

The industry's leading tile installation magazine

September 2025

# TileLetter

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of the fabrication laborer*

The magazine of the National Tile Contractors Association

[www.tileletter.com](http://www.tileletter.com)





NATIONAL TILE CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION

# NTCA REFERENCE MANUAL

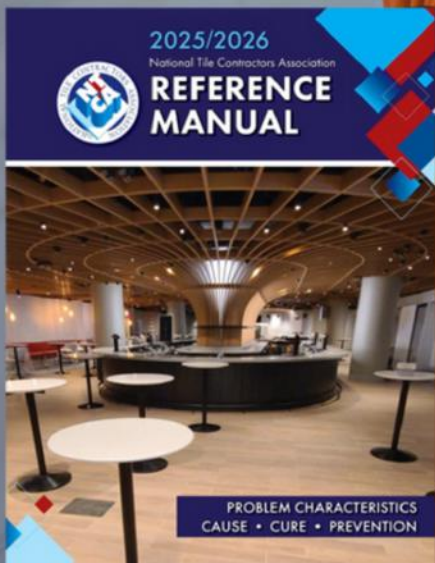
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In conjunction with the NTCA Technical Committee members, industry allies, and ceramic tile contractors, distributors, and manufacturers, we produce the *NTCA Reference Manual*. One of the most highly-valued tile industry documents, this manual identifies 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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# 2025-26 NOW AVAILABLE





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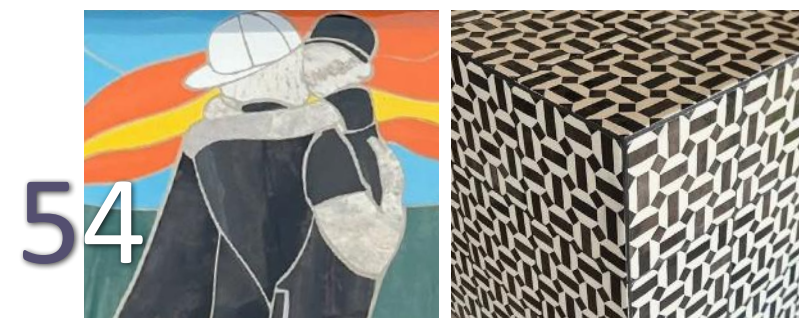
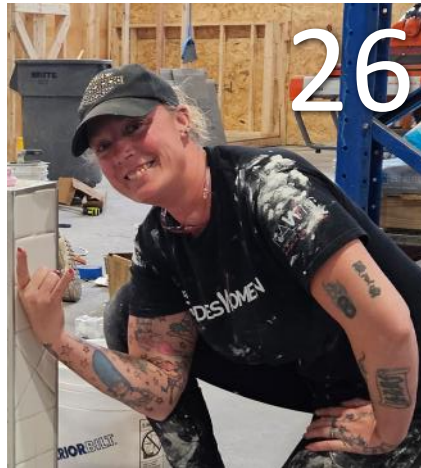
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# TileLetter

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NTCA would not be possible without the dedicated service of our volunteer board and committee members, and regional and state directors. You can find information and a continually-updated list of NTCA Five-Star Accredited Contractors and NTCA Members at [www.tile-assn.com](http://www.tile-assn.com) – click on Find a Tile Contractor, a Five-Star Accredited Contractor or a Tile Consultant.

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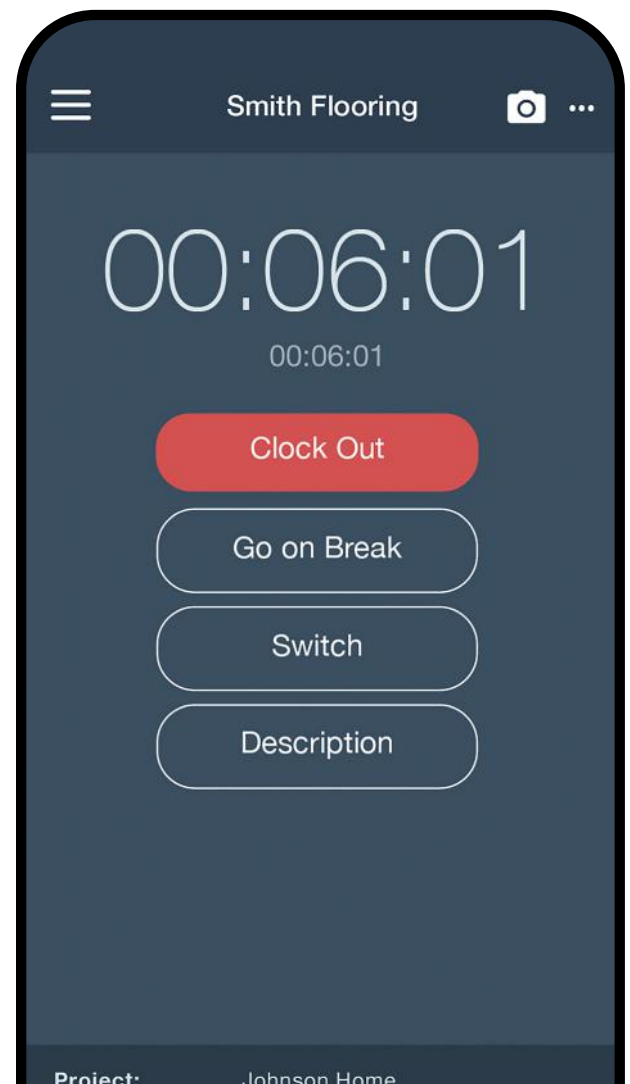
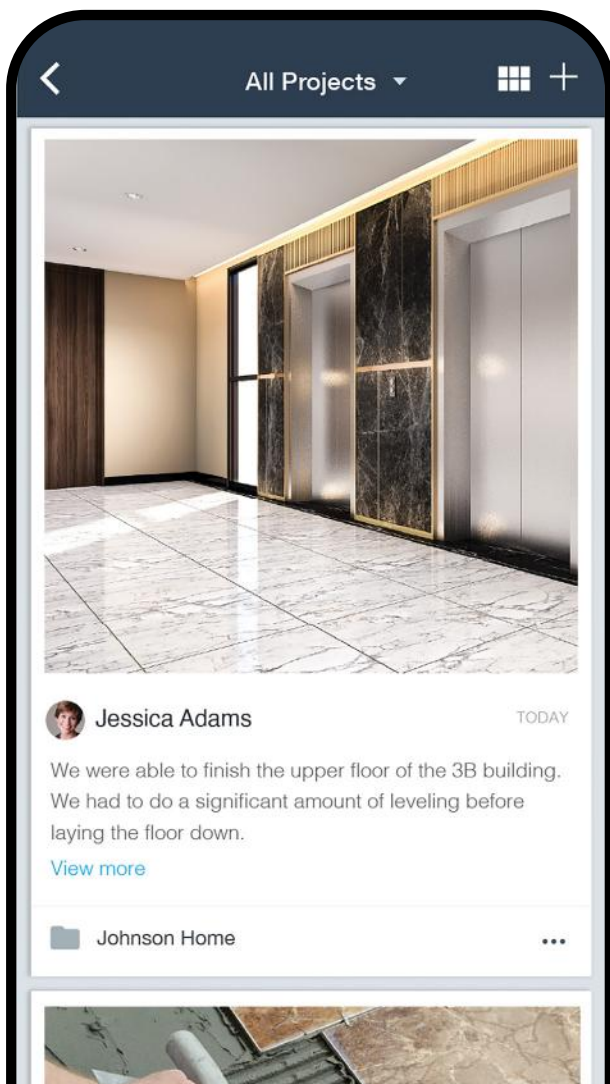
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## Meet the 2025 NTCA Training Team



**Matt Weiner**  
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 \*

To confirm dates and for more information visit [NTCATraining.com](http://NTCATraining.com)

### OCTOBER

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

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

### NOVEMBER

- 4 **Floor & Decor** – Denton, TX
- 4 **Daltile** – Louisville, KY
- 5 **Floor & Decor** – Lexington, KY
- 5 **Daltile** – Dallas/Ft. Worth, KY
- 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 \*

Register online at [NTCATraining.com](http://NTCATraining.com)

### OCTOBER

- 2 **Floor & Decor – GTPP/S**  
Levittown, PA

- 2 **Daltile – GTPP/S**  
Anaheim, CA

- 9 **Louisville Tile – GTPP/S**  
Mt. Juliet, TN

- 9 **Daltile – GTPP/S**  
Las Vegas, NV

- 9 **Floor & Decor – GTPP/S**  
Glen Burnie, MD

- 15-16 **Stone Tile Group – Art Glass  
Panel 2-day Program**  
Orlando, FL

- 16 **Floor & Decor – GTPP/S**  
Hilliard, OH

- 23 **United Tile – GTPP/S**  
Anaheim, CA

- 23 **Floor & Decor – GTPP/S**  
Chicago, IL

- 30 **Daltile – GTPP/S**  
Plymouth, MN

- 30 **AHF – GTPP/S**  
Phoenix, AZ



NTCA maintains an ongoing list of training events through an interactive map on its website. Check it out by visiting [www.NTCATraining.com](http://www.NTCATraining.com).

*\*Dates are subject to change*



# Industry Supporters

## of the 2025 NTCA Workshops and NTCA Regional Programs



One of the benefits of becoming a contractor member of the NTCA is the "Partnering for Success" program. Manufacturing sponsors of this program feel strongly about the value NTCA provides and have agreed to offset your investment by providing these product vouchers.

As a paid new or renewing contractor member of the NTCA, you will receive FREE product vouchers.





As CTEF's Scott Carothers points out in his technical story in this issue, "sustainability" is commonly described as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Check out the story for more information about the silicosis threat in engineered stone countertop fabrication facilities, and what's being done about it.

The theme of our issue focuses on this important topic for our industry, our lives and our planet. Publisher Elena Grant offers a report from the second annual Flooring Sustainability Summit and NTCA Executive Director Bart Bettiga interviews Paul Shahriari, founder of the green-centric technology platform Ecomedes in his One to One story. Our Product Focus section is bursting with options that support sustainability with recycled contents or ways to minimize or manage silica dust, thus bolstering the sustainability of the most important resource in our industry – our workers. And artisan tile setters show creative and heartfelt ways they've utilized leftover tile from previous projects, expanding and extending the use of their materials in a way that touches others and supports ongoing learning.

