

TileLetter

A lesson in precision:

MAPEI products help
build LAKE HOUSTON
MIDDLE SCHOOL



Foundations of
WET AREAS:
NEW FREE NTCA WORKSHOP
FOR 2026

THE NEXT GENERATION OF
TILE PROFESSIONALS—
REACHING for
the STARS



NATIONAL TILE CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION

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](#).

ORDER NOW



2025/2026
National Tile Contractors Association



**REFERENCE
MANUAL**



PROBLEM CHARACTERISTICS
CAUSE • CURE • PREVENTION

In Every Issue

BUSINESS

12 *Building our workforce—the next generation starts with a simple “yes”*

20 *Distributor’s lens: why SKU discipline and channel strategy matter more than ever*

NTCA MEMBERS

34 *The next generation of tile professionals—reaching for the stars*

TECHNICAL

50 *NTCA adds new Foundations of Wet Areas workshop*

56 *Ask the Experts*

Columns

ONE-TO-ONE

42 *PROFLEX Products, Inc.: building a one-stop solution for the flooring industry*



Feature

26 *A lesson in precision: MAPEI products help build Lake Houston Middle School*





An Iconic American Brand

WHAT INSPIRES YOU INSPIRES US.

Crossville® manufactures and stocks many exceptional tile products expertly designed to keep up with the creativity of any designer, architect, or installer, and create spaces with enduring beauty.

Celebrate Crossville's 40th anniversary with us at Coverings, Booth #4214



Featured: **Sociale™ Porcelain Tile**
Sociale is made in the USA.

All trademarks are owned by AHF, LLC

Departments

- 6 NTCA Training
- 8 Editor's Letter
- 10 President's Letter
- 60 Product Focus
- 62 News Ticker
- 63 Industry Supporters



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

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

Jennifer Bardoner, *Content and Production Manager*
jennifer@tile-assn.com

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

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

Mailing Address:

PO Box 13629
Jackson MS 39236

Shipping Address:

216 Avalon Circle, Ste B
Flowood, MS 39232
Tel: 601-939-2071
Fax: 601-932-6117

Websites:

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



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 – click on Find a Tile Contractor, a Five-Star Accredited Contractor or a Tile Consultant.

TILELETTER EDITORIAL POLICY: TileLetter is the official publication of the National Tile Contractors Association, Inc. (NTCA) and provides a medium for expressing views and opinions without approving, disapproving, or guaranteeing the validity or accuracy of any data, claim or opinion appearing under a byline, or obtained or quoted from an acknowledged source. Statements of fact and opinion are made on the responsibility of the authors alone and do not imply an opinion or reflect the official position of NTCA.

The National Tile Contractors Association, Inc. is an equal opportunity association and seeks to include qualified individuals and businesses in all phases of its activities. The National Tile Contractors Association, Inc. does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, veteran status, or disability. The National Tile Contractors Association, Inc. seeks opportunities to include these groups in its programs and activities.

WHAT THEY SAY...



I decided to join because I know the importance of having access to the resources that [NTCA] offers. My networking has expanded more than double since attending just a couple of events.

*Nicole Hulme, Owner,
The Tile Chick, LLC
Mesa, Arizona*

WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN!

- Stay competitive with the latest industry training, webinars, and educational resources.
- Connect with industry leaders, peers, and potential clients.
- Benefit from business advice, and discounts on essential products and services.
- Get support on complex projects and industry best practices.



JOIN NTCA
and take your
tile business to the
to the **NEXT LEVEL!**



JOIN NOW



Meet the 2026 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

2026 NTCA Workshop Programs *

To confirm dates and for more information visit NTCATraining.com

MAY

- 5 James Hardie – New Jersey, NJ
- 5 Floor & Decor – Katy, TX
- 18 Floor & Decor – Arlington, TX
- 19 Floor & Decor – Alexandria, VA
- 19 Floor & Decor – Oxnard, CA
- 19 The Tile Shop – Dallas, TX
- 20 Floor & Decor – Moreno Valley, CA
- 20 Floor & Decor – Whitehall, PA
- 21 Emser Tile – Las Vegas, NV
- 21 Daltile – Broomfield, CO
- 21 Floor & Decor – Fairfield, CT
- 26 James Hardie – Denver, CO
- 26 Daltile – Grapevine, TX
- 27 Daltile – North Little Rock, AR
- 28 Daltile – Tontitown, AR
- 28 Daltile – Davenport, IA

JUNE

- 2 Floor & Decor – Scarborough, ME
- 2 Daltile – El Paso, TX
- 3 Daltile – Derry, NH
- 4 Floor & Decor – Saugus, MA
- 9 Daltile – Lexington, KY
- 9 James Hardie – Los Angeles, CA
- 10 Daltile – Moraine, OH
- 11 Daltile – Brooklyn Heights, OH
- 16 The Tile Shop – Greenwood Village, CO
- 16 Floor & Decor – Brookfield, WI
- 17 Floor & Decor – Littleton, CO
- 18 Daltile – Loveland, CO
- 22 Floor & Decor – Apple Valley, MN
- 23 Emser Tile – La Vista, NE
- 23 MSI – Jacksonville, FL
- 23 The Tile Shop – Roseville, MN
- 24 Floor & Decor – Monona, WI
- 24 Floor & Decor – Fern Park, FL
- 25 Emser Tile – Lenexa, KS
- 25 MSI – Chicago, IL
- 25 MSI – Deerfield Beach, FL

2026 NTCA Regional Programs *

Register online at NTCATraining.com

MAY

- 7 Garden State Tile – Lancaster, PA
- 7 Uzin Utz – Waco, TX
- 12 Floor & Decor – Woodbridge, VA
- 14 BPI – San Antonio, TX
- 21 Floor & Decor – Louisville, KY
- 21 Floor & Decor – Webster, TX
- 28 Daltile – St Louis, MO

JUNE

- 4 Floor & Decor – Kansas City, MO
- 4 Floor & Decor – Albuquerque, NM
- 11 Daltile – Urbandale, IA
- 11 Floor & Decor – Fullerton, CA
- 18 Floor & Decor – Woodbury, MN
- 18 Floor & Decor – Henderson, NV
- 25 Floor & Decor – Chicago, IL



NTCA maintains an ongoing list of training events through an interactive map on its website. Check it out by scanning.



**Dates are subject to change*

Industry Supporters

of the 2026 NTCA Workshops and NTCA Regional Programs





Introducing
ARTISAN
POWER NIPPER

BUILT TO INSPIRE

Engineered in the USA, the QEP Artisan Power Nipper delivers precise, intricate cuts on tile, glass, and mosaic with a wide offset jaw and three-stage adjustable settings. Dual impact bumpers and smooth ball bearing action ensure comfort, control, and accuracy.



Offset 5/8" titanium coated tungsten carbide tips provide cleaner edges & smoother cuts

Three cut settings
4 mm, 10 mm & 13 mm

Wide offset jaw allows for unlimited depth of cut

Gel grip.
Zero slip.
Total control.

Designed in collaboration with Mosaic Artist David Arnott




Patent Pending Design

SCAN HERE FOR PRODUCT INFO



qep.com | shopqep.com | 866-435-8665

qeptools

SUPPORTING the next generation of INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS

"We bequeath to you, the next generation, our knowledge but also our problems. While we still live, let us join hands, hearts and minds to work together for their solution so that your world will be better than ours and the world of your children even better."

– ROSALYN SUSSMAN YALOW



Lesley Goddin

Actor, comedian, musician, and woodworker Nick Offerman has co-authored a new book for young woodworkers called *Little Woodchucks: Offerman Woodshop's Guide to Tools and Tomfoolery* with fellow creator Lee Buchanan. Among the songs and schticks I caught at his Lencis performance in Santa Fe back in February, he waxed passionately about the importance and creativity of craftsmanship, or making things by hand. In fact, one chorus of his "Make it Yourself" song proclaims:

*"You can make it yourself and feel the thrill
Making use of your knowledge, craft, and skill
Plant a garden watch it grow, Build a birdhouse for
your beau
You can hammer, sand, and saw; My friend you can
do it all.
Don't be afraid to make it yourself."*

Though he doesn't name tile setting in his song, his reverence for craftsmanship is clear, as is his desire to share it with up-and-coming generations.

