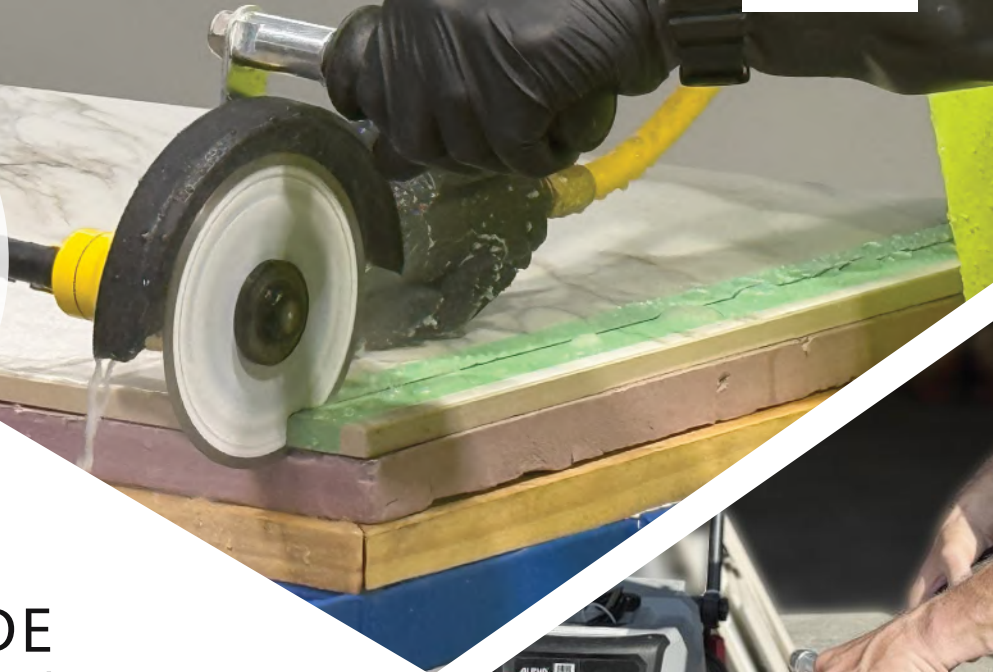
Though the 1/2" x 1/2" square-notched trowel gained popularity as tile size increased, testing shows it doesn't provide proper mortar coverage. The *Trowel & Error* video illustrates why.



The NTCA Technical Committee meeting, April 2025. The Committee meets at Coverings at Tile Solutions Plus -- and is open to all members of the industry. Please plan to attend!

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Association involvement

The new *Trowel & Error* videos are one more way the NTCA Technical Committee helps provide tools to installers for their success. Thanks to Woody Sanders of D.W. Sanders Tile and Stone Contracting, who is installing (and destroying) tile in the videos, Mike Micalizzi of Custom Building Products, who oversaw production of the videos, Lupe Ortiz of IMTEF who proofed the Spanish language version, and to Chairman James Woelfel, Vice Chairman Nyle Wadford, and CTEF's Scott Carothers for their technical expertise. Technical Committee members Jan Hohn and Chris Walker have also contributed to the project previously.

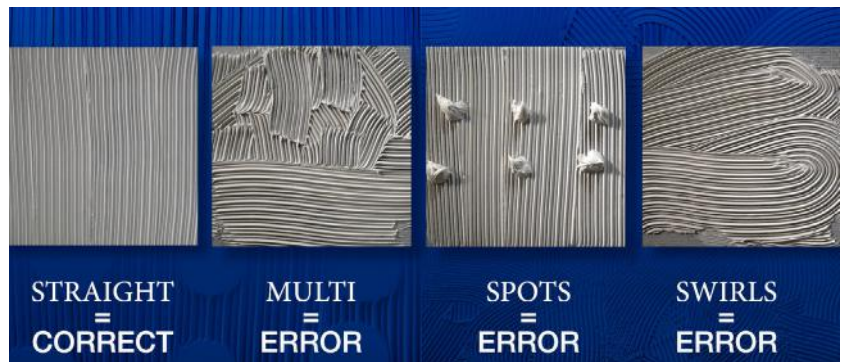
It is this kind of involvement from the NTCA Technical Committee that ensures *Trowel & Error* continues to serve as the vital resource it was first created to be, illustrating how to properly meet ANSI A108.5 standards for the installation of tile with tile mortar.