We also acknowledge the beginning of National Hispanic Heritage Month with a business story penned

by Advertising Sales and Membership Rep Angie Weber, about two panel discussions and a contractor tour she conducted at Coverings – all in Spanish, to support the 1/3 of the construction labor force that is Spanish speaking. Her story is printed here in Spanish too, with the English version available in our digital issue.

Rebecca Heustess of Grazzini Brothers is our featured member this month. Her story is full of passion for the trade, enthusiasm for the growing role of women in the industry – and her epic odyssey of obtaining her Certified Tile Installer credential this year.

Our cover feature describes how MAPEI materials strengthened and supported the new OG&E Coliseum in Oklahoma. And President Rod Owen continues his exploration of his business series “The Acumens,” by explaining why Strategic Acumen is so important to your current business and its sustainability for the future.

There are many ways to support our planet – and the people on it. We hope this issue inspires you to take one new action toward that goal.

God bless,

Lesley  
Lesley

lesley@tile-assn.com

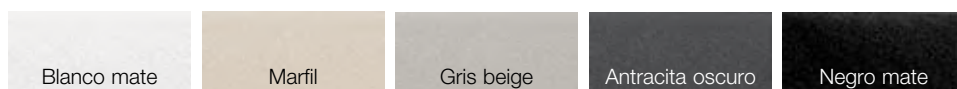






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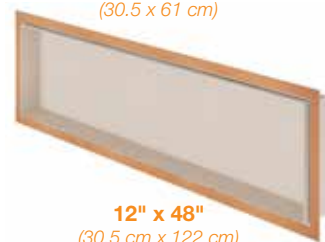
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Rod Owen

## Business Acumen Series: **STRATEGIC ACUMEN**

Over the past several months, we've been working through the 10 essential acumen skills that every tile contractor needs to grow a strong, resilient business. We've covered Financial Acumen, Market Acumen, Technological Acumen, and Leadership Acumen. Each installment builds on the last to sharpen your decision-making and strengthen your business foundation.

This month, we shift our focus to Strategic Acumen, arguably the skill that ties all the others together.

So, what is Strategic Acumen? It's the ability to step back from the day-to-day and think long-term. It's about crafting and executing plans that align with your company's mission, values, and goals while staying nimble in an ever-changing environment. The daily grind of tight schedules, problem-solving, and urgent jobs can easily pull us into short-term thinking. But without a strategic lens, we cap our growth and limit our potential.

Strategic Acumen begins with asking the right questions:

- Where do I want my business to be in five years?
- What kind of projects do I want to be known for?
- What skills, tools, or people will help me get there?

Maybe you're planning to expand into larger commercial work, double down on high-end residential projects, or open a second location. Strategic thinking means identifying those goals, mapping out actionable steps, and checking in on your progress regularly.

And it's not just about the big-picture movements, it's also about daily alignment. Are your current projects, partnerships, and decisions moving you toward your future? Are you hiring, training, and investing in ways that support your long-term vision?

Having a clear strategy gives you a decision-making filter: if an opportunity doesn't align with your goals, it's easier to say "no." It also keeps your team focused and your business steady, even in times of uncertainty.

And here's the key: strategic planning isn't a one-

and-done. It's a habit. At a minimum, it requires a semi-annual check-in with your goals. A yearly reset to see how industry changes or economic shifts might require a new direction. The tile industry is evolving fast. New materials, installation methods, sustainability expectations, and client demands are reshaping how we operate. If you're not thinking ahead, you're playing catch-up.

This month's *TileLetter* theme – sustainability – highlights why strategic thinking is essential in today's building environment. Sustainability isn't a side topic anymore, it's a smart, forward-looking approach to construction. Like nurturing plants in a balanced ecosystem, sustainable building reduces waste and conserves resources. While manufacturers play a key role, contractors can have a major impact through lean practices that improve efficiency and cut energy use. Simple strategies like accurate ordering, reusing materials, and maintaining equipment for top efficiency go a long way. I'm no "tree hugger," but practical steps matter. Sustainability isn't just responsible; it's a competitive advantage.

If you're serious about long-term success, build your Strategic Acumen. It's not about doing more, it's about doing what matters most.

Next month, we'll explore Negotiation Acumen: how to secure better terms, stronger partnerships, and deals to secure favorable outcomes.

Until then, think long-term, build intentionally, and as always...

Educate for Excellence!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Rod Owen".

Rod Owen  
NTCA President  
rod.owen@ccowen.us





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# NTCA TRAINING and EDUCATION

NTCA offers various training and educational opportunities to tile installers and other industry professionals. Each year, our training team offers free, hands-on workshops and regional programs nationwide. We also offer virtual learning through bi-monthly webinars. Additionally, our team conducts training sessions at Coverings and The International Surface Event (TISE), sharing valuable installation tips



LEARN MORE









# ALZANDO la VOZ

*Celebrando los paneles y recorridos  
en español en Coverings*

*Por Angelica Gonzalez Weber,  
NTCA Ventas de Publicidad  
y Membresía*



*Para conmemorar el Mes de la Herencia Hispana este mes, presentamos esta historia de Angie Weber, representante de ventas publicitarias y membresías de la NTCA. Ella organizó un par de paneles y una visita guiada para contratistas – todo en español – como parte del programa educativo de Coverings, con el fin de celebrar y apoyar a la comunidad latina dentro de la industria del azulejo, y brindar una oportunidad para compartir sabiduría. – Editora*

Este año en Coverings, tuve la increíble oportunidad de liderar algo muy cercano a mi corazón: los primeros paneles en español del evento y una visita guiada especialmente dirigida a contratistas hispanohablantes. Como estadounidense de primera generación y orgullosa miembro de la industria del azulejo, fue un momento que unió mi pasión personal con un propósito profesional. Lo que siguió fue más poderoso de lo que jamás imaginé – y un recordatorio de cuánto importan la representación, el idioma y la comunidad.

Cuando me paré en el escenario durante los primeros paneles en español en la historia de Coverings, sentí un orgullo inmenso, un propósito claro y una profunda



*Angie Weber de la NTCA moderó dos paneles en español por primera vez en Coverings (mostrado aquí). También lideró un recorrido para contratistas en español que visitó 10 stands e incluyó a un representante hispanohablante en cada parada.*



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Beyond aesthetics, the collection delivers unmatched versatility. From finishing edges and creating smooth transitions to framing doorways and adding visual interest to walls, MAPEI's Profiles and Trims are ideal for residential, commercial, and industrial applications. This comprehensive lineup supports endless creative possibilities, helping projects achieve a polished, professional look with ease.

For more information on MAPEI's Profiles and Trims line, please visit <https://www.mapei.com/us/en-us/products-and-solutions/lines/profiles-for-floors-and-coverings>



responsabilidad. Por primera vez en este contexto, no solo estábamos hablando de los latinos en la industria del azulejo — estábamos hablando como latinos, en español, frente a una audiencia que reflejaba el corazón de nuestra fuerza laboral y de nuestra cultura.

### **Latinos en EE.UU.: 30% de la construcción; la quinta economía más grande del mundo**

Tuve el honor de moderar una serie de paneles en español con algunos de los profesionales más apasionados y visionarios que he conocido. Estos panelistas no solo hacen ruido: están verdaderamente impulsando la industria a través de su contenido en español, su mentoría y su liderazgo. Sus historias fueron más impactantes que cualquier estadística — aunque hay muchas que vale la pena mencionar. Los latinos representan más del 30% de la industria de la construcción en Estados Unidos. Si fuéramos una economía independiente, la población latina en EE.UU. sería la quinta más grande del mundo. Solo en 2021, los latinos contribuyeron con unos asombrosos \$3.6 billones a la economía estadounidense.

Pero lo que más me conmovió no fueron los números — fueron las experiencias vividas de nuestros panelistas y asistentes. Vivimos en tiempos inciertos. Para muchos contratistas hispanos, especialmente quienes no tienen documentos o provienen de familias con estatus migratorio mixto, incluso asistir a un evento público como Coverings puede sentirse riesgoso. Varios asistentes me confesaron que al principio tuvieron miedo de venir. Por eso esta oportunidad significó tanto. Pudimos demostrar que los latinos somos mucho más que un estatus legal — somos empresarios, instaladores, artistas, diseñadores y líderes. Somos esenciales. Y pertenecemos aquí.

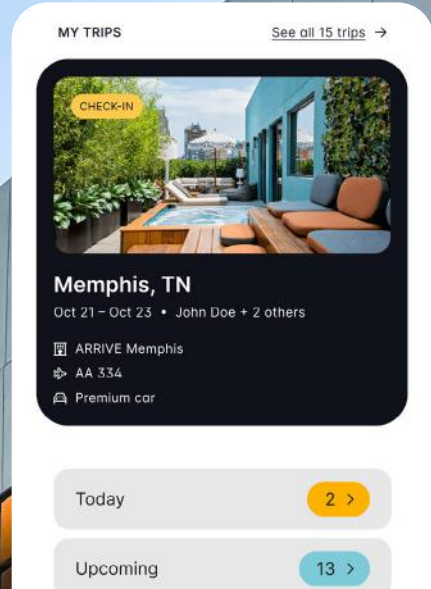
Hubo algo verdaderamente mágico en estar sobre el escenario, hablar en español y ver cómo la gente se detenía físicamente, sorprendida y atraída por un idioma que no suele escucharse con fuerza en estos espacios. Cada panel tuvo una asistencia fantástica, con muchas personas de pie en los pasillos o sentadas en el suelo solo para ser parte de la conversación. La participación fue fenomenal. Las preguntas fueron profundas, los comentarios sinceros. Algunos asistentes compartieron historias de dificultad, otros de triunfo, y casi todos expresaron gratitud por simplemente sentirse vistos.

En un mundo donde hablar español en público muchas veces se encuentra con miradas incómodas o silencio, se nos dio el micrófono — literal y figuradamente — para alzar nuestras voces con orgullo en el centro del piso de exhibición. Y no solo fuimos escuchados. Fuimos celebrados.