Here at NTCA, we think the craft of tile setting is pretty nifty too, and are supportive of the next generation of industry leaders, contractors, and tile setters taking the reins and forging new paths. So we are dedicating this issue to you!

For starters, we have our Members story, where six emerging NTCA members share their perspective on the evolution of our industry and what is needed to equip new tile professionals for future success. Alison Mullins of The Rep Method also talks about outreach to young leaders in her Business article, and Joe Lundgren pens a second Business story that illuminates the process of developing SKU discipline, launch strategy, and channel focus.

Companies grow and change, and NTCA's Bart Bettiga tracked the evolution of one-stop supplier PROFLEX in his

One-to-One interview with CEO Tim Abbott.

New generations bring new educational opportunities, and the NTCA Training Team has crafted a brand-new NTCA Workshop, detailed in our Technical section: Foundations of Wet Areas. This mind-blowingly comprehensive workshop combines classroom instruction with hands-on opportunities to put lessons into practice and learn the intricacies of building a shower that performs flawlessly for many years. The Training Team also answers questions about the need for precision when working with large tiles and slabs in our Ask the Experts section.

NTCA President Rod Owen recaps his Business Acumen series and discusses the future of our industry in line with this issue's theme. As he writes, "The next generation isn't just about new products or new technology. It's about preparing people, strengthening businesses, and raising standards."

Our Product Focus section homes in on several tools and pieces of equipment that facilitate the process of tile setting for ALL generations.

And our cover feature approaches the next generation from another angle: how a complete system solution from MAPEI helped NTCA member Westway Flooring install nearly 88,000 sq. ft. of quarry tile, porcelain, accent wall tile, and Crossville Laminam panels in the new Humble Independent Middle School #11 (aka Lake Houston Middle School) near Houston, Texas.

Up-and-coming leaders, we salute you, and we stand in awe of your creativity and community and dedication to your craft. Let's build the future together!

God bless,

Lesley
lesley@tile-assn.com

MARAZZI

SETTING TILE TRENDS NOT FOLLOWING THEM.



PHOTO FEATURES INYO™, BLOCK™ AND ZELLIGE NEO™.



Rod Owen

BUSINESS ACUMEN SERIES RECAP AND THE NEXT GENERATION

Over the past several months, we've walked through the Ten Essential Business Acumen skills that contribute to building strong, sustainable companies in our industry. From Financial and Market Acumen to Leadership and Strategic Thinking, each topic was designed to sharpen a specific area of business performance.

Now that we've completed the series, it's worth stepping back to look at how they connect.

- **Financial Acumen** reminds us to understand our numbers, cash flow, margins, budgeting, and smart investment.
- **Market Acumen** keeps us aware of trends, customer expectations, and competitive pressures.
- **Technological Acumen** challenges us to stay current and leverage innovation wisely.
- **Leadership and Strategic Acumen** guide vision, direction, and long-term planning.
- **Negotiation and Risk Management Acumen** protect the business, securing favorable terms while identifying and mitigating potential threats.
- **Problem-Solving Acumen** equips us to navigate daily jobsite realities with clarity and confidence.
- **People Management Acumen** reinforces that our teams are our greatest asset.
- **Ethical Acumen** anchors everything in integrity and professionalism.

Individually, each of these skills matters. Together, they form a framework for long-term success. They influence how we bid projects, manage crews, invest in technology, develop leaders, and represent our companies in the marketplace. Strong businesses are rarely built on one

strength alone; they are built on a balance.

Many of us recently gathered at Coverings 2026 in Las Vegas. Events like Coverings are a living example of these acumen principles in action. We saw technological innovation shaping the future of tile. We discussed market shifts and emerging trends. We strengthened relationships and reinforced the leadership and ethical standards that define our trade. When we come together as an industry, we sharpen our collective acumen.

That leads directly into this month's *TileLetter* theme: "Tile: The Next Generation." The future of our industry depends on how well we apply these principles today. The next generation of installers, leaders, manufacturers, and distributors will inherit what we build now. If we model strong leadership, sound financial practices, smart risk management, continuous learning, and unwavering integrity, we create an industry positioned to thrive.

The next generation isn't just about new products or new technology. It's about preparing people, strengthening businesses, and raising standards.

Let's continue building companies—and an industry—that are ready for what's next.

Until next time, stay focused, keep learning, and as always, Educate for Excellence!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rod".

Rod Owen
NTCA President
rod.owen@ccowen.us

Before I had BusyBusy, we were dealing with paper time cards and where I was the only one in the office, I either didn't have all the information I needed for my time cards or my people didn't turn in their time cards.

— Justin, Sierra Restoration



How Tile Contractors By Sadaf Momin Are Simplifying Time Tracking

If you're a tile contractor, you already know how tough it can be to track your crew's time accurately. Between job site chaos, tight schedules, and crews moving from one location to the next, staying on top of hours is easier said than done. Paper time sheets get lost. Clock-ins are missed. Handwritten notes are hard to read — and harder to verify. And when it's time to run payroll or settle a client question, all that uncertainty can cost you.

That's why thousands of contractors are switching to BusyBusy.

BusyBusy is built to make time tracking as easy and accurate as possible, without slowing you or your team down. Whether you're managing a small crew or multiple teams across several job sites, BusyBusy gives you the tools to track labor in real time. Employees can clock in from their phones, a supervisor can clock in the whole crew, or you can set up a kiosk at the job site.

Every clock-in is GPS-verified, so you'll always know exactly who was on site, where they were, and when they got to work.

That means no more chasing down missing time cards, dealing with messy handwriting, or guessing who did what. You'll save hours every week — and reduce costly errors.

And time tracking is just the beginning. BusyBusy also connects hours directly to cost codes, so you can see exactly how time and money are spent across different phases of your tile jobs. Your crew can complete daily safety sign-offs to help protect your business and reduce liability. And you can even take job site photos and videos that are automatically saved to the right project.

Everything stays organized. Everything's in one place. And everything's built with contractors like you in mind — so you can run a more efficient, more protected business with less stress.

BUILDING OUR WORKFORCE—

The next generation starts with a simple “YES”



Mullins at a local NAWIC conference



*By Alison Mullins,
Founder of Rep Methods®*

In May of 2023, I attended my first Industry Appreciation Night with the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) Richmond Chapter #141. I'd worked in sales for construction materials for years, so I decided to join the local chapter—but I was a sales rep, not a builder. Did I belong? Then someone mentioned Camp NAWIC, a weeklong construction camp supported by Henrico County's Career & Technical Education (CTE) program. Before I could overthink it, I turned to one of the ladies and asked, “How can I help?” I knew I was supposed to say “yes” to this. That yes began a transformation in my mindset that yes, I did belong in this amazing group of women in construction.

Reaching the next generation

The next generation is different, and the methods of reaching them will be uncomfortable. Across the tile, stone, flooring, and construction trades, we've spent years talking about a “labor shortage.” Installers are retiring. Experienced craftspeople are hard to find.

But when you step into classrooms of any youth trade program, you see something completely different: young people are here, and they are interested. They want meaningful work, financial stability, and mentors.

The workforce problem isn't the lack of talent—it's our reach. Today's youth discover careers through TikTok, YouTube, mentorship, camps, and assignments. They follow their own squirreled-away and swiping-right methods of curiosity. They seek purpose, but they don't dig deep. They respond to softer authenticity.

The good news is that the non-collegiate path is already paved. But we must show up.

Maximizing opportunities through CTE programs

Every public school district in the U.S. has a Career & Technical Education (CTE) program. These programs teach carpentry, drafting, design, construction trades, nursing, engineering, and more.

CTE programs are required to partner with local businesses, but most don't have enough participation. They need speakers, tours, internships, advisory board members, hands-on demos, and so much more.

Students are there. They're curious. They're exploring. The infrastructure exists—but visibility will require an army of “yes” people.