The new *Trowel & Error* videos can be found on the NTCA YouTube Channel:

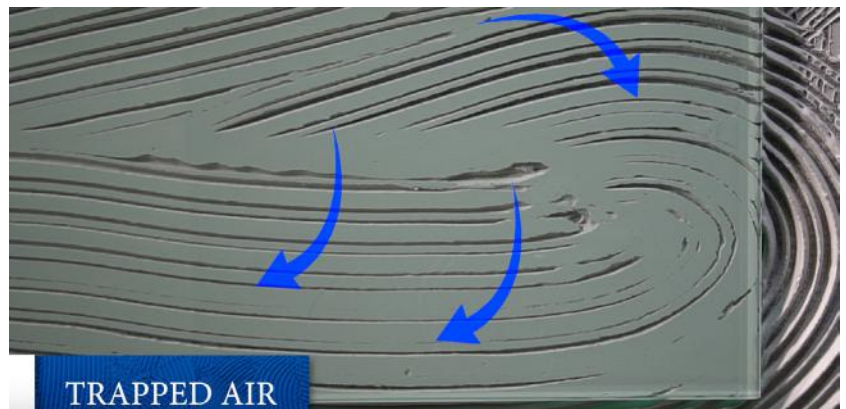
- **Trowel & Error (English):**
<https://youtu.be/zfMmbJWFbSY?si=AU7GV7sWKBHecUat>
- **Errores Al Alisar La Superficie (Spanish):** <https://youtu.be/OR4T8x2ubuQ?si=0ci2tJ6r6JjwAf15>
(this actually says Errors When Smoothing the Surface) **TL**



Woody Sanders of NTCA Five-Star company D.W. Sanders Tile & Stone Contracting illustrates concepts in the *Trowel & Error* video.



Correct and incorrect ways to trowel mortar, ensuring proper coverage.



Trapped air when ridges are collapsed in swirled troweling methods means coverage is inadequate.

Chris Woelfel, M. Ed., is Partner and Business Manager at J.G. Woelfel & Associates, Tile and Stone Consultants. A member of the NTCA Technical Committee, she has long been an advocate for qualified labor and adherence to industry standards. She spent over 15 years in the tile contracting business at Artcraft Granite, Marble and Tile Company, with prior work experience as an award-winning journalist, video producer, external and internal communication strategist, and public relations director.

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PARTS and PIECES ESSENTIAL for a WATERTIGHT INSTALLATION

Yes, you have to use all of them ←



*By Dean Moilanen,
Director of
Architectural Services,
Noble Company*

While trying to come up with a new, exciting PowerPoint for our annual NTCA Webinar, I stumbled upon a veritable breadcrumb trail of “parts and pieces” to explore. These are essential items that are critical, and when they are omitted, forgotten, or value-engineered out of the critical path of installation, lead to trouble.

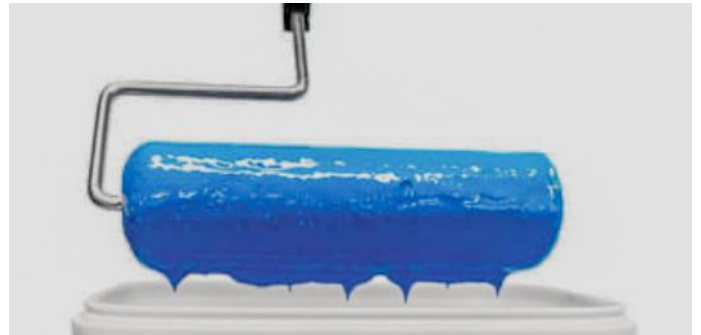
Play the right “board game”

One might think that unacceptable substrate failures are confined to sketchy, low-budget remodels. But high-dollar, four-star hospitality projects have run afoul of successful, long-term performance, due to an unacceptable wall substrate being used. Not every cement backer board can be used outside. Not every lightweight foam board will hold up in a steam room. And the legion of tile industry organizations that weigh in against dry-wall or greenboard in wet areas should be a word to the wise. The correct tile substrate is a very important “part” of the wet area’s legacy performance and success.

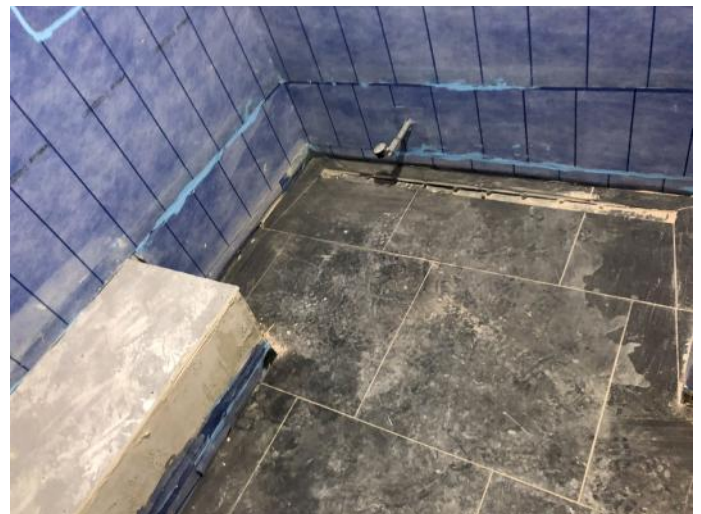
Liquid or sheet membrane?

Everyone would agree that you need an effective and robust waterproof membrane for a leak-proof shower, right? Should you choose a liquid membrane, which is easier to apply (and sometimes lower in cost and performance metrics)? Or should you select a composite sheet membrane, with a somewhat higher material and labor cost, but often a faster installation time, and higher permeation and crack isolation attributes? I recommend taking a closer look at ANSI A118.12/high performance data and ASTM E 96 procedure E for permeation (.5 or

lower). Then consider how well the membrane you plan on using meets the high-performance metrics of these two industry guidelines.