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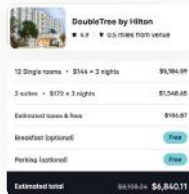
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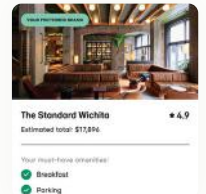
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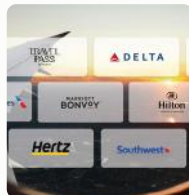
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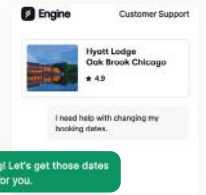
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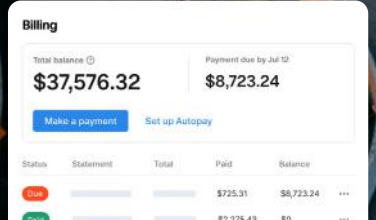
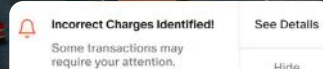
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## Oportunidad y comunidad

Uno de los panelistas, Harry Burgos de CNB Renovations en Charleston, Carolina del Sur, comentó: “Como puertorriqueño criado en Connecticut, no veía a muchos hombres como yo dirigiendo empresas de remodelación. Pasé años trabajando con W2, marcando entrada y salida, construyendo el sueño de otra persona”.

“Fundar CNB Renovations cambió eso,” agregó. “Ahora instalo cerámica y también doy el ejemplo – para mis hijos, mi comunidad y para cualquiera que piense que necesita permiso para comenzar. Llevo mi cultura conmigo en cada trabajo, y se nota en el orgullo con el que hago mi labor. Este oficio me dio un propósito – y yo le entrego todo de vuelta.”



La moderadora Angie Weber (izq.) durante el panel *El Éxito en Nuestro Idioma: Cómo la Industria del Tile Apoya a los Profesionales Latinos*, el 29 de abril en Coverings. Con Weber (de izq. a der.): Rudy Llerena, D&B Tile Distributors; Iván Herrera, Miami Floors; Joseph Mattice de Schluter y Juan Carlos Ramos de JC Renovations.



Weber (izq.) también moderó la presentación *Innovación y Tradición: La Evolución de la Instalación de Baldosas en el Mercado Hispano* el 1 de mayo. Los panelistas de esta charla fueron (de izq. a der.): Mauricio Rapalo, Prominent Tile; Harry Burgos, CNB Construction; Alejandro Ponte, Schluter, y John McIntyre de SIKA.

Junto con los paneles, también tuve el privilegio de liderar el Spanish Contractor Tour – una experiencia bellamente curada que llevó a nuestro grupo a 10 stands de expositores a lo largo del evento. En cada parada, un representante hispanohablante de la empresa nos dio la bienvenida y compartió sus ideas, información sobre productos y su perspectiva sobre los latinos en la industria del azulejo. Estas no fueron simples presentaciones – fueron conversaciones profundas, bien pensadas y adaptadas a nuestra audiencia. Los participantes se sintieron vistos, valorados e incluidos, y muchos salieron con nuevas conexiones y un entendimiento más profundo de su papel en el futuro de la industria.

Lo que más me impactó tanto en los paneles como en el recorrido fue el sentido de comunidad. Personas que nunca se habían visto antes estaban intercambiando contactos, dándose ánimos, e incluso haciendo planes para colaborar en proyectos futuros. Me recordó por qué hago lo que hago. Esto no se trató solo de traducción – se trató de transformación. De inclusión. De justicia.

Quiero expresar mi más profundo agradecimiento a los panelistas que compartieron su tiempo, conocimiento y corazón: Alejandro Ponte, Juan Carlos Castro, Harry Burgos, Rudy Llerena, Joseph Mattice, Iván Herrera, Mauricio Rapalo y John McIntyre. No son solo colegas – son amigos queridos. Me siento verdaderamente honrada de llamarlos mi red de apoyo. Cada uno aporta sabiduría y perspectiva únicas, y el lazo que hemos formado va mucho más allá del azulejo. Compartimos la vida como latinos en esta industria – con todos sus retos, su belleza y sus triunfos – y esa conexión es algo que atesoro profundamente.

Es hora de reconocer que el futuro de la industria del azulejo es bilingüe, multicultural y está lleno de talento por descubrir. Eventos como este demuestran lo que es posible cuando invertimos en representación y damos espacio a todas las voces en la mesa – o en este caso, en el escenario y en el piso de exhibición.

A quienes se detuvieron a escuchar, hicieron preguntas, o asistieron con valentía a su primera feria comercial en un idioma que se siente como hogar – gracias. Su presencia fue la declaración más poderosa de todas.

Sigamos construyendo – no solo mejores espacios, sino una mejor industria. Una donde todos, sin importar el idioma que hablen, tengan la oportunidad de ser vistos, escuchados y valorados.

**Ed. note:** please see the story in Spanish in print *TileLetter* and in English on *TileLetter.com*.

**Nota del editor:** consulte la historia en español en la edición impresa de *TileLetter* y en inglés en *TileLetter.com*.





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*A sweeping aerial view of Oklahoma City's OG&E Coliseum — a bold new landmark built with MAPEI system solutions to serve the community for decades to come.*





# PERFORMANCE beneath the surface

*MAPEI delivers reliability for  
Oklahoma's new showpiece arena*

A new chapter in Oklahoma City's architectural and cultural history is being written with the construction of the OG&E Coliseum. This arena is the showpiece of the city's MAPS 4 Fairgrounds Improvement Project. Replacing the iconic Jim Norick Arena – a building that once turned heads for its cutting-edge design – the new coliseum brings modern flair, multi-use versatility and the unmistakable durability of MAPEI products beneath its polished finish.

Originally opened in 1965, the Jim Norick Arena was named after the mayor of Oklahoma City at the time. Its most distinctive feature was its roof – a sweeping, arched catenary structure that was, at the time, the largest of its kind in the world. The arena became a beloved local landmark, hosting livestock shows, concerts and basketball tournaments for nearly six decades.

But while the building was structurally impressive, its nickname – “The Big House” – became increasingly controversial. Though it originated with a basketball coach referencing the arena's size, critics pointed out that “The Big House” was also a term used for plantation homes during the era of slavery in the American South. “I've always thought about it that way. It's always been offensive,” said Monique Bruner, a MAPS 4 Citizens Advisory Board member, in an interview with *The Oklahoman*. As a result, the new coliseum was intentionally designed to start fresh – with a new name and a new identity.

*MAPEI products were used throughout Oklahoma City's new OG&E Coliseum, delivering durable, high-performance tile installations across 90,000 sq. ft. (8 361 m<sup>2</sup>) of public, sport and event spaces.*

Funded through the city's MAPS 4 initiative – a debt-free public improvement program that will raise over \$1.1 billion via a temporary penny sales tax – the OG&E Coliseum marks the final major development planned for the fairgrounds. The facility features 4,700 fixed padded seats for horse shows, with the ability to expand to 7,500 seats using retractable configurations for concerts, sporting events and more.

"It's a big deal for Oklahoma City," said Brett Long, MAPEI Sales Representative for the project. "This venue is going to host everything from livestock shows to basketball games, and it needed a tile installation system that could stand up to that kind of foot traffic and still look great doing it."



*Before tile installation, crews used Mapecem Quickpatch to level and repair concrete substrates across the site.*



*Tiles installed along the base of a wall at the OG&E Coliseum, using MAPEI's Keraflex™ SG mortar for reliable bond strength and smooth application on vertical surfaces.*



*MAPEI's waterproofing membrane being applied to restroom floors, creating a waterproof barrier before tile installation.*



*The NexSpaces/Workspace Solutions crew sets tile with Keraflex SG mortar on the arena's walls, providing a strong, reliable bond for lasting vertical installation*



## MAPEI on the jobsite

MAPEI played a key role in the installation of approximately 90,000 sq.ft. (8,361 m<sup>2</sup>) of tile across the new arena's floors and walls – including restrooms, concourses and high-traffic public areas. Three separate four-man crews from NexSpaces/Workspace Solutions worked across the massive construction timeline.

The substrate, a mix of concrete and CMU block, presented common challenges that were quickly resolved with MAPEI's complete system approach. "It's one of the things that makes MAPEI so valuable," Long explained. "We're not just a single product – we offer full solutions."

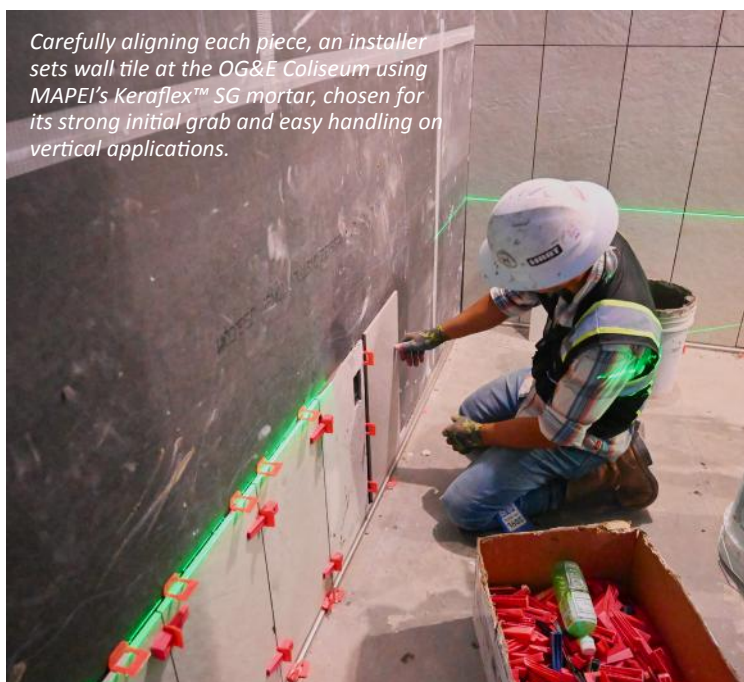
For surface prep, Mapecem Quickpatch was used to float and smooth areas as needed. Mapecem Quickpatch is a high-performance, fast-setting, cementitious material used for the patching of concrete surfaces. Featuring a very low emission of volatile organic compounds and including an offset of greenhouse gas emissions, it is part of MAPEI's sustainable Zero line of products. Floors were protected with Mapelastic CI, a roller-applied, liquid-rubber, quick-drying, crack-isolation membrane. Bathroom walls received two roller-applied coats of Mapelastic AquaDefense – the quick-drying, liquid-rubber, premium waterproofing and crack-isolating membrane – before tile was installed using Keraflex SG. Keraflex SG standard, extra smooth, large-and-heavy-tile mortar with polymer is formulated for use over uncoupling, crack-isolation, sound-reduction and waterproofing membranes. For the finishing touch, Kerapoxy CQ epoxy grout was applied throughout the project, chosen for its durability, color consistency and ease of cleaning in public spaces.