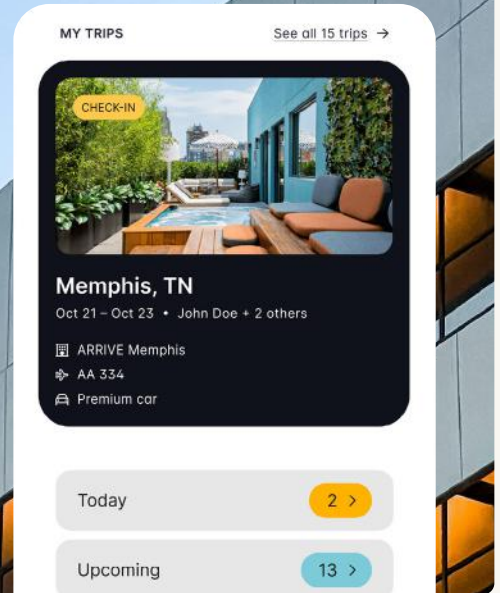
Get involved in these programs:

- **SkillsUSA: where the next generation is already showing up**

SkillsUSA connects more than 400,000 students each year to technical and construction careers. Many

Every business trip, one powerful platform

Engine gives you the flexibility to change travel plans, visibility into trends, and total control to prevent overspending. Smarter, faster, more powerful tools for business travel all-on-one platform. Welcome to modern travel management.



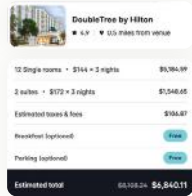
26% average savings

Loyalty points

Flexibility

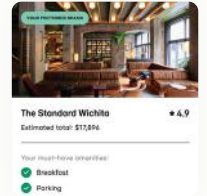
More savings

Save time and money with powerful business tools like custom travel policies, real-time expenditure tracking, and consolidated billing.



More choice

From your favorite airlines and hotels to your preferred car rental companies, we've got you covered. Explore over 750,000 properties, 250 airlines, and 40 car rental options.



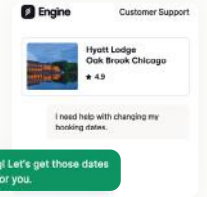
More rewards

Earn Engine Rewards on all lodging reservations in addition to your favorite travel loyalty programs. Cash in Engine Rewards on any trip!



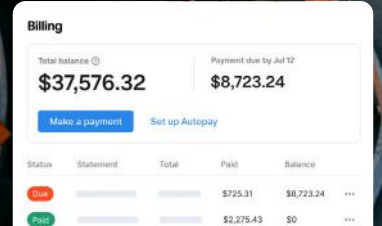
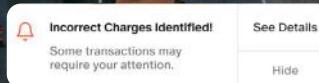
More flexibility

When plans change we're here for you. Get refunds for last-minute cancellations and shortened trips by booking with Flex.



More control

With flexible filters, travel policies, and analytics, Engine helps you manage company-wide travel and invoices and set policies all on one intuitive platform.



No agent-assist fees

No contracts

No minimum spend

INDUSTRY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



MAPEI's PP level Grid

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, scan.



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



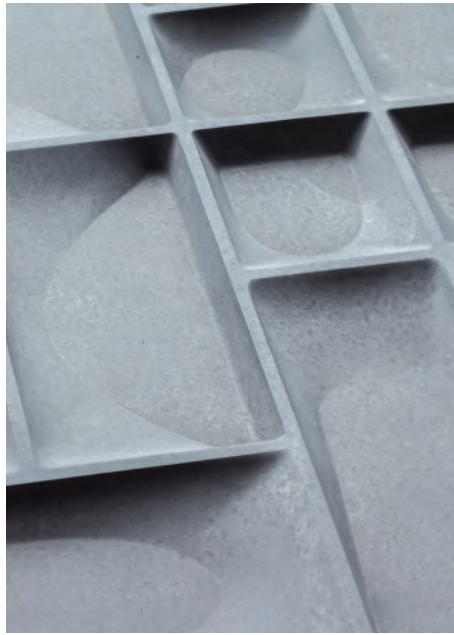
Students receiving their first 30-day calendar at the Order Maker event in Richmond, Va.

states host tile setting competitions, and pathways are expanding quickly. Volunteer as a judge. Sponsor a contest. Host a booth. Invite competitors to shadow your team.

(Ed. Note: NTCA has been involved with SkillsUSA in Georgia since 2018.)

- **ACE Mentor Program: exposure through experience**
The ACE Mentor Program of America introduces high school students to architecture and engineering through weekly mentoring, team-based design challenges, jobsite tours, and learning opportunities with industry leaders. Some of the largest construction companies are already involved. One hour a week can change a career. If your city has an ACE chapter, join it. If not, ACE can help you start one.
- **NAWIC chapters and NFSF: scholarships and empowerment**
The NAWIC Founders Scholarship Foundation (NFSF) awards scholarships every year to students entering construction-related programs. Combined with other NAWIC initiatives across the country, these programs create some of the most effective engagement pathways for young women entering the trades.
- **Industry- and manufacturer-led programs**
Tile and stone manufacturers have built robust training programs that support youth and adult learners. The NTCA Training programs, NSI E-learning, fabricator training systems, and training programs from Schluter, ARDEX, and LATICRETE are just a few examples. In addition, CFI offers flooring installation certification. These programs show what's possible—but implementation still has challenges.

Arto ARTO



Making Artisan Tile in the USA

Rustic Elegance Since 1966

at ARTO.com or follow us [@ARTOBRICK](https://www.instagram.com/ARTOBRICK) on Instagram

Call 310-768-8500 or howdy@arto.com

Rep Methods®

ORDER MAKER 2025

**BUILD BRANDS
CLOSING SALES
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES
BECOME AN ORDER MAKER**

AWARD WINNING

Author: Alison L. Mullins

**WHOLESALEERS, RETAILERS, SMALL BUSINESS
ENTREPRENEURS
STUDENTS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20TH

SALES & BRAND STRATEGY SUMMIT

RICHMOND, VA INVITES YOU TO ATTEND
ACCA SHRINER CENTER- 1712 BELLEVUE AVE, RICHMOND
9AM - 4PM EASTERN

BEST SELLER

THE ART OF SELLING

BEYOND ORDER MAKERS

The concept behind the Order Maker Summit was to introduce students to careers in sales within the industry.

Don't accept defeat

The concept behind the Order Maker Summit in Richmond, Va., was to introduce students to careers in sales within our industry. To get this started, I had direct access to the right people and infrastructure, but it was a struggle to build something new like sales training for the trade. Event turnout was lower than expected.

During a priming speaking event, 10 out of 30 ACE students showed curiosity about sales, business, and

branding, despite no prior business acumen. Four attended the event. Their feedback? They were bored.

What I realized is that students aren't disinterested; they're under-exposed. They hadn't been taught that a sales career could be a lucrative alternative to college. They didn't have any exposure to basic business structure or terminology.

I don't see my first event as a failure; I simply need to change my approach, and I have more to learn.



ACE Technical Center Entrepreneur Program students with Mullins.



Students at the Order Maker Event snapping photos of screens

MAKE A SPLASH

WITH TEC® POOL TILE INSTALLATION SYSTEM



Triple Flex



TotalFlex® XMS



Power Grout®

TEC pool tile products are designed for the most challenging underwater applications ever, including clear and transparent glass tiles. They are ideal for pools, spas, water features, showers and more. So work smarter not harder, when you dive into your next pool project!



Visit TECspecialty.com

10 simple ways to get involved with only a “yes”

These all can be implemented within the next 30 days.

1. Email your local CTE director. Ask what support their program needs.
2. Offer to speak to a class about careers in tile, flooring, stone, or fabrication.
3. Host a jobsite or showroom tour for a small group of students.
4. Volunteer with SkillsUSA at a state or regional competition.
5. Connect with your local NAWIC chapter to plug into existing youth outreach.
6. Share scholarship opportunities, such as NFSF and NSI, with local schools.
7. Host a hands-on demo day using materials you already have in the shop.
8. Join a CTE advisory board to help shape curriculum and industry connections.
9. Offer shadow days or internships—even one student makes a difference.
10. Partner with a community college or trade school on workshops or facility tours.