Fluid-applied membranes may be somewhat less expensive and “easier” to apply, but consistent coverage and mil thickness can be a challenge.



All overlaps and seams should show a consistent “bleed out” of sealant. Lack of visible sealant coverage may result in a failure.

Build your skilled tile team from the ground up!

The NTCA's Apprenticeship Guidelines, registered with the U.S. Department of Labor, give you the blueprint to create your own "learn-while-you-earn" programs for tile finishers and setters. Combine hands-on training with NTCA University online learning, develop clear career paths, and boost your recruitment. NTCA provides the guidelines, resources, and even recruitment materials to get you started. Ready to invest in your future?

Visit www.tile-assn.com/page/NTCA_apprenticeship_guidelines for more info.

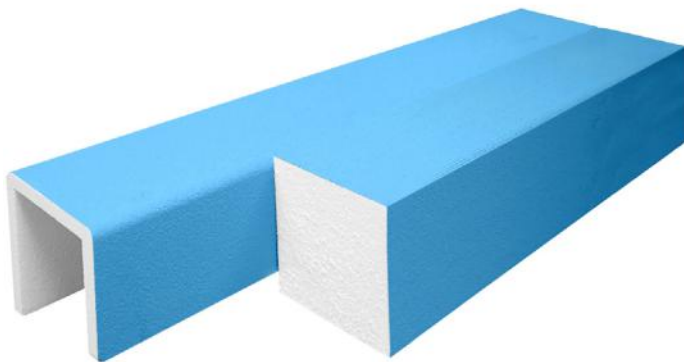


Curb your enthusiasm

There was a time when building a shower curb was the domain of stacked 2" x 4", membrane, metal lath, and mud. A fair amount of competence and experience with "mud work" was – and is – needed.

Improperly-built shower curbs with incorrectly-installed metal lath may be anchored with staples, tack hammers, or galvanized nails that end up penetrating the curb membrane. Cut cementitious backer unit (CBU) serves as the curb sidewalls, and the curb-top ends up with anchor points for cement board strips penetrating the membrane.

A new "part" is called for: like a solid foam curb, which eliminates the heretofore mentioned punctured curb membrane. In addition, installation takes minutes, and the height, width, and length of each curb is remarkably consistent. Lastly, some pre-fab curb suppliers can offer custom sizing for the curbs as well.



Prefabricated lightweight foam curbs and overlays can go a long way in preventing failures at curb details.

To pea or not to pea

Many clamping ring drains with weep holes are part of commercial projects, including those in hospitality, multi-family, condominium, and institutional. So, how does one protect those weep holes? In theory, the "classic" best practice is crushed tile or pea gravel distributed over the weep holes. This method is devised to protect against the dry-pack mortar clogging things up.

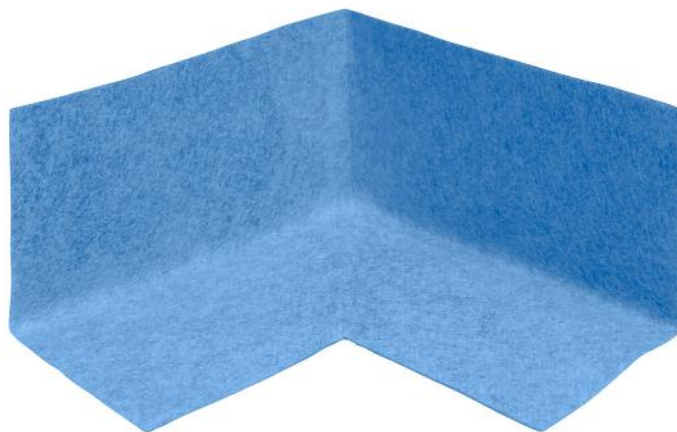
But there is a better, more reliable way to do this: a positive weep protector. A variety of manufacturers offer prefabricated plastic collars that are designed to clip around the base, cover the weep holes, and allow residual moisture to exit the system.



Use of a positive weep protector instead of pea gravel would ensure protection of weep holes.

Don't get cornered

One of the main areas of failure inside shower pans occurs at the inside and curb corners. With the ready access to an assortment of thin-line prefabricated corners from various vendors, there is no reason to try and "handcraft" these critical installation details. Note that installation methods of these corner products may vary from vendor to vendor.



Prefabricated inside and outside corners can help ensure that these critical details are waterproof.



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Flash in the pan

Where any type of waterproof membrane ties into the drain is the number one area of failure in shower pans. Using a drain flashing eliminates the time-intensive effort to get a sheet or liquid membrane to perform in this failure-prone detail.



Prefabricated drain flashings are useful when waterproofing ties into this critical drain detail.

Bonded, seamed, sealed

All ANSI A118.10 waterproof membranes are bonded. All sheet membranes are seamed, and many companies offer a proprietary sealant. The trouble begins when an installer assumes that the bonding, seaming, and sealing of one particular product is universal. I have seen many failures happen for this exact reason. Be cognizant of each brand's unique proprietary installation methods and products.