"You've got heavy foot traffic, animals, weather – this is a real test of performance. And MAPEI's systems delivered across the board."

– BRETT LONG, MAPEI SALES REPRESENTATIVE



*Keraflex™ SG mortar is mixed on-site during tile installation at the OG&E Coliseum. This standard-grade, versatile mortar offers excellent workability and bond strength—ideal for large-format tile in demanding commercial settings.*



*Carefully aligning each piece, an installer sets wall tile at the OG&E Coliseum using MAPEI's Keraflex™ SG mortar, chosen for its strong initial grab and easy handling on vertical applications.*



*A member of the skilled NexSpaces/Workspace Solutions crew applying MAPEI's system solutions across 90,000 sq. ft. of surface.*

According to Long, the products performed exactly as expected. "You've got heavy foot traffic, animals, weather – this is a real test of performance," he said. "And MAPEI's systems delivered across the board."

Designed by the renowned architecture firm Populous and built by contractor Flintco, the OG&E Coliseum was made possible in part by a major naming-rights donation from the OG&E Energy Corporation Foundation. The donation helped complete the \$126-million project while offering a fresh identity to a venue built to serve the community for decades to come.

From its thoughtful name to its performance-driven design, the OG&E Coliseum stands as a modern symbol of Oklahoma City's growth and sensitivity to history. And beneath it all, MAPEI's innovative installation systems help to ensure that the structure is as durable as it is dynamic. **TL**



*Tile awaiting grouting with MAPEI's epoxy grout Kerapoxy CQ. This grout was chosen for application throughout the building for its stain resistance, durability, and easy maintenance.*

#### TECHNICAL DATA

##### OG&E Coliseum

Oklahoma City, OK, USA

##### Years of construction:

2023-2025

##### Year of MAPEI involvement:

2024

##### MAPEI coordinator:

Brett Long

##### Project owner:

OG&E Coliseum

##### General contractor:

Flintco

##### Architect:

Populous

**Installer:** NexSpaces/  
Workspace Solutions

**Photographer:** Thomas Hicks

**Project size:** 90,000 sq. ft.  
(8,361 m<sup>2</sup>)

#### MAPEI PRODUCTS USED

Keraflex® SG

Kerapoxy® CQ

Mapecem® Quickpatch

Mapelastix® AquaDefense

Mapelastix CI



*Although not readily visible on the surface, precision installation and sleek finishes highlight the aesthetic appeal of durable MAPEI setting materials throughout the Coliseum.*





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# GRIT, GROWTH and DETERMINATION fuel MINNESOTA tile setter

Grazzini's Rebecca Heustess found her calling in tile and amplifies women in the industry

*By Lesley Goddin, Editorial Director  
and Senior Writer*



**R**ebecca Heustess is driven. In a good way. She is passionate about amplifying women in the industry, and is dedicated to exemplifying excellence in the trades. And she attained legend status this year when she embarked upon an odyssey to gain her Certified Tile Installer (CTI) credential, demonstrating her determination and zeal to achieve her goal, despite the obstacles.

## Finding her calling

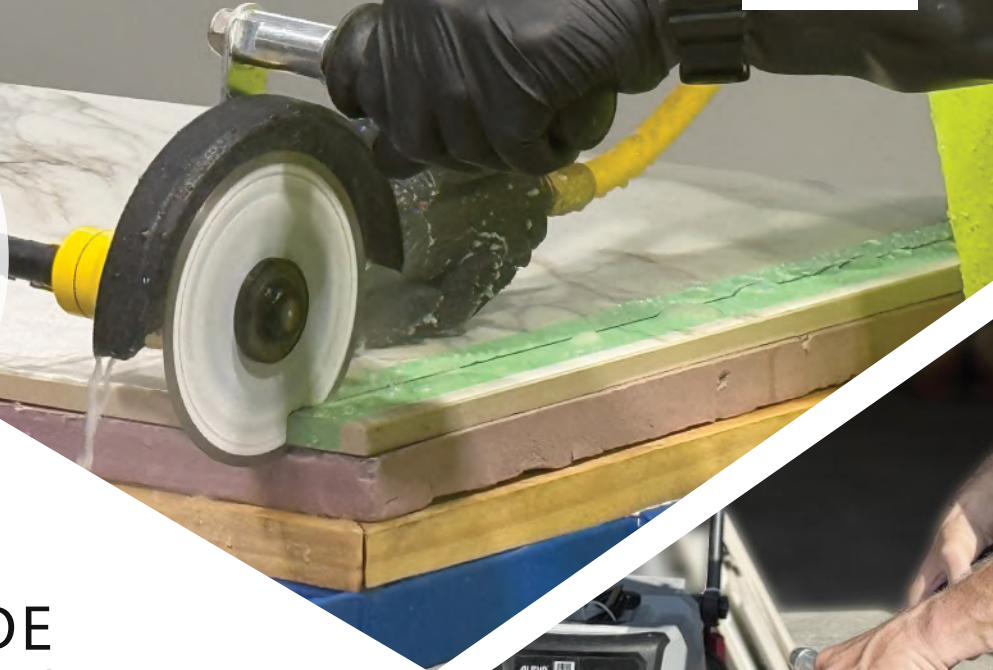
She started in the trade by launching her own carpet and vinyl install company with a partner, shifting into hardwood a few years later. She loved the trades but hadn't yet found "the craft that truly lit me up," she said.

Through a job posting for Grazzini Brothers in Eagan, Minn., she found her calling. She poured herself into learning everything about the tile trade, buoyed by a crew of skilled tradespeople who taught her the right way to ply her craft. "They helped shape me into the installer I am today," she said. "Thirteen years later, I'm still with Grazzini and I truly couldn't



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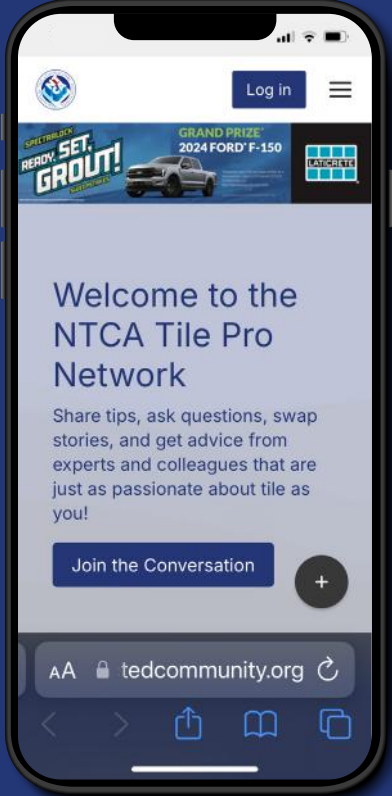
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imagine working anywhere else.”

Her hallmark as Lead Tile Setter is doing things the right way, no shortcuts or sloppy work. “I’m detail-obsessed and driven by the challenge of setting tile that’s not only beautiful, but built to last.”

Her “heart for the trade” truly sets her apart. “I’m not just here to work. I’m here to represent, to mentor, and to raise the standard,” she said. “As a woman in the field, I know eyes are on me, and I take that seriously. I lead by example, and I’m not afraid to speak up for what’s right. Tile is my craft, but building people up in the process – that’s my purpose.”

## The impact of NAWIC

In 2022, Heustess joined the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) and founded the Dakota Prairies Chapter #394. The following year, she served as its first and current Chapter President. Seeking connection with other women in construction, she found a sisterhood, support system and platform for change that helps dispel the isolation of the trades. She sees NAWIC as giving women a voice at the table, a chance to be seen and heard and to impact opportunities for women at all levels.

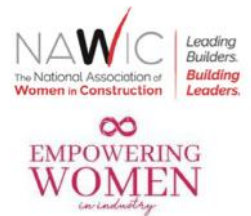
“NAWIC gave me a space to lead, learn, and lift others up,” she said. “If more women in tile joined NAWIC, we’d see a stronger, more united voice for standards, equality, and opportunity – on jobsites and beyond.”

That visibility that NAWIC provides shows women they belong in the trade, Heustess said. She urges companies to put women in the spotlight, on the tools, at the table, to build a culture that makes them want to stay and gives them the resources to excel.

“Support means more than words,” she explained. “It’s mentorship, access to training, and a crew that’s got your back. Women need to feel seen, respected, and valued for their skill, not judged by their gender.”

## Growing and learning

Heustess values education and training – and has a zeal for eternal learning. She completed NTCA University training courses in technical and leadership topics, holds OSHA 30 certification, CPR certification, and her heavy terrain forklift operator license. She also completed the Competent Person training for Table 1 Silica Exposure to prioritize safety on every site. Through NAWIC, she





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completed the Leadership Academy with Ambition Theory. This “strengthened my voice as a leader and advocate for women in the industry,” she said. “Whether I’m tiling or training, I make it a priority to stay sharp, up-to-date, and always ready to grow.”

She’s proud that as an NTCA member company, Grazzini actively lives out the association’s mission. This means being the change they wish to see by supporting employees, treating them with dignity, and giving them the tools and trust to do their work with pride.

“Knowing we hold ourselves to the NTCA standard means something,” she said. “It raises the bar, and I’m proud to be a part of that.”

### Chasing – and catching – her CTI

Heustess embarked on the process of gaining her credentials as a CTI to prove to herself that “beyond a doubt, I was a good tile installer.” This credential gave her validation, backing up the confidence she had in her work. It also opened doors to leadership for her, with Grazzini giving her new opportunities to lead jobs and crews.

Her journey started with the All-Woman CTI hands-on exam on International Women’s Day in March where she and 14 other women tested their mettle against the CTEF modules and the clock.

“Being in that room, surrounded by strong female setters, was deeply empowering,” she said. “But...I let the stress get the best of me. I doubted myself, second-

guessed my every move, and ultimately, I failed.”

That failure fueled her, and three weeks later, she traveled to CTEF headquarters in Nashville to take the exam again. Though focused and confident, she again fell short, by just a few points. “I was devastated,” she said. “Two tests. Two failures. I started to question everything.”