Mullins teaching a group of professionals and students at the Order Maker event in Richmond, Va.

The future belongs to those who say “yes”

If we want young people to come to us, we must do more than hope they show up. We must invite them in and show them who we are. And we must keep showing up. The next generation is not missing; they’re waiting for us to show them the open door. **TL**

Alison Mullins is a construction-industry sales strategist with more than 15 years of experience in surfaces. Through Rep Methods®, she provides sales transformation custom consulting agreements. Mullins also leads ACCM, a marketing agency supporting trade businesses. You can email her at info@repmethods, find her on LinkedIn or scan the code below.



Order Maker[®]

(*ör-där- ,mā-kər*) noun

Proactive sales leader. Builder of pipelines. Closer of deals. Creator of momentum. Not a taker. Order creator. Someone who creates opportunities, not just waits for them. Turns vision into results. Plays offense, not defense. Leads the way.

see also: go-getter, catalyst, rainmaker, trailblazer, disrupter of norms



QEP INTRODUCING THE **NEW & IMPROVED**

Black Widow™

Professional Diamond Blades

Built with a reinforced steel core to reduce flex, wobble, and vibration for ultra-smooth, consistent cuts.

From porcelain to marble,
Black Widow™ cuts it all with ease—
Your go-to for high-performance, versatile cutting.



qep.com | shopqep.com | 866-435-8665




 qeptools

SCAN HERE FOR
PRODUCT INFO




BUILD A REPUTATION THAT LASTS!

Your reputation is only as good as your last installation. Stay ahead of the curve and protect your bottom line with free workshop and regional training from the NTCA. Our expert-led sessions provide the hands-on instruction you need to master the latest industry standards, from advanced substrate preparation to the newest waterproofing technologies. Learn to navigate complex materials and avoid the common mistakes that lead to costly callbacks. Invest a few hours in your craft today to secure your success for tomorrow.

Register for FREE at [NTCATraining.com](https://www.ntcatraining.com)

DISTRIBUTOR'S LENS:

Why SKU DISCIPLINE and CHANNEL STRATEGY matter more than ever

By Joe Lundgren,
President, Joseph Lundgren Consulting



Armen Alajian from ARTO explains to distributors the importance of stocking profiles.

Disciplined stocking decisions shape contractor success, control costs, and strengthen the supply chain. But before conversations turn to stocking profiles, channel strategy, or inventory optimization, there is one foundational concept the industry must agree on: what exactly is a SKU?

A SKU, short for “Stock Keeping Unit,” is a unique identifier assigned to a specific product. Any variation in size, color, finish, thickness, packaging, or country of origin creates a different SKU. While that distinction may seem basic, it is the cornerstone of an effective distribution strategy.

SKU discipline starts with the distributor: What it means for the contractor

Manufacturers today may offer thousands—sometimes more than 10,000—individual SKUs. Distributors, however, cannot stock everything. Nor should they. SKU discipline begins with intentional stocking decisions designed to balance availability, economics, and service. When executed well, disciplined SKU management allows distributors to ensure immediate product availability for contractors, control inventory carrying costs, allocate cash flow efficiently (as with all businesses, “cash flow is king!”), and support the right sales channels with the right products.

For contractors, it is important to understand that a distributor’s stocking profile is not limited by default. It is truly a strategy. When contractors align their needs with what distributors stock, or what distributors can reliably source quickly—often domestic products—both parties benefit.

So if that’s the case, why don’t we have more than 12 domestic floor tile factories? To sum it up, it’s very expensive to build factories and produce tile in the U.S.

Since 2019 we have had an unstable import market due to tariffs, wars (Ukraine supplied as much as 40% of the body to European producers and Russia supplied 40%–45% of the natural gas used in Europe), not to mention skyrocketing freight costs. Nevertheless, manufacturers from around the world have been able to call “audibles” (aka, last-second strategy changes) in order to deal with these challenges.

The role of contractor communication

Effective SKU discipline depends heavily on communication. Contractors who clearly articulate what they install repeatedly, which products turn quickly, and what must be available same day or next day help distributors refine their stocking strategies.

While distributors rely on historical sales data, contractor input allows them to respond more quickly to shifts in demand and market conditions. This collaboration is essential in an industry where preferences, formats, and price points evolve rapidly.

Across many industries, high-priority products are commonly referred to as ‘A’ items. In tile and surface



Plan for What's Important

Investment Management | Financial Planning | Wealth Advisory



EP Wealth Advisors is a fee-only fiduciary with 50+ offices nationwide. In 2024, we proudly celebrated 25 years of serving high-net-worth individuals, families, and business owners by providing tailored strategies in investing, tax, estate, and retirement planning—among other specialized services.



Schedule your complimentary, no obligation consultation with Morgan DeGooyer, CFP®, and discuss how our team can help support your financial goals.

Morgan DeGooyer, CFP®
Wealth Advisor
Phone: (801) 896-5062
Email: mdegooyer@epwealth.com

Request an appointment with an EP Wealth Advisor when you have a minimum of \$500,000 in investable assets – which includes qualified retirement plans (IRA, Roth IRA, 401(k), taxable brokerage, cash (savings / checking) and CDs. Investable assets do not include your home, vehicles, or collectibles.



Many factories offer factory tours so customers can see firsthand the manufacturing process and, hence, the need for SKU management. Here, mosaic artist Allison Eden tours the ARTO factory in advance of her studio's collaboration with ARTO on the Palm Royale collaboration.

materials, these are the core SKUs. They include the formats, colors, finishes, and price points that consistently drive both volume and margin. These are the products distributors want on the shelf because they keep business moving efficiently.

Knowing what to stock and what to let go

Just as critical as deciding what to stock is deciding when to stop stocking certain items. Every new SKU added to inventory consumes working capital, warehouse space, and operational attention. Without disciplined SKU rationalization, inventory can quickly become bloated, slowing turns and increasing carrying costs.

Effective SKU management requires continuous evaluation of sales velocity, margin performance, and demand trends. Products that no longer earn their place on the shelf must be reduced or removed to maintain balance across inventory, cash flow, and warehouse capacity.



Distributors must display showroom items with clear lead times.



Take a fresh approach to shipping.

As a member of NTCA, you can save big!

NTCA members can receive discounted shipping rates on eligible services. Sign up for the FedEx Advantage® discounts program for free to start saving on eligible services.

With the FedEx Advantage program, you'll save up to:*

45% off	FedEx Express® shipping
25% off	FedEx Ground® shipping
25% off	FedEx Home Delivery®

It's free to sign up using your FedEx account number, and there are no quotas or commitments. Typically, your FedEx discounts will be available 7 to 10 business days after you join the FedEx Advantage program.

To enroll, go to PartnerShip.com/NTCA-FedEx



FedEx
Advantage®
Discounts

* FedEx shipping discounts are off standard list rates and cannot be combined with other offers or discounts. Discounts are exclusive of any FedEx surcharges, premiums, minimums, accessorials, or special handling fees. Eligible services and discounts subject to change. For eligible FedEx® services and rates, please call 1.800.GoFedEx 1.800.463.3339. See the applicable FedEx Service Guide for terms and conditions of service offers and money-back guarantee programs.



■ BUSINESS

This challenge mirrors the decisions manufacturers face as well. When new product lines are introduced, often consisting of dozens of SKUs, manufacturers and distributors must simultaneously assess which existing items are declining. Doing so preserves production capacity, raw material availability, and operational focus for the products that matter most.

Channel strategy: the other half of the equation

Channel strategy is inseparable from SKU discipline. Today's contractors operate within an increasingly complex distribution landscape that includes regional distributors, national distributors, importers, direct programs, and manufacturer-owned channels.

Understanding where the product originates and how it moves through the channel is becoming essential. Factors such as country of origin, lead times, tariff exposure, freight volatility, and manufacturing-concentration risks all influence stocking decisions.

Distributors evaluate SKUs not just by popularity, but by channel fit. Some products make sense for stocking branches or regional distribution centers. Others align better with job lot contractors or showroom-driven design businesses. Not every SKU belongs in every channel.