Make sure you use the correct sealant as required by the waterproof membrane manufacturer.

Q/A-Q/C and training

Any project with a robust and enforced quality assurance/quality control program for waterproofing will have a higher level of installation quality as well as fewer failures. The same is true of training. Installer turnover, combined with new products, requires a repeated sequence of installation and product training. Remember, even the best baseball players go to spring training to work on the basics.

Some things never change. The temptation to save time or money by cutting corners will usually come back to haunt you. **TL**



Quality assurance/quality control can play a major role in successful waterproofing installations.

Dean Moilanen is Director of Architectural Services – Noble Company, AIA Las Vegas Allied Member, CSI, CTEF, IIBEC, NTCA Ambassador, and Certified Forensic Stone & Tile Inspector. He is a Division 9 waterproofing, crack isolation, and permeation specialist who advises on some of the most demanding and prestigious projects in the USA. As a 35-year veteran of the tile industry, Moilanen's relationships with architects, builders, and owners allow him access to some of the most challenging and compelling design issues in the industry. Moilanen's extensive career on job sites gives him a real-world perspective as he has seen first-hand success and failure relating to product selection, installation issues, and sequencing challenges. Reach him at: dean@noblecompany.com, 702-604-5366.



TRAINING AND EDUCATION CLASSES

The Ceramic Tile Education Foundation (CTEF) offers several ceramic tile education and training courses – from basic tile installation for the non-installer to various levels of hands-on training, including custom ceramic tile training courses.

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To become a member and make use of personal, targeted answers from NTCA's Technical Team to your installation questions, contact Jim Olson at jim@tile-assn.com.



QUESTION

We have a dry pack shower pan that one of my new installers put in with the bonded method, using a thinset slurry over the slab. After inspecting the pan, everything sits too low by 0.75" - 1.25". I took out the bonding drain flange and stubbed a new 2" pipe up so that I can install a new drain flange at a higher level.

Can I dry pack over the cured shower pan using the same method as before to get the proper height everywhere, or do I need to completely remove the mud bed down to the slab and start from scratch?

ANSWER

That's a great question, and it's a situation many of us mud installers have faced when our elevations weren't quite right before floating floors. The good news is that being too low is often an easier fix than being too high,



It's important to determine if the original installation is sound before floating over an existing mortar bed.

which would require a complete demolition and restart.

To float over an existing mortar bed, we first need to determine if the original installation is sound. I typically check two things:

- 1. Soft/Improperly Compacted Mortar:** I use a cold chisel to lightly scrape the top of the mortar bed. If it crumbles easily, it needs to be removed.
- 2. Proper Bonding:** I tap or lightly slide the cold chisel over the mortar bed and listen for any hollow or scratching sounds, which would indicate a poor bond.

If both of these checks are acceptable, you can proceed with the installation.

Assuming this bonding flange shower assembly also includes a shower curb, the corresponding *TCNA Handbook Method* is B422, found on pages 258-9 in the 2025 edition. In the Requirements section, it states that the minimum mortar thickness for bonded mortar installations is 3/4". Additional requirements are in ANSI 108.1A-5.2 (1, 2, 3), which covers the application of mortar to concrete floors and decks.

You'll need to dampen your existing mortar bed and then either apply a thin layer of cement slurry or dust it with dry cement, wet it, and broom the cement into a slurry over the entire mortar bed before placing the new mortar bed.

Keep in mind that 108.1A 2.33 sets the limit at 65 sq. ft. before reinforcing wire is required, and 108.1A 2.3 provides the ratio of 4 parts damp sand to 1 part Portland cement by volume.

Once these steps are complete, you'll be ready to set your new elevations and install the new mortar bed.

This is a great teaching moment – it's always easiest to make a quick call if we're unsure about mortar bed elevations or finish floor heights, before we begin.

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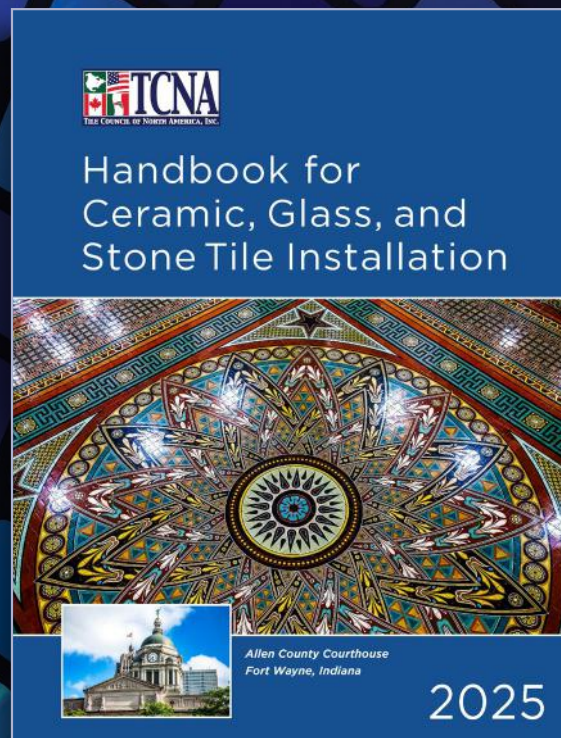
ANSI A137.1



ANSI A108, A118, and A136



ANSI A137.3, A108.19 and A108.20



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I have a job in Austin, Texas, and the homeowner wants to install porcelain tile on their outdoor patio. The concrete patio floor is an addition to an existing concrete patio floor with rebar connecting the two slabs of concrete with a cold joint. What type of crack isolation /uncoupling membrane should I use to prevent cracking in my environment? How do I treat the cold joint?