But she had the rare opportunity to test again – the very next day. “I was exhausted, sore, and emotionally drained,” she explained. “Still, I showed up. I fought through the physical pain and the mental weight of self-doubt. And with the support of some amazing cheerleaders in my corner, I pushed forward. On that third attempt, I silenced the doubt and did what I do best – I tiled. I passed with flying colors.

“That day, I didn’t just earn my CTI certification, I proved to myself what I was truly made of. The grit, the determination, the refusal to quit – that’s what I’ll carry with me forever.” Now firmly anchored in confidence, she said it also gave her the “feeling that I’m exactly where I’m supposed to be, doing the work I was meant to do.”

From her early beginnings, to her embrace of the tile trade for herself and other tradeswomen, her work with NAWIC, ongoing education and upholding high standards – to the moxie that kept her going to achieve her status as CTI #1996, Heustess has demonstrated that she is a shining star in her field. **TL**



*Rebecca Heustess, of Grazzini Brothers, at the All-Women CTI test on International Women's Day this past March. This was her first of three attempts at gaining her CTI credential.*



*Three weeks later at CTEF headquarters in Nashville, Tenn., Heustess tackled the CTI again, finishing with zero seconds on the clock. So close, but she didn't pass this exam either.*



*Victorious! The third time was the charm for Heustess who took the exam in Nashville again, the very next day – and passed!*





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# COLLABORATION at the core of FLOORING'S SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

By Elena Grant, *TileLetter* Publisher

The 2025 Flooring Sustainability Summit took place at the historic Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., drawing professionals from across the flooring, design, manufacturing, and sustainability sectors. The two-day event provided a platform for technical insight, cross-sector dialogue, and collaboration across the flooring industry's sustainability value chain. Chaired by Bill Griesse, Deputy Executive Director of the Tile Council of North America (TCNA), the summit featured a mix of policy updates, keynote addresses, technical panels, and collaborative workshops designed to generate both clarity and action.

Highlights included a keynote with Peter Templeton of the U.S. Green Building Council and Corey Clayborne, Senior VP of Knowledge and Practice at the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Scott Conwell of IMI moderated a designer-focused panel and Alessandro Filipponi (Confindustria Ceramica) offered a policy overview. The event also included the WFCA's posthumous Hall of Fame induction of sustainability pioneer Ray Anderson, honoring his lasting legacy in green manufacturing.

## Interactive learning in action

One new addition this year was a "Sustainability 101" session to help attendees get grounded in key terminology and frameworks before diving into more advanced discussions.

As a participant, one of the most engaging parts of the summit for me was the interactive workshop experience. My group selected a scenario focused on the circular economy and were asked to take on the role of a resilient flooring manufacturer. The challenge? Address a once-reliable recycled content stream that had become contaminated and cost-prohibitive. We had to weigh our options including strategic partnerships, alternate sourcing, internal R&D, and discuss how to navigate shifting client expectations, cost pressures, and cross-departmental coordination. The diversity of perspectives at the table led to insightful, real-world strategies. Other groups tackled equally complex topics, choosing from a range of scenarios designed to mimic actual business and sustainability dilemmas, crafted to spark cross-sector dialogue and problem-solving.



Representing NTCA at the Flooring Sustainability Summit were Deputy Director Jeremy Sax and TileLetter Publisher/Assistant Executive Director of Marketing and Public Relations Elena Grant.



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ANSI A137.2



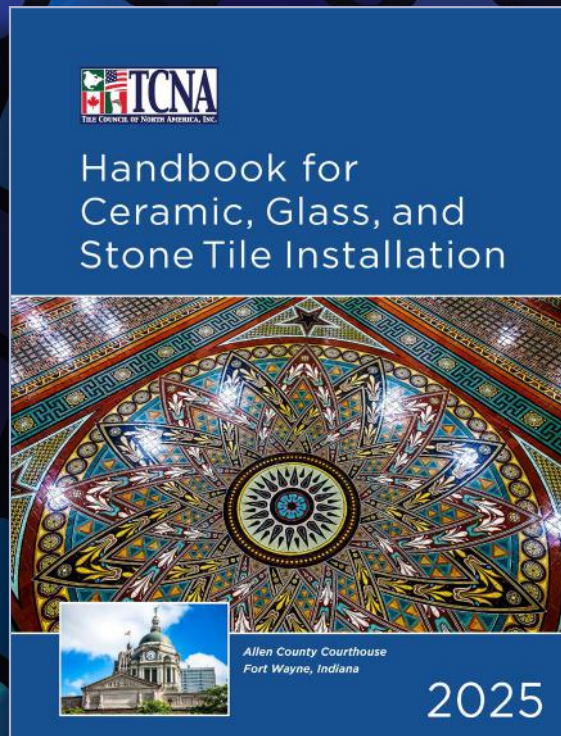
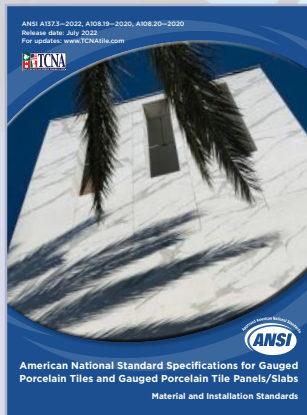
ANSI A137.1



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## Industry voices on the contractor's role

In a post-summit interview, Bill Griese underscored the vital but often overlooked role of the flooring contractor in sustainability conversations. “A major takeaway from this year’s summit was the need for better communication across the entire value chain – including manufacturers, designers, specifiers, owners, dealers, distributors, and contractors – to ensure that sustainability goals are truly met,” Griese said. “Too often, the flooring contractor is left out of the dialogue, despite being the one who brings the project to life and the one interacting directly with both suppliers and general contractors. Meanwhile, distributors and dealers connect with manufacturers, and general contractors engage with specifiers, designers, and owners. With better coordination, the flooring contractor can be in a unique position to help bridge the entire value chain, as they have real influence over which products are used and how they’re installed.

“They also often serve as the key link between the vision established by designers and owners and the product knowledge held by manufacturers,” he added. “Their perspective is essential to closing the loop and preventing disconnects that can lead to unsustainable outcomes. We’re hopeful that future efforts, like a dedicated summit-derived task force, will help formalize these connections and give contractors a stronger, more consistent voice in sustainability conversations.”



*The opening keynote panel set the tone, moderated by Bill Griese, of TCNA, featuring Peter Templeton, President and CEO of the U.S. Green Building Council, and Corey Clayborne, Senior VP of Knowledge and Practice at the American Institute of Architects (AIA).*

William Paddock, CEO and Managing Director of WAP Sustainability Consulting, said installers play a critical and “often underrepresented” role in the sustainability process.

“Their hands-on experience gives them unique insight into which materials perform best over time, generate the least waste, and are easiest to install with minimal environmental impact,” Paddock said. “Installers are also on the front lines of jobsite practices – decisions around adhesives, grouts, waste sorting, and water use often come down to the installer. By promoting low-VOC materials, efficient cutting techniques, and proper installation to maximize product life, tile installers directly influence the carbon footprint and longevity of flooring systems.”

Paddock added that to better represent installer voices at events like the Flooring Sustainability Summit, these aspects should be discussed with seasoned installers participating in panels. “Their lived experience or preferences in material selection can ground sustainability conversations in practical application, bridging the gap between product innovation and real-world performance,” he said. “Including installer perspectives also signals to the industry that sustainability is not just about product specifications – it’s also about how those products are applied, maintained, and valued over time [which] can get lost in the discussion.”

Ron Nash, President and COO of LATICRETE, also spoke to me about tile installation contractors and their role in the future of sustainable building. “Sustainability isn’t just an issue for manufacturers or architects, it’s a practical, on-the-ground opportunity for tile contractors to lead,” Nash said. “Whether you’re working on a commercial build with a firm like Gensler or guiding a homeowner on material choices, installers are uniquely positioned to make decisions that reduce waste and increase the life of the project. That’s real environmental impact.”

Nash pointed out that the growing complexity of eco-labels, over 450 in circulation, makes clarity and partnership essential. “The industry is backing Green Squared® to simplify the path forward,



but it's still confusing. That's why contractors should align with manufacturers who are not just talking about sustainability, but actually building tools and systems to support it."

He emphasized that it's not just LATICRETE making progress: "We sat down with competitors at the Sustainability Summit who are also using recycled materials, streamlining logistics, and reducing landfill waste. This is a shared effort across the tile industry."

Nash believes that tile contractors should not only implement sustainable practices but use them as a competitive edge. "Reducing waste isn't just green, it's gold. It cuts costs, improves efficiency, and strengthens your pitch. When you tell a client, 'This is the last shower you'll ever need,' you're selling durability and responsibility at the same time."

He referenced a message from his childhood. "With all the eco-label chaos, it's time we took a feather from Woodsy the Owl. His message still holds up: *Give a hoot, don't pollute*. Let's keep it simple, honest, and focused on what tile does best, lasting a lifetime, and then some."

## Looking ahead

As the flooring industry continues to align around shared sustainability goals, the summit reinforced a key takeaway: success will require better integration of all voices, from manufacturers and designers to contractors and end users. For more coverage of the event visit [tileletter.com](https://tileletter.com). **TL**



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# Sustainability & silicosis

*protecting the future of the  
fabrication laborer*

The subject of sustainability has been the topic of conversations for a number of years. It was first identified in 1987 by the United Nations Brundtland Commission that defined it as: *“Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”*

Currently, a substantial number of kitchen and vanity countertops consist of natural stone or engineered stone. These products, in and of themselves, pose no danger to the end user, but the manufacturing process to create them by drilling, cutting, grinding, and polishing causes the encapsulated silica to become airborne. This dust, if repeatedly inhaled by an unprotected fabrication worker, can potentially cause a serious – and often fatal – lung illness known as silicosis.

Using the Brundtland definition, we can connect sustainability to silicosis. “Meeting the needs of the present” (the physical health of countertop workers), “without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Without corrective or protective action, fabrication workers can be compromised by silica dust particles. This could remove them from the workforce and hinder their ability to provide for their family’s needs.

## Silica content of countertop materials

To gain an understanding of these products and the silica levels of each product, we need to review them. Limestone and marble generally contain less than 5% silica. Sintered stone – also known as ultra-compact – ranges from 5% to 11%. Granite can range from 40% to 50%, while engineered stone (quartz) products range from 90% to 97%.