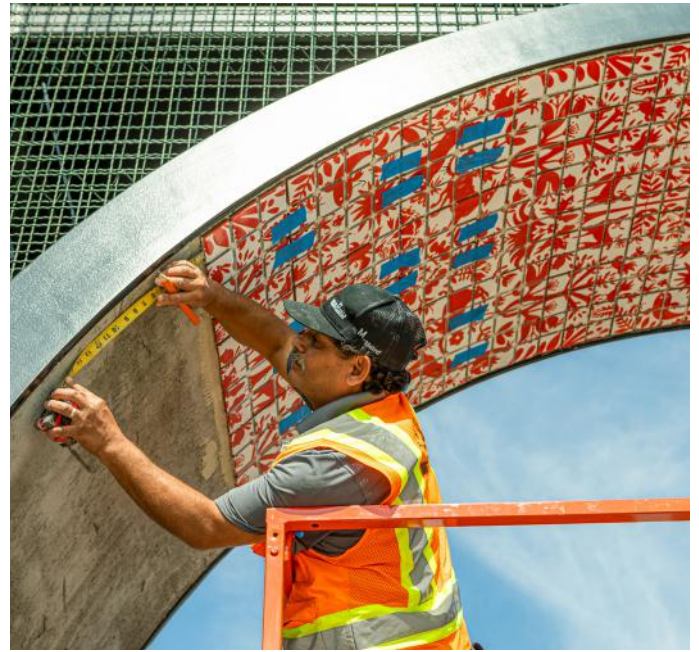
The economics behind the shelf

Every SKU stocked represents cash tied up in inventory, warehouse space utilization, handling and logistics costs, and the risk of obsolescence. SKU discipline allows distributors to reduce these costs while still ensuring contractors have access to the products they need, whether from local stock, regional inventory, or reliable inbound programs. When done correctly, disciplined SKU management strengthens service levels without sacrificing financial performance.

Why this matters to contractors

Contractors who understand SKU discipline and channel strategy gain tangible advantages. Faster job starts, fewer material delays, stronger distributor relationships, improved pricing leverage, and more predictable supply all stem from alignment across the supply chain.

Rather than pushing distributors to stock everything, the more effective approach is collaboration. Understanding a distributor's stocking profile, aligning on core high-turn SKUs, planning for special order or long-lead items, and communicating upcoming needs early create shared expectations and better outcomes.



ARTO's LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes project in Los Angeles was the result of the installer and manufacturer understanding lead times and stocking profiles.

If you're a contractor reading this, you might say, "I don't have time to order the material once the general contractor awards my firm the contract." This can only be overcome by working with the distributor who is pushing the architect/owner to place orders. This distributor also needs the contractor to push from their end through the general contractor to ensure the contract is awarded with time to do a final takeoff and order the material.

When distributors and contractors operate with a mutual understanding of SKU discipline and channel roles, costs decline, service improves, and the entire supply chain becomes more resilient. **TL**

Joe Lundgren is a globally-recognized product and marketing expert in the ceramic and stone industries, with deep expertise in business development, product management, and marketing strategy. He spent 27 years at Dal-Tile, a subsidiary of Mohawk Industries, serving most recently as Vice President of Marketing, overseeing the Daltile and American Olean brands, Mohawk ceramic products, and all home center channel programs. Lundgren led strategic planning, global sourcing, and joint ventures in China, Italy, and Mexico. He holds a BS from Pepperdine University and an MBA from La Verne University.

Connect with him at joe@jlconsult.com.

Now Available in
Print and Digital Formats

2025 TCNA Handbook and ANSI Standards

ANSI A137.2



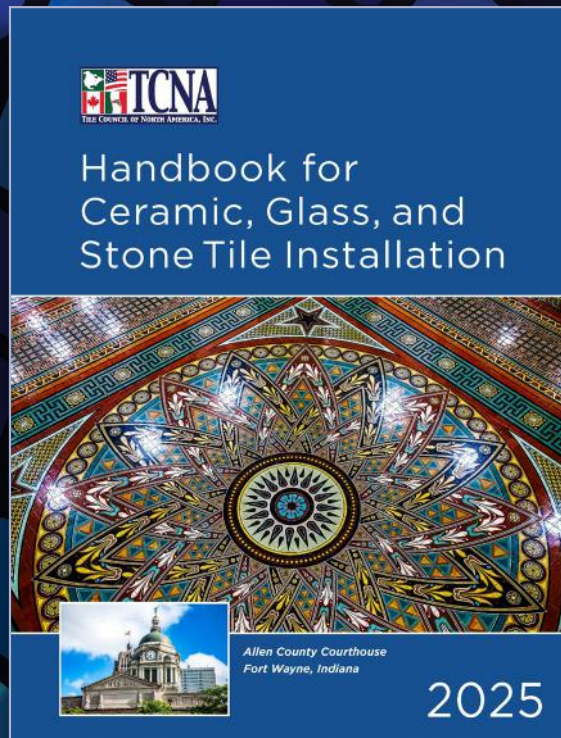
ANSI A137.1



ANSI A108, A118, and A136



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



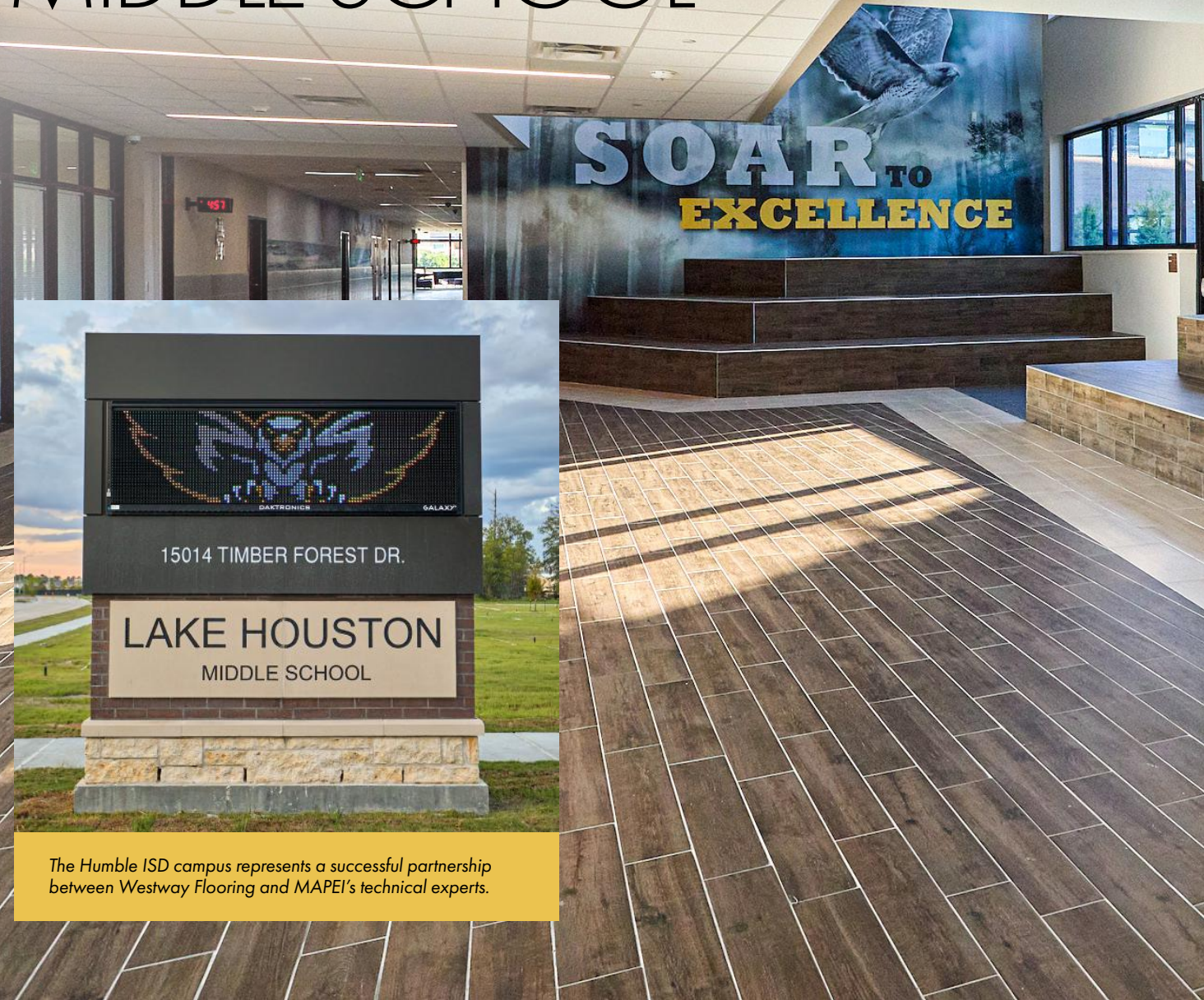
Update your reference library today
with the standards information you
need for a successful project.



www.tcnatile.com

A lesson in precision:

MAPEI products help build LAKE HOUSTON MIDDLE SCHOOL



The Humble ISD campus represents a successful partnership between Westway Flooring and MAPEI's technical experts.