Thank you for reaching out with your question about installing porcelain tile on your outdoor patio in Austin, Texas. Based on industry best practices and recognized standards, including the *TCNA Handbook* and ANSI A108, I'm happy to provide the following information.

Your situation involves two concrete slabs joined with rebar and a cold joint. A cold joint is considered a non-structural movement joint, but it is still a potential point of differential movement that can telegraph cracks through to a tile installation.

According to the *TCNA Handbook*, any known cold joint or change in substrate must be treated as a movement joint and must not be tiled over without proper treatment.

Crack Isolation / Uncoupling Membrane: To help mitigate potential cracking caused by slab movement, you should use one of the following:

- **Crack Isolation Membrane (ANSI A118.12 compliant):** These are specifically designed to prevent existing or in-plane cracks (up to a certain width) from transferring through to the tile.
 - When used over cold joints, the membrane manufacturer's instructions must be followed carefully, and movement accommodation is still required directly over the joint.
- **Uncoupling Membrane:** These membranes uncouple the tile assembly from minor horizontal substrate movement. However, they do not eliminate the need for movement joints directly over cold joints or changes in substrate.

Important Note: While these membranes help mitigate crack transfer, they do not eliminate the need for a movement joint over the cold joint itself.

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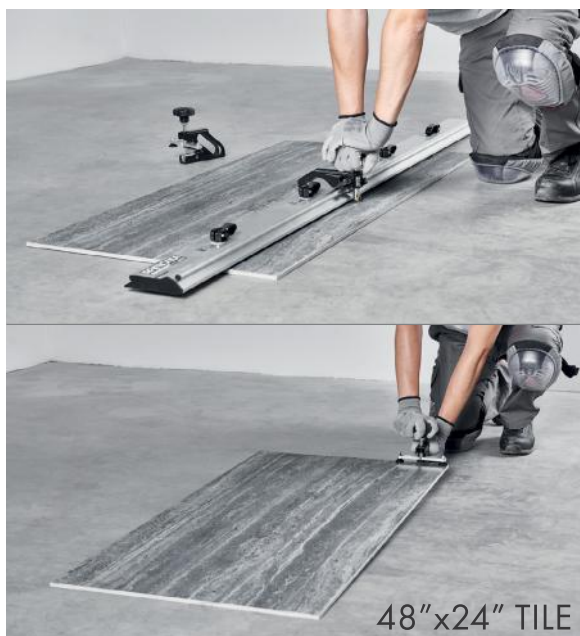
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Treatment of Cold Joint: The cold joint must be honored and treated as follows:

- **Movement Joint at Cold Joint:** Per TCNA EJ171, a movement joint must be installed in the tile assembly directly over the cold joint, continuing through the tile and setting materials.
- The joint should be filled with a flexible sealant that meets ASTM C920, such as a polyurethane or silicone sealant designed for exterior use.
- Use appropriate backer rod and joint design based on width and depth (see ANSI A108.01 and EJ171).

Environmental Considerations in Austin, Texas

- Austin's climate includes heat, sun exposure, and occasional freezing, all of which cause thermal expansion and contraction.
- This makes it even more important to use appropriate expansion joints every 8–12 feet (perimeter and field), per TCNA EJ171, and to ensure that tile, setting materials, and membranes are rated for exterior use.



NTCA Technical Trainers offered recommendations for installing porcelain tile on an outdoor patio in Austin, Texas, based on industry best practices and recognized standards, including the TCNA Handbook and ANSI A108 manual.

Summary of Recommendations:

- Use an ANSI A118.12 crack isolation membrane or a suitable uncoupling membrane rated for exterior applications.
- Honor the cold joint with a movement joint in the tile assembly directly above it.
- Use ASTM C920-rated sealant in the movement joint.
- Follow TCNA EJ171 for placement and frequency of additional movement joints.
- Confirm with the membrane manufacturer that their product is suitable for this application and how it should be installed over a cold joint. **TL**

NTCA TRAINING WORKSHOPS



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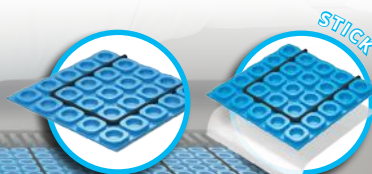
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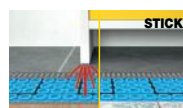
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Precision, camaraderie and ingenuity elevate bath and pool projects

By Lesley Goddin, Editorial Director and Senior Writer

Baths and pools – how does an artisan tile contracting company approach these types of projects? To find out, we talked to Dirk Sullivan of NTCA Five-Star Contractor Hawthorne Tile, based in Portland, Ore. He shared the details, challenges and triumphs of several projects, demonstrating the excellence, artistry and adherence to standards that make or break a project.