By Scott Carothers,  
Academic Director,  
Ceramic Tile  
Education  
Foundation



*The manufacturing process to create natural or engineered stone kitchen or vanity countertops by drilling, cutting, grinding, and polishing causes the encapsulated silica to become airborne and can lead to a serious lung illness known as silicosis.*





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## Legislation history

Australia was the first country to ban the use, supply, and manufacture of engineered stone products, including quartz countertops, due to the health risks associated with silica dust exposure. This ban was instituted on July 1, 2024. The intent was to protect workers in the countertop manufacturing industry from developing severe lung conditions, such as silicosis. This governmental decision was supported by health care providers, trade unions, and fabrication workers, stressing the crucial need to address this health hazard.

In the United States, current legislation includes the California Code of Regulation, Title 8, Section 5204, Occupational Exposures to Respirable Crystalline Silica. As stated by the legal firm Husch Blackwell, here are the key points of this legislation:

- On December 29, 2023, the California Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board instituted an emergency regulation to address occupational exposure to respirable crystalline silica. This regulation addressed additional safety requirements for businesses involved in cutting engineered stone, improved monitoring for workplace sites, and increased the ability for workers to report non-compliant employers. These emergency regulations became permanent in February 2025.

**Stronger worker protections are needed.**

**Engineering controls are necessary, but insufficient.**

Industry data: 25% of silica samples over action level, with wet methods in use.

**High-level respiratory protection is also essential.**

CDPH

**Proposed revisions strengthen medical surveillance requirements.**

CDPH

**37% of engineered stone silicosis cases are missed by chest x-ray.**

Hoyle et al. Respiratory 2024

- Replacing chest x-ray with low-dose chest CT will help improve detection of silicosis among high-risk workers.
- Early detection is key to prevent additional exposure & ensure appropriate medical care.

*This presentation from Amy Heinzerling and the California Department of Public Health advocates for stronger worker protections and more effective diagnostics.*

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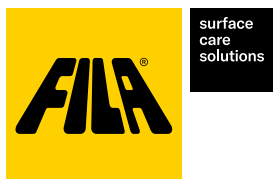
El hormigón es un material poroso que suele estar expuesto al tráfico peatonal, a los neumáticos y a las inclemencias del tiempo. Con el tiempo, pueden aparecer grietas, manchas y desconchados en la superficie. Por eso es muy importante proteger las paredes y pisos de hormigón. Es importante elegir un sellador de hormigón que reúna las siguientes 3 características principales para prolongar la vida útil de tu piso o pared exterior.

**Repelencia al agua:** el agua y la humedad pueden filtrarse en las superficies desprotegidas y expandirse al congelarse, provocando grietas, desconchados y picaduras.

**Repelencia a las manchas:** el aceite, la grasa y las manchas orgánicas pueden absorberse en el material y dejar marcas permanentes. Por otro lado, una superficie protegida se limpia fácilmente, lo que facilita el mantenimiento regular.

**Consolidación de la superficie:** las partículas de polvo del hormigón sin tratar pueden desprenderse de la superficie, desgastando la capa exterior del material. Una superficie consolidada es más limpia y compacta.

En FILA, recomendamos CONCRETE PRO-TECT, nuestro nuevo sellador y resaltador de bajo brillo para hormigón formulado para preservar su patio, la zona alrededor de la piscina y adoquines de hormigón durante años. Para las paredes exteriores recomendamos HYDROREP, nuestro hidrófugo anti-envejecimiento.



- The growth in cases of silicosis from exposure to engineered stone created a flurry of inspection activity in California. In 2024 alone, Cal/OSHA conducted 85 inspections related to silica exposure. These inspections resulted in 26% of the shops inspected receiving Orders Prohibiting Use (OPUs). These orders temporarily shut down equipment or processes that pose immediate safety risks until the issues are fixed. Additionally, citations were issued in approximately 95% of the closed inspections, with 53 out of 56 resulting in violations.
- In its most recent statement, Cal/OSHA noted the unique nature of the stone-countertop industry. Workers are particularly vulnerable because they are not represented by a labor union. Plus, they face the possibility of retaliation if they report workplace hazards to Cal/OSHA. Further, only 7% of the employees in the industry received workers' compensation.
- Section 5204(3) of this legislation applies to high-exposure trigger tasks regardless of employee exposures, exposure assessments, or objective data. Cal/OSHA defines high-exposure trigger tasks as machining, crushing, cutting, drilling, abrading, abrasive blasting, grinding, chiseling, carving, gouging, polishing, buffing, fracturing, intentional breaking, or intentional chipping of artificial stone that contains more than 0.1 percent by weight crystalline silica. It also includes these activities conducted on other silica-containing products, including natural stone, that contain more than 10 percent crystalline silica by weight. High-exposure trigger tasks also include clean up, disturbing or handling of wastes, dusts, residues, debris, or other materials created during the above-listed tasks.

### California Senate Bill (SB) 20

Senate Bill 20 (SB 20), introduced by Senator Caroline Menjivar on December 2, 2024, is titled "Occupational Safety: Fabrication Activities on Slab Solid Surface Products." The proposed bill addresses the following impositions on the suppliers and manufacturers of stone slab products commonly used in residential kitchen countertop installation or customization. These regulatory changes included:

- Banning dry stone fabrication or cutting.
- Requiring wet fabrication methods. These include using constant running water on the entire surface being cut and the cutting equipment, water jet cutting, or submersion cutting.
- Licensing requirements for fabrication shops, requiring compliance with state occupational health standards.





1. A worker using a handheld pneumatic wet grinder with a diamond grinding cup wheel in the final grinding process; 2. A worker using a handheld pneumatic wet polisher in the polishing process; 3. A worker using a wet miter saw in the lamination process; 4. A worker using compressed air to dry the surface of the stone in the lamination process. Images courtesy of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

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The Magazine of the National Tile Contractors Association



## Medical studies and online safety course

The International Surface Fabricators Association (ISFA), in partnership with the Natural Stone Institute (NSI), has released the Yale Literature Review: Medical Studies. This



report, the second part of a two-study series, thoroughly analyzes peer-reviewed medical research on the health impacts of respirable crystalline silica exposure in the surface fabrication industry. It builds upon the first part of the study, released in 2024, which detailed real-world silica dust levels in fabrication environments. This review provides fabricators with evidence-based understanding of silica exposure's health consequences, empowering them with facts to enhance shop safety.

ISFA offers an online silica safety course, which has enrolled over 1,100 industry employees. Together with ongoing research, ISFA demonstrates its dedication to rigorous safety standards and proactive health education within the surfacing industry. This initiative is part of ISFA's broader commitment to workplace wellness and continuous education. The full review and additional resources are available at [isfanow.org/silica-RESOURCES](https://isfanow.org/silica-RESOURCES).

In July, IFSA and OSHA established a formal Alliance under OSHA's national Alliance Program. This voluntary, cooperative partnership pledges to elevate workplace safety, training, and safety culture across the surface fabrication industry. For more information, visit the [isfanow.org](https://isfanow.org) website or view the story at <https://tinyurl.com/ISFAOSHAAIalliance> on TileLetter.com.

In addition, the Natural Stone Institute has a library of resources for preventing silicosis. Find it at <https://www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/silica/>.

- Certification requirements for fabrication workers under an authorized training curriculum.
- Prohibiting suppliers of slab products from working with unlicensed fabricators.
- Reporting requirements for state agencies on silicosis statistics, worker safety assessments, and the effectiveness of the new regulatory structure.

According to the California Legislative Information website, SB 20 has passed in the Senate Appropriations Committee and the full Senate. It then went to the Assembly (House) where it passed the Labor and Employment Committee. It is now before the Assembly Appropriations Committee, awaiting debate.

## Fabrication safety

This bill has a significant impact for the tile installer using any of the above-listed products if the work performed falls under Section 5204 of the CAL/OSHA regulations. However, it does not apply to normal construction work on a jobsite falling under Section 1532.3 of the CAL/OSHA regulations.

For fabrication work under Section 5204, fabricators are required to use PPE – which could include a powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR), HEPA filtered dust containment systems, site ventilation systems, along with wet cutting and wet grinding tools. Many of these measures greatly reduce the potential of airborne silica, protecting everyone.



*CleanSpace™ WORK Kit from MB Stone Care redefines respiratory protection for countertop fabricators. Engineered for silica-heavy environments, it combines HEPA filtration with a slim, hose-free design that enhances maneuverability in tight shop setups. Built for wet fabrication and daily use, it delivers comfort, durability, and compliance all without slowing the crew down.*

## Conclusion

This legislation is in progress and will, most likely, be modified in the future. The larger issue with this legislation is funding. SB20 includes a provision for funding the certification process that will help protect workers, if it can pass the Assembly Appropriations Committee, and if the Governor signs it into law. The bottom line is that fabrication workers need to be protected, having the opportunity to work in a safe and healthy environment.

Safety for silica workers translates to sustainability not only for the industry, but also for the lives of those involved in creating beautiful countertops for clients. **TL**





[&]



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Ask the Experts Q&As are culled from member inquiries to NTCA's Technical Team.

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](mailto:jim@tile-assn.com).



## Determining movement joints in the substrate

### QUESTION

We are installing an exterior thin brick project consisting of 21,000 sq. ft. over seven stories. The installation of the thin brick will include expansion joints per TCNA. The substrate – which consists of multiple layers of waterproof barrier, rockwool insulation, drain mat and 1/2" cement board that we will adhere to – does not have any movement joints. Is this acceptable, or is the substrate required to have the same expansion joints continuing through the different layers?

### ANSWER

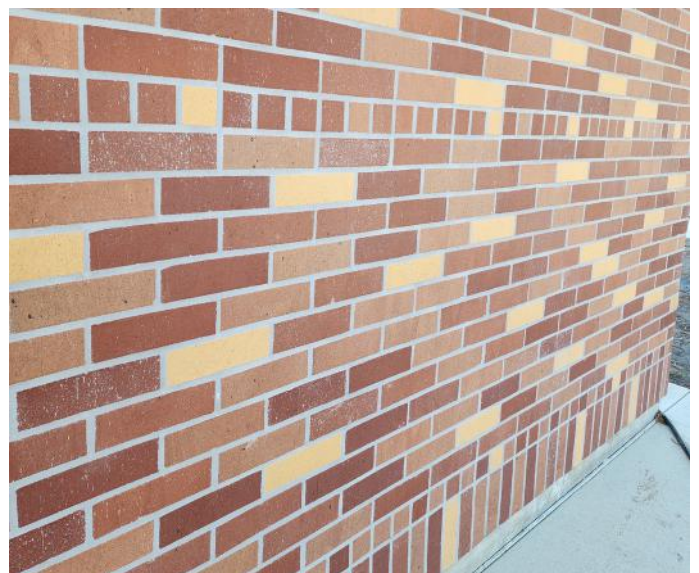
Thank you for your detailed question regarding the installation of thin brick over a multi-layer exterior wall system on a seven-story project. Based on tile industry standards and best practices outlined in the *TCNA Handbook*, ANSI A108, and the *NTCA Reference Manual*, I'd like to offer the following clarification.