Durable 6" x 24" wood-look porcelain tiles create a warm, inviting atmosphere in the high-traffic corridors, finished with Ultracolor Plus FA grout.

In the ever-expanding Humble Independent School District (ISD) near Houston, Texas, a new middle school is rising, designed to support future generations of students in a fast-growing region. Known as Lake Houston Middle School (Humble Middle School #11), this expansive facility represents more than just classroom space—it's a study in design sophistication, large-format tile installation and high-performance materials. Helping lead the charge in this multi-surface endeavor was Westway Flooring, which turned to MAPEI for a full system of tile installation products that could keep up with the ambitious project scope.

"This wasn't a typical school tile job," explained Gary Sharpe, Project Manager with Westway Flooring, an NTCA Member tile contracting company. "We had to install tile up to 24' [7.32m] high, manage massive 3' x 10' [0.91m x 3.05m] Laminam panels in interior and exterior settings, and coordinate it all while keeping up with the overall construction schedule. MAPEI's products and support made the difference."

Building from the ground up

Construction on Lake Houston Middle School began in September 2024, with tile installation scheduled to wrap up in May 2025. The project included the installation of porcelain tiles in a variety of formats—from 2" x 8" (5cm x 20cm) accent tiles to large-format 12" x 24" (30cm x 61cm) porcelain tile, to expansive Crossville Laminam porcelain panels measuring 3' x 10' (0.91m x 3.05m).

In total, the tile installation included:

- 4,000 sq. ft. (372 m²) of 6" x 6" (15cm x 15cm) quarry tile with epoxy grout
- 24,100 sq. ft. (2,239 m²) of 6" x 24" (15cm x 61cm) wood-look porcelain tile
- 45,300 sq. ft. (4,208 m²) of 12" x 24" (30cm x 61cm) porcelain tile on walls and floors
- 8,550 sq. ft. (794 m²) of 2" x 8" (5cm x 20cm) accent wall tile
- 6,000 sq. ft. (557 m²) of 3' x 10' (0.91m x 3.05m) Crossville Laminam panels in various colors and thicknesses



Lake Houston Middle School has a striking new emblem and floor tile to welcome students and teachers to the building.

“Projects of this scale really showcase how important it is to have a complete system from one manufacturer,” said Rick Hay, MAPEI Sales Representative. “From surface prep to waterproofing to the adhesives and grouts, we were able to provide Westway Flooring with solutions at every step.”

MAPEI’s complete system solutions

MAPEI products were used throughout the installation, starting with surface preparation. In areas where the concrete subfloor required leveling, **Novoplan 2 Plus** high-strength, self-leveling, cement-based underlayment and repair mix was applied to create a smooth, stable base. For crack isolation, **Mapelastix CI** premixed, liquid-rubber, quick-drying crack isolation membrane was used, and wet areas such as restrooms received **Mapelastix AquaDefense**, a premixed, advanced liquid-rubber, extremely quick-drying waterproofing and crack isolation membrane for waterproofing protection.

“One of the great things about working with MAPEI is the reliability of the systems,” said Charlie Patterson, MAPEI Sales Representative. “Contractors can trust that the products will perform—and if there are questions, we’re here for them.”

The setting materials were carefully selected based on tile size and substrate. For the bulk of the porcelain tile installation, **Keraflex SG** (Gray) standard-grade, extra-smooth, large- and heavy-tile mortar with polymer provided the strength and open time needed. For the large-format 3’ x 10’ (0.91m x 3.05m) panels, installers used **Keraflex Super** (White) premium, extra-smooth, large-and-heavy-tile, nonsag/nonslump mortar with polymer and no VOCs—and it exceeded expectations.

“We worked with the architect and were able to get Keraflex Super approved specifically for the Laminam panel installs,” Sharpe said. “The workability and strength were ideal for those large panels, and it helped us stay on schedule.”

Grouting was also tailored to each application. **Ultracolor Plus FA** high-performance, rapid-setting grout was used in most standard tiled areas, while **Kerapoxy CQ** premium two-component, 100%-solids, epoxy grout was used in commercial kitchens and high-moisture spaces. **Mapesil T Plus** professional-grade, 100%-silicone sealant was used at expansion joints and floor transitions, and **Keracaulk U** premium, unsanded siliconized acrylic caulk was used at vertical corners and door jambs.

Your **build** Your way Backed by **MAPEI**



FLEXIBILITY

Complete, customizable shower solutions ranging from liquid membranes to waterproof boards and pre-formed accessories



PERFORMANCE

Engineered for total moisture control in residential and commercial environments, from spas to steam rooms



WARRANTY

Best-BackedSM protection that safeguards your craft and ensures a lifetime of leak-free reliability



Mapeguard[®] Shower Systems

Your Build. Your Way.

Learn more



Customized waterproofing. Backed by MAPEI.

From custom residential baths to high-traffic commercial gang showers, **Mapeguard**[®] Shower Systems offer a complete, integrated solution for total moisture control. Whether you prefer the speed of waterproof boards or the seamless protection of liquid membranes, our systems are designed to adapt to your specific project needs. Visit www.mapei.us.



#MAPEIUSA #BuiltMyWay





To ensure that the subfloor was perfectly smooth and would provide a high-strength base for the tile installation, the crew installed Novoplan 2 Plus self-leveling underlayment.



Systematic floor installation underway, where every tile is carefully leveled to eliminate lippage. This stage highlights the reliability of MAPEI setting materials, providing the necessary workability for the crew to maintain a consistent pace.

Overcoming installation challenges

Installing tile at heights of 24' (7.32m), including vertical accent tile and large porcelain panels, presented unique challenges for the Westway crew. Working from manlifts, mechanics and helpers used trowel-applied mortars while harnessed in full three-point safety gear.

"Safety was a big concern," Sharpe said. "But our team was trained and experienced, and MAPEI's products had the workability and bond strength we needed to get those tiles installed securely and safely."

Equally complex were the "portals"—large vertical tile installations in 11 areas throughout the school that had to be coordinated with adjacent trades.

"Those portals took careful planning," Sharpe said. "But with the right MAPEI materials and a coordinated effort from all involved, we made it work."

A trusted partnership

Westway Flooring's longstanding relationship with MAPEI proved crucial throughout the project. Product availability, performance, and technical support were all instrumental in keeping the job on track.

"There were days when we needed a specific grout or mortar the next day, and MAPEI came through every time,"



An aerial view of the new Lake Houston Middle School, where over 90,000 sq. ft. of tile and stone were installed using a complete MAPEI system.



Vibrant accent tiles pop against neutral backgrounds on the walls, while warm wood-look porcelain tiles create a clear pathway on the floor.

Sharpe said. “That kind of local product availability and responsive support is why we choose to work with MAPEI.”

Hay echoed the sentiment. “Westway is a top-tier installer, and when you pair their craftsmanship with MAPEI’s system solutions, the results speak for themselves.”

With its complex design, large-format tiles, and vertical installations, Lake Houston Middle School pushed the boundaries of traditional school

construction. Thanks to the skilled team at Westway Flooring and the comprehensive support from MAPEI, the project is set to be completed on time and to the highest standards.