Dragon mosaic pool project

Portland mosaic artist Mimi Near is a world-renowned mosaic artist, tile installer and personal friend of Sullivan. She was commissioned to create a 20' mosaic dragon on the bottom of the clients' pool to delight their daughter.

Near builds her work with adhesive on a membrane for installation. Sullivan said they turned to ARDEX to get a warrantable specification for installing the mosaic to meet up with plaster in the pool.

A team of four worked on this project: Near, together with Elly Warner, Grace Rael and Vladimir Blaschchishchin. The team needed to address the challenges posed by the freeform pool. Near created a full-size plastic template and Blaschchishchin devised a system using 1/2" thick rubber tubing hot glued to the bottom of the pool to outline the contours of the dragon and to create a screed guide for the ARDEX AM100 render that needed a precise 5/8" thickness.



Dirk Sullivan, CEO and Founder of Hawthorne Tile



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The crew installed the mosaic in sections with Ardex WA epoxy. Afterwards, they covered the mosaic in double plastic for protection and the rest of the pool was finished with plaster.

Technical expertise was key, but the incredible camaraderie amongst the team contributed to this project's success. Sullivan spoke highly of both Warner and Rael – “We are better because of them,” he said. “Elly and Grace are the two most requested people on our team. They bring something very special and everybody adores them. We adore them...and they have become such an integral part of our team.”

Sullivan noted that Warner (along with apprentices Will Strauss and Ned Burns) graduated in August from the Oregon Columbia Tile Trade Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee (JATC) Tile Apprenticeship Program offered by the Northwest College of Construction.

In addition, both Warner and Rael recently participated in the annual ZBIZ mosaic competition held by Z Tile, a local distributor, Z Collection. Zee Coleman, Founder and CEO of Z Collection, focused on celebrating women this year, inviting women in the tile industry to create a mosaic using her tiles. “Elly and Grace both knocked it out of the park,” Sullivan said. “They both won all the awards!” Warner walked away with the Best Technique and Best in Show awards and Rael took home the Most Unique Design honor.



Finalizing the dragon mosaic with artist Mimi Near.



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Pratt & Larson bath

Another stellar project was the bathroom install of artisan-made tiles from legendary, local Pratt & Larson Ceramics. What made this project notable is that the current President, Belle Iskowitz, inspired the bathroom aesthetic with a drawing. Kat and Roger, an artist team in Los Angeles known for their hand-painted, hand-thrown ceramics, are frequent collaborators with Pratt & Larson, and teamed up with the Portland tile maker on this project.



Pratt & Larson President Belle Iskowitz's drawing for a Mid-Century Modern shower design.

Kat and Roger took Iskowitz's drawing and designed 6" x 6" and 2" x 6" Mid-Century Modern tiles, which were produced locally by Pratt & Larson.

Sullivan describes this project as "eye candy," and a "total joy to work on." He said the main challenge was precisely fitting the pieces as drawn, installing with ARDEX and Schluter materials. The large, puzzle-like pieces were "soothing to work with," Sullivan added.



(l to r) Grace Rael, Zee Coleman and Elly Warner with Elly's masterpiece mosaic and their ZBIZ awards.

Jessica Helgerson Interior Design bath

A stunning bath project, with delicious hues of penny round floor tiles, was in process at the time of my interview with Sullivan. This story focuses on one of three bathrooms in a house designed by Jessica Helgerson Interior Design. Helgerson hails from Portland – with a location in Paris, France – but she is known around the world for her functional, well-crafted designs that combine a respect for historical architecture and modern aesthetics.