While the substrate beneath the thin brick installation does not currently have movement joints, it's important to distinguish between structural movement joints within the building envelope and movement joints within the tile (or thin brick) assembly. The two are related, but serve different purposes:

### **TCNA Handbook EJ171 (Movement Joint Guidelines)**

Per *TCNA Handbook EJ171*, movement joints in the tile (thin brick) layer must:

- Be placed in alignment with structural movement joints in the building, if present.





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- Be installed every:
  - 8–12 feet for exterior installations
  - At all changes in plane
  - At perimeters and penetrations

It is *not strictly required* for every layer beneath the tile (such as insulation, drainage mat, or cement board) to have corresponding movement joints unless:

- The building's structural engineer has designed movement joints in the wall assembly,
- Or the wall assembly itself is expected to experience movement or differential expansion that could stress the tile layer.

*TCNA Handbook 2025* – EJ171 (last paragraph of page 439) Wall Tile Movement Joints in Framed Wall Assemblies states: “Location and frequency of movement joints shall be determined by the design professional or engineer, including the design of the joint itself with framing, sheathing, and backer board considerations. Consult backer board manufacturer for specific recommendations. Design details must be specified before the wall is assembled as movement joint accommodations cannot be retroactively added.”

We can read and review the *TCNA Handbook* EJ171 and determine all of the above information, but it is very important to note that **determining the placement of movement joints within a tile assembly is NOT the responsibility of the tile contractor**. The second paragraph (page 436) of EJ171 states “Because of the limitless conditions and structural systems on which tile can be installed, the **design professional or engineer** shall show the specific locations and details of movement joints on project drawings.”

## ANSI A108.01 and A108.02

ANSI standards reinforce *TCNA Handbook* EJ171 by stating that movement joints in the tile finish must accommodate expected movement from the substrate and environmental conditions, but they do not mandate that non-structural layers (like continuous cement board, insulation, etc.) have mirrored joints unless movement or deflection is anticipated at those layers.

## Best practices from NTCA Reference Manual

The *NTCA Reference Manual* emphasizes coordination with project architects, structural engineers, and envelope consultants to identify where movement is expected. If movement joints are not provided in the substrate, and there's no indication of structural movement at those points, it may be acceptable – provided





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**Meridio**

the tile assembly includes properly-placed and detailed movement joints per *TCNA Handbook* EJ171.

However, if the substrate layers (e.g., cement board) span across large areas without interruption, and especially over different framing types or floor levels, you may be introducing the risk of telegraphed movement or stress cracks unless joints are incorporated or appropriate uncoupling/isolation methods are used.

### Additional project considerations

There are two additional points I want to emphasize based on our experience as former tile contractors and how important this has proven to be on similar jobs:

- 1. Get everything in writing** – Make sure all communication with the design team is documented. Get their responses in writing and confirm your understanding back to them in writing as well. Save that documentation – if questions or problems arise later in the project, having a written record of those instructions can be absolutely critical.
- 2. Be willing to walk if you can't get clarity** – You mentioned “we are installing,” but it's unclear whether

the install has already begun or is just about to start. Either way, this is one of those situations where you need to be prepared to pause or walk away from the project if you can't get the necessary information. The proper performance of your installation and the long-term function of the system as a whole depends on this detail being resolved before work continues.

### #1 Recommendation – consult the design professional

My recommendation is that you go back to the design professional – whether that's the architect, structural engineer, or whoever is responsible for the wall system – and ask the same questions you asked me. Specifically, ask:

- Are movement joints required in the substrate?
- Have specific movement joint locations been defined for the tile layer?
- What expectations are in place for movement accommodation across this wall system?

*Images courtesy of Randy Fleming, NTCA Technical Trainer. **TL***

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# ONE *to* ONE

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



*Paul Shahriari, founder of Ecomedes, has a civil engineering background and was motivated by a desire to improve the planet for future generations. He embraced the concept of building sustainability early on, and was one of the first one hundred people to be LEED certified.*

*Ecomedes is a technology platform geared to the sustainability and green building communities. It houses 1.2 million products with 3,000 green attributes, offering immediate documentation for certifications, streamlining a process that used to take hours.*



*Paul works closely with industry associations in the construction industry. Prior to the Flooring Sustainability Summit in Washington, D.C., which he attended, he was a featured speaker at the Tile Council of North America (TCNA) Marketing Committee, held in town.*

## PAUL SHAHRIARI

↓  
*Sustainability  
and Green  
Building pioneer  
providing workflow  
solutions with  
groundbreaking  
technology*

**Your talk addressed the continued need for collaboration of all parties in the sustainability space. You spoke about the need to embed product performance data into intuitive, interactive decision-making tools across devices. How does Ecomedes facilitate this or help simplify the process?**

I started a consulting business called Green Mind Inc., and was working with the USGBC as a faculty member and trainer on LEED. I also have a passion for data and spreadsheets. I realized quickly that the process for specifying sustainable projects was complicated and at times very cumbersome. You have a lot of parties involved in the process: from manufacturers to designers to project owners. You also have a lot of ingredients that go into this.

And while the specifier creates a specification, we all know there is a big difference between that and what often gets installed on the job. I was consulting and speaking on how to train general contractors on green building, how to green architecture practices and how to help manufacturing groups become greener in production. Around 2005 I realized that everyone's looking for data to drive better buying, better decision making and design and better selling. You cannot sell to the architect or project



*Shahriari works closely with industry associations in the construction industry with his Ecomedes sustainability-centric technology platform. It houses 1.2 million products with 3,000 green attributes, offering immediate documentation for certifications, streamlining a process that used to take hours.*



owner without the data. Ecomedes was born out of the fact that the right person needs three to five elements of good data to make the right decision, and they want as much of this as possible optimized.

### **How do you bring all the parties involved to understand and use a platform like Ecomedes?**

We created Ecomedes to be a tool that works great with trade associations. Tile Council of North America is a good example in flooring, and we work with ASID and IIDA in design. Basically, our tool helps you navigate through a scavenger hunt of information and map this to all the different rating systems, grids and frameworks. Ultimately with one click, it gets you the document you need to specify a project. We used to do this kind of work as consultants, and now we offer this tool free to anyone -- which does what we used to for about \$300 an hour.

### **Since you are so connected with the design and building industry, where do you think there might be some opportunities for ceramic tile and natural stone for the next several years?**

You have an incredible opportunity with millions of square feet of commercial real estate in urban markets that are converting office space into living spaces. High-end residential construction is also embracing sustainable design elements. The opportunities are right there for your trade. You may have to look for technological solutions such as large-format panels and less grout, but there is a lot of versatility in your industry's products.

### **How important is life cycle when comparing products to designers and specifiers?**

They talk a lot about comparing the life of a product from Cradle to Cradle (production to the jobsite) vs. Cradle to Grave (production to the landfill or dumpster). This is more about circularity as a brand. If you have a product like LVT that is not going to hold up for 30 years, how important is that if the intended use of the building might be 5-10 years, and the owner plans to sell it or demolish it? Logic has to be factored into the sustainability picture here. It can be important to differentiate, but it all boils down to intended use of the building and finding the appropriate products that fit that need.

### **The latest buzz is carbon reduction in manufacturing processes. How important is this right now?**

It's a big deal. Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) and Ingredient Transparency are very important. Life cycle assessments are important too, but these cost a lot of money, and are often used to prove or disprove declarations on carbon footprint. As a person who cares about the planet, I don't want to run out of resources on the planet. But putting in all this effort to just track carbon isn't the only thing that matters. It is also important to declare what the ingredients are in the product. Health Product Declarations (HPDs) and Transparency Certifications are just as important as carbon. Building finishes and EPDs really matter most. The real carbon intensity of most buildings is in the concrete and the steel and aluminum and glass.

### **What can the tile industry do to be as effective as possible in the Ecomedes platform?**

Young people love technology, and most of them care about the environment and sustainability. If they find your industry lagging in the information they are looking for, they will discount you as irrelevant. A lot of construction-related product brands and sectors are not modernized enough. You have some of the greatest green products in the world, but if the people looking for this information can't find it quickly in a platform they feel they can trust, you may not see your product specified on many of these projects.

Stakeholders in your industry can have some dialogue about the importance of getting the most important information into our platform and utilizing the technology with high-quality imagery and be willing to invest a little bit of money into building that database.

Transparency is vital to this as well. You also need to look at your trade association and make sure contractor and labor leaders embrace the products and technology you are promoting in the sustainability field. Your members should be proud to say they embrace these products being promoted in the sustainability world.

There's an opportunity for you to tell a story that is something that everyone's going to want to follow. Get your manufacturer brands to follow that same storytelling. Showcase or feature actual projects that have met these certifications and create a place where this can be found easily by the A&D Community (such as at [whytile.com](http://whytile.com)). Your industry has a great story to tell in this community. **TL**



# MAKING SUSTAINABILITY BEAUTIFUL

ARTISAN TILE SETTERS GIVE  
NEW LIFE TO LEFTOVER TILES

*By Lesley Goddin, Editorial Director and Senior Writer*

When it comes to sustainability, artisan tile setters give new life to tile scraps and tile left over from projects. Mosaic artists can source specific ceramic, stone, porcelain or glass materials for their projects to obtain a particular effect – but many use their vision and creativity to transform leftover scraps and shards from installation projects into works of art.

And then there are those artisan tile setters who use tile leftovers for education, training and experimentation.