“This is one of those projects that makes you proud,” Patterson said. “It highlights the craftsmanship of our contractor partners and shows how MAPEI’s system solutions can meet any challenge.” **TL**



High-performance wall tile reaches heights of 24’ in the main entryway, showcasing the extreme bond strength of Keraflex SG.



With the tiles set, the team prepares for the final step: applying Ultracolor Plus FA grout to ensure a durable, color-consistent finish that stands up to heavy foot traffic.

National Tile Contractors Association

ELEVATE YOUR CRAFT. SECURE YOUR FUTURE.

In an industry where precision is paramount, every mistake costs you. The NTCA equips you with the most comprehensive technical standards and installation training in the industry. As part of your membership, you receive the *NTCA Reference Manual* – a definitive guide to help you navigate complex installations, avoid costly errors, and ensure every job meets the highest industry standards.

- ✓ **Access Instant Answers:** On-demand technical support and documented best practices.
- ✓ **Reduce Costly Errors:** Minimize callbacks and protect your reputation.
- ✓ **Install with Confidence:** Stay ahead of new materials, standards and advanced techniques.

Join Now



www.tile-assn.com



**Membership
isn't a cost; it's
an investment that pays for
itself through unmatched
installation training, technical
expertise, and support that
only the
"Voice of the Tile Contractor"
can provide.**

THE NEXT GENERATION OF TILE PROFESSIONALS— REACHING for the STARS



By Lesley Goddin, Editorial Director and Senior Writer

As the tile industry evolves, a new generation of contractors, business owners, and installers is bringing fresh energy, digital fluency, and entrepreneurial ambition. Members of the National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA) say the industry has strong foundations—but also clear opportunities to better support emerging leaders and propel them to their visions of success.

Where the industry excels

Education is a standout strength. From standards to certifications, installers praise the breadth and affordability of training available through NTCA, manufacturers, and suppliers.

“There’s an impressive amount of technical training available through NTCA, manufacturers, and suppliers, and much of it is free or very affordable,” said Ashley Singer of Tile Jawn in Phoenixville, Pa. “Whenever I’ve needed guidance or didn’t know where to start, the response from NTCA staff, suppliers, and manufacturers has been fast and generous. That ‘ask and you shall receive’ culture is empowering, and I don’t feel like I’m operating on an island.”

Megan Garvey of Welch Tile in Holland, Mich., emphasized that education must extend beyond installers. “To successfully attract new talent, we must unite around a consistent message that the tile trade is appealing, rewarding, and offers long-term

career opportunities,” she said, urging distributors and manufacturers to actively participate.

Craftsmanship is also experiencing a resurgence. Joppe Aguirre of Casacadia Tile Company, LLC in Bend, Ore., noted, “More installers are getting into detailed work like mosaics, and that focus on craftsmanship and creativity is helping raise the bar for the industry as a whole.”

Social media plays a growing role. Alex Nez of Columbia River Tile & Stone in Portland, Ore., said, “The industry is doing well at communicating through social media about their products and services. It makes sense since it’s another way to engage with your customers.” Still, he cautioned, “I’m not a fan of how many people on social media make everything look SO clean, which creates an expectation for future/current installers.”

Singer pointed to Facebook groups like Tile the World that engage both homeowners and installers in conversations about TCNA standards. She encouraged the industry to explain standards clearly, without overwhelming jargon, and to teach homeowners what to look for when hiring skilled trades. “Clear, accessible education builds trust, raises expectations, and creates a stronger pipeline of informed clients and future professionals,” she said.

Learning goals: technical and business growth

Despite strong technical resources, young professionals want more. Garvey values networking with experienced

REDGARD®

The ONE Name to Trust
for Waterproofing and Crack Isolation.



Trust the proven
RedGuard brand for
waterproofing and
crack prevention.
Ask for it by name
when you buy tile
installation materials.



Scan this to
learn more about
RedGuard!

DOWNLOAD CUSTOM'S
MOBILE APP



Available at
The Home Depot
and tile distributors
nationwide.



CustomBuildingProducts.com
800-272-8786



CUSTOM®

A QUIKRETE® COMPANY

INDUSTRY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



MAPEI's Profiles & Trims

MAPEI's extensive Profiles and Trims collection offers over 4,500 high-quality, durable pieces designed to enhance any project. With a wide variety of styles, shapes, and sizes — from classic to contemporary — this line empowers architects, designers, and builders to achieve tailored, cohesive designs. Each profile and trim features color-complementary options that seamlessly integrate with diverse palettes, ensuring perfect harmony, whether you're creating subtle accents or bold statements.

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, scan.



Ashley Singer of Tile Jawn used AI to create this caricature of herself, partner Marlon Cedeño, and helper cat Beamster.



Alex Nez, Columbia River Tile & Stone

leaders. “Learning from those who have navigated challenges before me strengthens both my technical knowledge and my business decision-making,” she said.

Business education is a recurring theme. Gracelynn Rael of Hawthorne Tile in Portland, Ore., asked, “How do you advertise yourself? What makes a tile installer stand out from the others, and how do they get jobs? How can I read plans and translate them into real life?”

Janice Hill of D.W. Sanders Tile & Stone Contracting in Marietta, Ga., sees value in more training on reading contracts and contract negotiations, and said information on job costing, managing people, sustainable growth, bidding, and using jobsite plans effectively is in demand.

Hill described her company's structured approach: weekly meetings to compare job costs versus estimates using WIP reports with real-time numbers, quarterly meetings with a financial advisor, and over/under reports at closeout to anticipate trends. “Job tracking for everything coming up, even in the years to come, is important for our success in running our company,” she said.

Challenges in a changing industry

Rapid product innovation and evolving standards present ongoing hurdles. Aguirre said growing sustainably with trustworthy people who share his quality standards—while staying profitable—is a conundrum.

Rael noted that the wide range of skills required from

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!

[LEARN MORE!](#) 

Meridio



Ashley Singer, on the job.



Gracelynn Rael, Hawthorne Tile



Joppe Aguirre, Cascadia Tile Company, LLC



Megan Garvey, Welch Tile

job to job makes it difficult to gain deep proficiency. Through a Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee (JATC) program, she focuses on one skill at a time. “In those classes, we study a TCNA standard and bring it to life with the help of senior installers by creating modules and real-life scenarios,” she said.

Resistance to change irks Garvey, especially the “We’ve always done it this way” mindset. She added, “Remaining open to new ways of thinking in recruitment, retention, or technical advancements is key, and being willing to adapt across all levels and generations is essential for long-term success.”

Singer noted that when multiple trades are involved in a project, overwhelmed clients often default to a GC or tile store. “That often leaves skilled tile installers on the sidelines, not because of a lack of ability, but because project management and coordination aren’t clearly communicated or supported as part of our role,” she said. “Many of us... weren’t trained or encouraged to market ourselves that way.”

Rebecca Heustess of Grazzini Brothers & Company in Eagan, Minn., cited labor shortages and

limited public awareness of tile’s technical demands. She constantly balances “quality, schedules, costs, and people while keeping operations healthy.”

Hill raised concerns about product specifications. “Some reps just go off of what manufacturers say (i.e., zellige in steam showers/shower floors) and it can compromise assemblies and methods,” she said. Contractors often must educate customers and design teams to make necessary changes.



Janice Hill, D.W. Sanders Tile & Stone Contracting



Rebecca Heustess, Grazzini Brothers & Company

Equipping the next generation

“To support and attract the next generation, the industry needs to expand how it defines success,” Singer said. Project management, communication, and business education are as essential as technical skills. “Showing younger installers that tile work can evolve into leadership, collaboration, and long-term career growth would make the trade more accessible, sustainable, and appealing,” she added.

Heustess agreed. “When people can see a future in the trade, they’re more likely to commit to it,” she said, calling for a more compelling story about opportunity and career paths.