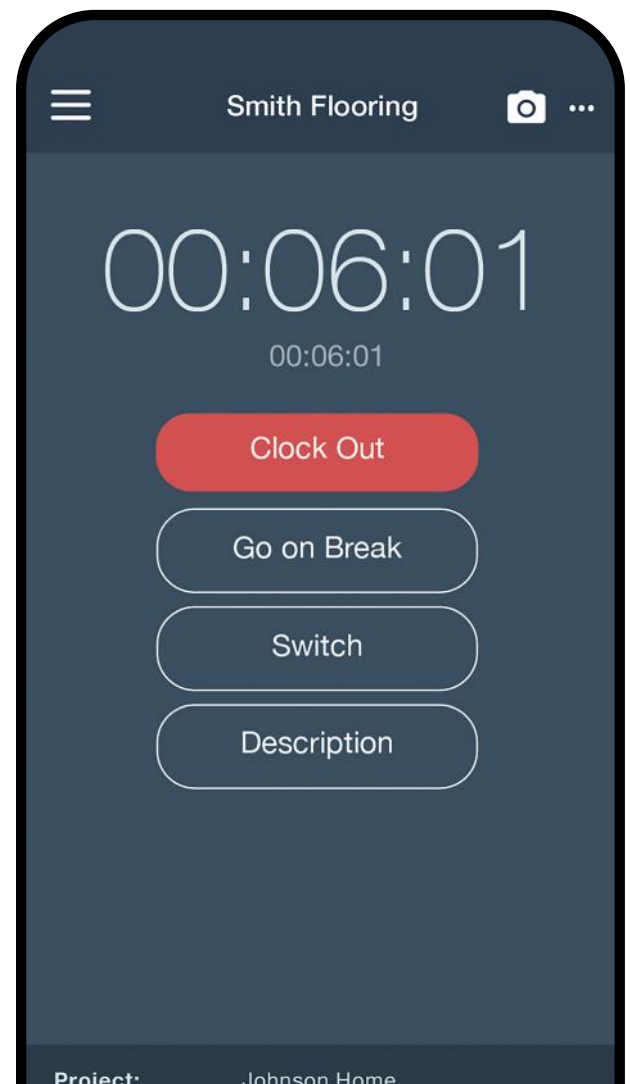
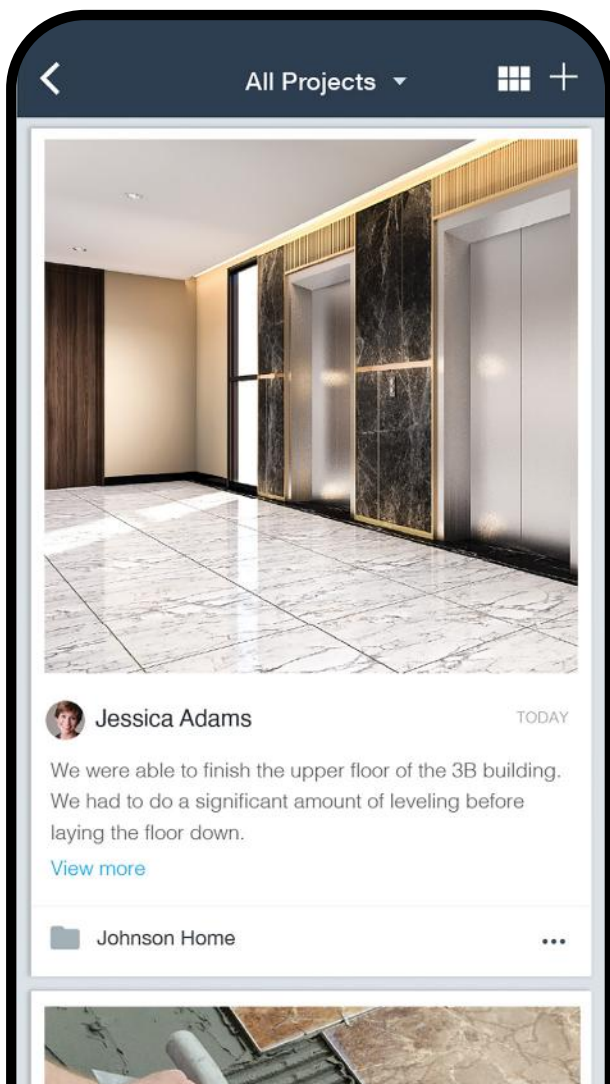


The drawing, brought to life through a collaboration between Kat and Roger and Pratt & Larson, with expert installation by Hawthorne Tile.

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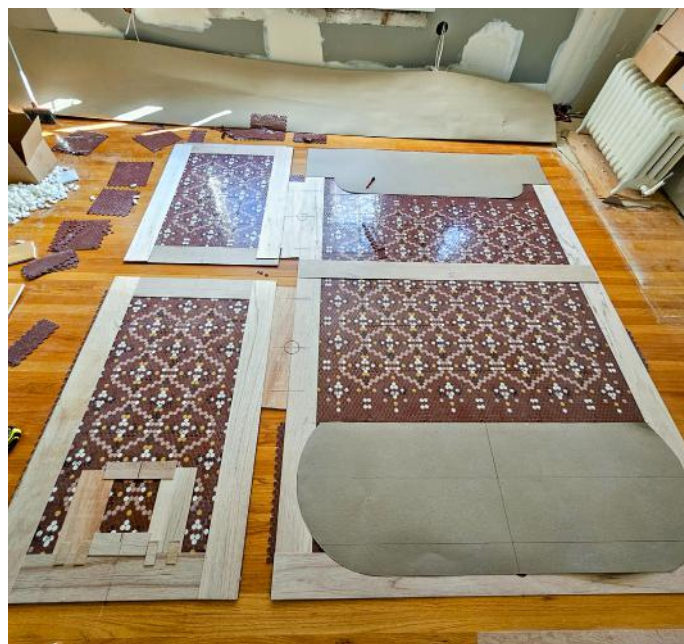




You'd never know from looking at this install how much the floor was out of level when the project began, but Hawthorne Tile made sure the floor was level before beginning the install.