## **From firebox to practice box**

One such professional is Chris Stover, Owner/Tile Contractor at Stover Tile and Design in Los Osos, Calif. In February of 2024, Stover and his apprentice were finishing up a stunning residential fireplace using patterned tile. Stover, who attended the first Artisans Revolution in Tile (A.R.T.) tile artisan training in Milwaukee in 2023, was inspired to use this tile for a training exercise for his apprentice Heath Jones that would become a gift for their client.

Stover built a box out of foam board, and set tile on one side as a demonstration, then let Jones set the rest – including all the miter cuts. The next morning, as





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Stover was setting a kitchen backsplash, Jones grouted the box himself – which Stover pointed out was great practice for grouting miters.

“He had a lot of fun with it and got a ton of hands-on training,” Stover said. “I got to make something I’ve wanted to make for a while, and the client will get a one-off piece of custom decor.”

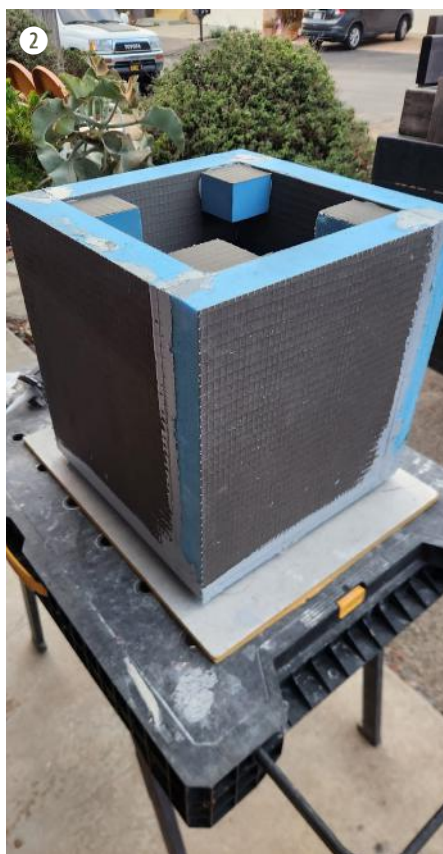
This training was on the clock, with Stover and his apprentice investing in training and practice that would pay off down the line. Stover said there was downtime for his apprentice on the job, after skimming the kitchen splash flat or while Stover set tile on it.

Jones grouted the box, running cuts in between waiting for the grout. Jones had cut all the tile a few

months prior while Stover was breaking the jobsite down, so the tile was ready to go.

Master tile artisans applauded Stover’s approach! “Great way to teach the next generation,” wrote Joshua Nordstrom of Tierra Tile, who is one of the instructors of the NTCA-sponsored A.R.T. program. Lee Callewaert of Dragonfly Tile and Stone Works is Nordstrom’s fellow instructor for the program. He said, “We’ve had many apprentices do things like this on the clock. Worth it!”

In a followup to the project, Stover noted, “The project has paid off for sure! The client was super stoked on the gift and Health is awesome at miters now. I [recently] had him cutting miters in zellige all day for a fireplace surround we just started.”



1. Tiling lesson. “He had a lot of fun with it and got a ton of hands-on training,” Stover said of his apprentice Heath Jones.
2. Stover built this box and tiled one side – then gave it to Jones to complete, miter and grout.
3. Leftover tile from this fireplace offered Chris Stover’s apprentice Heath Jones a chance to learn about mitering and grouting miters.
4. “I got to make something I’ve wanted to make for a while, and the client will get a one-off piece of custom decor,” Stover said of the finished piece.



## Sustaining a memory in mosaics

Aryk Snowberger of NTCA member company Snowbee Custom Tile in Canton, Ohio, was also in that inaugural A.R.T. class. He has taken what he learned with that first 107-piece koi mosaic and has developed his own style, choosing a range of subjects that have meaning to him or embody beauty or joy. And he keeps a stockpile of leftover tiles to create his tile art, giving new life to cut-off pieces.

"I use tile samples and even scrap tiles that I accumulate in every color, texture, and medium possible," he said. "I have a broad arsenal at my disposal and regularly keep cut offs from jobs to use in the workshop. Having the right colors and textures adds realism and personal connection. I've yet to have to wait to make a mosaic because I needed to source anything. A lot of times the inspiration comes from the materials themselves. I've got to feel it, and love it, like the material selection and the mosaic itself - it has to be organic."



*This photo prompted Snowberger to design and create a heartfelt mosaic in memory of his friends. His wife and business partner Rochelle converted the original photo to a line drawing and then to a template with colors and materials indicated. She also polished both of the smaller mosaics.*



*Two of the mosaics Aryk Snowberger lovingly created of his friend Patrick and his son Braxton, both lost in a tragic rafting accident in June.*

Snowberger's assortment of materials allowed him to create a memorial series of mosaics for a family friend and his son who perished this summer in a tragic rafting accident that devastated the community. Two mosaics depict Snowberger's family friend Patrick Cross, hugging his five-year old son Braxton at a little league ball game. Another shows Braxton kissing his three-year old brother Holden. He made these heartfelt mosaics as tributes and remembrances for the family.

"You can say a lot with a mosaic without saying anything at all," Snowberger said.

In addition to the tile pieces, Snowberger said the frames themselves are also repurposed by a carpenter out of wood from wood flooring projects, pallets, etc.

Cassie Cross, Patrick's widow and mom to Braxton and Holden, was deeply moved by Snowberger's gift. "I just wanted to give a shout out to Aryk and Rochelle for the incredible artwork they made for Holden and myself.

So much love was poured into these. He deserves so much recognition and love for taking the time to create such a special keepsake for us. Thank you so much Aryk."

Snowberger has expanded the use of these castoff tiles into artistic works of beauty and meaning. "Today, I am more thankful and proud of having acquired this training and skillset than ever before," he said. "Our first training taught us that art is about evoking emotions. I personally experienced the real-time impact of my mosaics on the family and friends, including myself, at the funeral and afterwards. These mosaics will be treasured for a lifetime! Although I am filled with sadness, my heart is also full. Three-year-old Holden was all smiles and fist bumps when I saw him recently. It brings me joy to know that he will grow up cherishing a mosaic of him and his big brother. This is a testament to the profound impact of art and love. Rest in Heaven, Pat and Braxton." **TL**



*Snowberger also crafted this mosaic of Braxton kissing his younger brother Holden, a testament to treasure for Holden – and the photograph that inspired it. "You can say a lot with a mosaic without saying anything at all," Snowberger said.*

National Tile Contractors Association

# Tile Pro

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# In Memory

Robert "Bob"  
SCAVONE, SR.



Robert "Bob" Scavone Sr., age 73, of Parkland, Fla., passed away peacefully on Sunday, July 27, 2025, after a years-long battle with Parkinson's disease. He is survived by his beloved wife, Lucille, and their two children, Robert Jr. and Kimberly Anne.

Bob was born on May 22, 1952, in Brooklyn, N.Y.. He moved to Florida in the late 1970s with less than \$1,000 to his name. His family soon followed. Over the next four decades, Bob built two very successful commercial flooring contracting companies. In 1990, he founded Total Flooring Contractors, Inc., one of the most recognized and respected companies in the country.

"Total Flooring Contractors was a highly respected commercial contractor, and they had a reputation for adhering to industry standards,"

said NTCA Executive Director Bart Bettiga.

"Robert Scavone Sr. supported the industry by allowing his son Robert Scavone Jr. to get involved in the NTCA Technical Committee.

Robert Scavone Jr. contributed to the creation of many new documents in the *NTCA Reference Manual* thanks to the support of his dad. NTCA is grateful for the contributions of the Scavone family, and we celebrate the life of Robert Scavone Sr. with them."

Bob was deeply passionate about his work and took great pride in providing for his family. Beyond his career, Bob had a lifelong love for music. A talented musician, he played the drums, guitar, and piano.

Robert touched countless lives and leaves behind a legacy of generosity, kindheartedness, and unwavering determination.

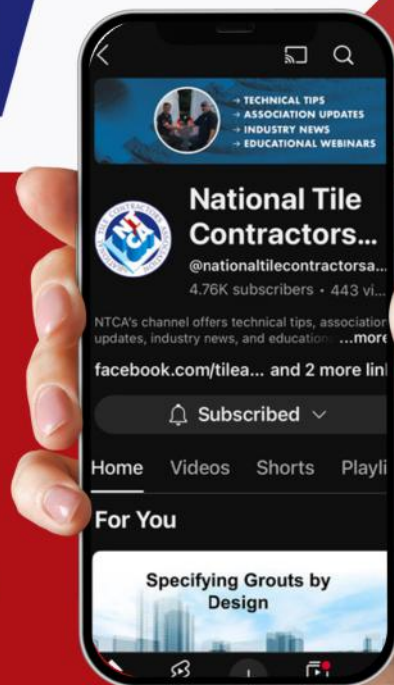




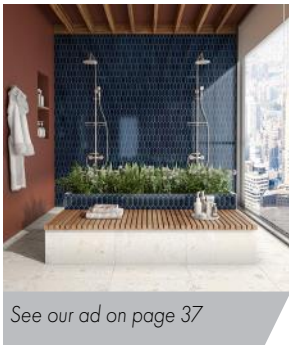
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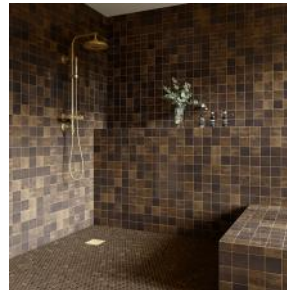
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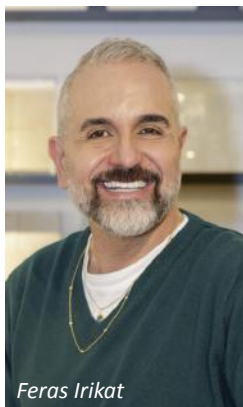
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Merola



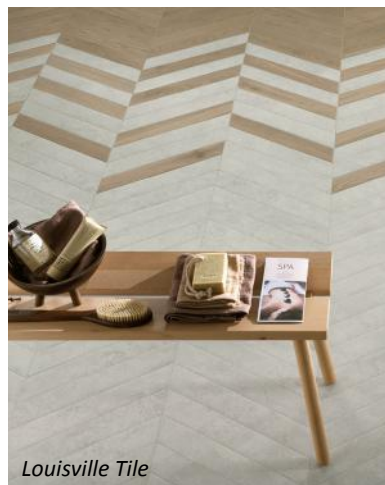
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