This beautiful installation was extremely challenging due to the house's condition. The existing framing was "jacked," Sullivan said, and the floor was out of level by 1.5" from the entryway to behind the tub. There was no room for a conventional mud float. "We ended up having to do two lifts with ARDEX liquid backer board to bring the floor level with the plywood," Sullivan said. The team then laid the floor heat out and did another pour with ARDEX atop that.

The 160-sq.-ft. of floor mosaic tiles for this "intense" project came in four sections (shower floor, middle medallion, entryway, and wall), requiring the team to lace



Hawthorne Tile had to lace in several sections of penny round tiles – plus create templates to calculate exact distances around the vanity and tub – that were not yet installed – for precise installation of tile.

in the field around everything. Adding to the challenge were the specific instructions from the designers, who were meticulous about the layout and the distance between the vanity and the tub, neither of which was installed. "It was overwhelming," Sullivan added. "If you're off by just the smallest amount, it'll throw everything off."

In addition to the floor tiles, 2" x 6" ceramic subway tile from Heritage Tile adorned the walls and the ceiling.

A love of the work, together with precision, camaraderie and ingenuity, brings both joy and satisfaction to the process and a beautiful, enduring outcome for the client. **TL**

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Schluter

Schluter®-DITRA-HEAT and DITRA-HEAT-DUO combine electric floor warming with uncoupling, waterproofing, and vapor management. DITRA-HEAT-DUO adds a thermal break for faster heating and sound control. Both membranes are also

available in peel-and-stick versions, making installation faster and cleaner – no thinset needed beneath the membrane for a secure bond to the subfloor. schluter.com/schluter-us/en_US/



AIRMADA

AIRMADA's updated AirJet Shower Drying System now features both round nozzles and new linear components. This patented system delivers targeted forced air to eliminate moisture, reduce slip risks and prevent mold. Custom layouts ensure full

coverage, drying in every corner – including benches, niches, and shelves – for a safer, drier shower. airmadadry.com/AirJet



Bostik

Bostik's TruColor® and Dimension® grouts now feature EzClean Technology for faster, easier cleanup with no haze. TruColor delivers exceptional color accuracy and durable, stain-resistant performance, while Dimension offers a radiant, glass-enhancing finish. Both include antimicrobial protection and RapidCure™ Technology – helping installers finish faster, clean easier, and achieve flawless results every time. bostik.com/us/en_US/



EMAC America LLC

Novoescuadra MINI is a sleek, overlapped aluminum profile from EMAC's MINI Collection. With just a 13 mm visible surface and beveled edges, it's ideal for protecting and beautifying corners in low-thickness coverings such as plaster or wallpaper.

Available in matte silver, black, white, and royal gold finishes. emac.es/en/novoescuadra-mini-corners



NTCA Total Health & Wellness Benefits Program

The National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA) provides exclusive, cost-saving programs designed to support the success and growth of tile professionals nationwide. Among the many valuable benefits available to NTCA members is the NTCA Total Health & Wellness Benefits Program. This comprehensive program is dedicated to promoting the well-being of our members and their teams. Discover how NTCA can enhance your business and help you thrive!

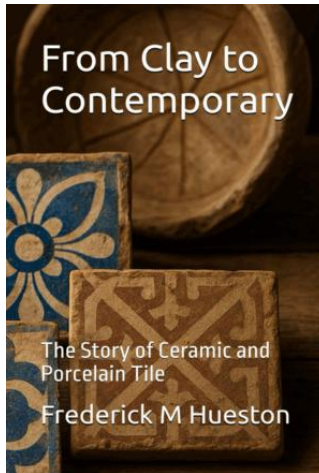
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NEWS TICKER

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Coverings 2026 is coming to the Las Vegas Convention Center venue, March 30- April 2, 2026; opens submissions for annual awards programs...**Shaw Contract** enters porcelain and ceramic category with the debut of Stellar and Interact, unveiled at NeoCon 2025...Top takeaways from the **2025 Flooring Sustainability Summit** point to a collaborative future; 2026 summit is set for July 15-16 in Washington, D.C....Author, educator, and stone and tile forensics expert **Frederick M. Hueston** released three new books – two focusing on tile and one on his journey to obtain a new heart...The **International Surface Fabricators Association (ISFA)** appointed Laurie Weber as its new Chief Executive Officer (CEO)...The Spanish Ceramic Tile Manufacturer's Association (ASCER) is calling for entries for the 24th edition of the **Tile of Spain Awards in Architecture and Interior Design**, deadline October 20, 2025...**OSHA** and ISFA launch alliance to strengthen safety culture in fabrication shops...**Houzz Inc.** is accepting applications for its annual Houzz Scholarship Program for students pursuing studies in interior design, construction, architecture, landscape architecture, architectural engineering or the skilled trades, deadline March 21, 2026...**MILEstone** launched the Untamed™ Collection, Chapter 3 of the Stories concept...**Sika®** expanded its renowned tile and stone waterproofing product line with SikaTile®-150 Moisture Guard Fabric Membrane and SikaTile®-250 Fracture Guard UCM®.



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Photo features **Luminique™ Juniper** on the wall with **Panoramic Porcelain Surfaces™ Opalite** on the left wall and countertop.



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