Digital outreach is central to that effort. Aguirre suggested mobile apps for easier access to TCNA and ANSI publications on the jobsite. Garvey added, “The industry should actively showcase tile as an artistic craft and a highly-skilled trade by leveraging online platforms and digital storytelling.” She encouraged a unified message: “Together, we can become our own ‘influencer’ group and inspire the next generation to see tile as a viable and exciting career path.”

Hill emphasized apprenticeship programs with

“obtainable goals and a clear path to grow through the company” as critical to long-term retention.

The role of NTCA

NTCA plays a key role in building confidence and community. Aguirre said, “Being a member has connected me with business owners and installers with a lot more years of experience. I have a lot of people in the NTCA that I can call for help.”

Garvey praised the full range of resources—*TileLetter* magazine, *TileTV*, newsletters, and the Tile Pro Network app—which connect members in a private online forum.

“The strength of NTCA lies in its people,” she said, noting that access to members, staff, board leaders, and even the president “creates unparalleled learning opportunities and is a powerful foundation for success.”

Heustess summed it up as: “NTCA gives me confidence. It’s a trusted resource that helps me stay informed, educated, and connected. Whether it’s technical guidance, training opportunities, or access to people who truly know the industry, NTCA helps me make better decisions on and off the jobsite. It supports not just how we install tile, but how we grow as professionals and business owners in a constantly changing industry.” **TL**

New Product Launch Special for a Limited Time Only

KEEDEROLL® WT

PLATFORM[™]
PERFORMANCE
FLOORING SYSTEMS
A KEENE INC. COMPANY



KeedeRoll® WT is a watertight uncoupling mat that delivers dual defense protection with a waterproof barrier and Structured Strand[™] layer for crack isolation and load distribution. Its built-in seam overlap, easy rollout design, and broad mortar compatibility make installation fast and reliable for any space.

BUY 3 GET 1 FREE

Buy 3 rolls (or pallets) of **KeedeRoll® WT** and get the 4th roll (or pallet) **FREE**.

**SCAN
FOR
OFFER**



Innovating the Tile Tool Industry

FloFX
Bond Flanges & Grates for Drains



See page 9-14

Gruen
Linear & Point Drains & Niches



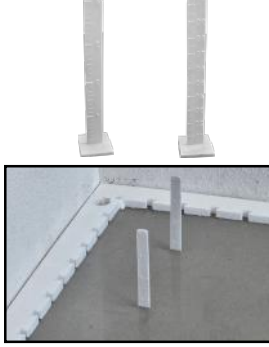
See page 15-17

Illuminiche
Pre-Lit Niches & Light Channels



See page 18

Leveling Pin
SLU Depth Gauge



See page 24

Kneel-It
V3 Rolling Knee Pad & Support



See page 32-33

Bucket Scoop
Curved Stainless Steel Blade



See page 34

Wedge MD
Tile Lippage Control System



*Coming soon

See page 43

MLT Space & Break
Clip Lippage System



See page 49



Scan to view these new products in the RTC Products Vol. 13 digital catalog

Over 1,400 SKUs Manufactured for the Installer and Always Adding More!



Scan to visit our website

Contact your Dealer to Order Today! Dealer inquiries welcome!

CALL (262) 432-0877

RTCPRODUCTS.COM • SALES@RTCPRODUCTS.COM

One Revolutionary Product at a Time

NXT Pedestal
Max & Mini Pedestal System



See page 50-51

Sigma Vibrator
Tile Beater for Grinder



See page 60

Flex Float
Urethane Grout Float



See page 60

WrinGo Mobile Station
Case & Rolling Basin for WrinGo



See page 66

Caibro Square
Precision Tile Trim Cutting Tool



See page 79

Nip Nut
For Grinders - 5/8"-11 (2-pack)



See page 79

Tile Bullseye
Tile Drilling Template & Guide



See page 80

Hydro Tail
Universal Water Attachment



See page 87

**Contact your Local Dealer for these
New Innovative Products!**



Scan to view these
new products in the
RTC Products Vol. 13
digital catalog



ONE to ONE



TIM ABBOTT AND WIFE XOCHITL

with the Northeast Polk Chamber of Commerce's award to PROFLEX Products for 2024 Large Business of the Year.

PROFLEX PRODUCTS, INC.:

building a one-stop solution for the flooring industry



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



The PROFLEX team at Coverings 2025 (l. to r.): Jim Hanley, Dale Kane, Maxx Bradford, Richard Trujillo, Ramon Olivera, and Gerard Gigon, with Tim Abbott, seated.

I recently talked with Tim Abbott, CEO of PROFLEX Products, Inc., while he was at the International Builder Show in Orlando. We discussed how a small sound-control product company has evolved into a comprehensive flooring solutions provider with approximately 7,000 SKUs.

From three products to a complete ecosystem

In 2003, an owner of 50-year-old Florida distribution company Shoreline Flooring Supplies identified a market need for sound-control products. That initial vision launched PROFLEX Products, Inc. with just three peel-and-stick membranes—40 mil, 70 mil, and 90 mil—along with a couple of primers.

When Tim Abbott joined the company in 2008 as National Sales Manager, the company had only seven SKUs. Those SKUs have since multiplied a thousand times over, with PROFLEX® now offering approximately 7,000 products and solutions across multiple categories.

“We just kept building,” Abbott explained, noting that the growth reflects a strategic vision to become a true one-stop shop for distributors and contractors.

Designed for Life in **COLOR**

With **MyDesign**, Schluter profiles and shelves become part of the design—not just a detail. This versatile customization program lets finishes blend seamlessly or stand out with intention.



Digital printing for profiles replicates tile surfaces like wood, marble, and stone for a cohesive look



RAL program offers custom **color-coated profiles** and **shelves** in 190 RAL colors for bold accents or precise coordination



SCAN TO
LEARN MORE



A comprehensive product portfolio

The expansion from sound-control underlayments to a full-service provider happened systematically. Abbott brought adhesives, thinsets, and liquid waterproofing into the product line, improved existing primers, and added rubber products for sound control. The company now serves multiple divisions:

- **Sound Control Division:** The original focus that built the company's reputation
- **Surface Preparation Products:** Self-leveling compounds, moisture mitigation, and waterproofing solutions
- **Tile and Stone:** Complete thinsets, self-leveling products, floor-prep solutions, grouts, and caulking
- **Wood Products:** Wood adhesives and repair kits
- **Luxury Vinyl and Carpet:** Pressure-sensitive adhesives and carpet adhesives
- **Tools and Accessories:** Tack strip, clips, wedges, seam tape, tile saws, blades, and more

This comprehensive approach allows distributors to order everything they need from a single source.

"If you're doing a hotel and they have glue-down commercial carpet, luxury vinyl, tile, and hardwood, we have answers and solutions for all of that," Abbott said. "You have one phone call, and we can give you system warranties up to a lifetime for that project."

Manufacturing excellence in Florida

PROFLEX operates a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Haines City, Fla., with four powder production lines and two liquid lines. The company has invested in automation and innovation, including a brand-new automated line, set to be completed within a year, to handle S-type mortars, M-type mortars, and floor mud. Additionally, PROFLEX operates a facility in Texas for wood adhesives and pressure-sensitive adhesives, with plans to eventually establish powder plants in Texas and the Phoenix area to better serve Western markets.

"We're very strong from New York to Ohio and then straight down and over into Texas," Abbott explained. The company's geographic expansion strategy focuses on building demand before investing in new facilities, a measured approach that reflects both ambition and financial prudence.

Strategic partnerships and distribution

Rather than competing with home centers, PROFLEX works through established distribution channels. The company supplies products to Lowe's, a relationship that began nine years ago, and sells through QEP direct to The Home Depot. PROFLEX is also the only approved vendor for all sundry items for the Abbey Carpet and Floors to Go buying groups, and maintains partnerships with American Home Surfaces Group for markets without established distribution.



Some of the PROFLEX team joined with the Northeast Polk Rotary to deliver lunch to the local fire station.



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.

[**LEARN MORE**](#)



The Liberty series is packaged in plastic bags onsite to offer a two-year shelf life, compared to one year for paper-bagged products. A portion of proceeds from every Liberty series bag sold goes to the Gary Sinise Foundation, Children of Fallen Heroes, and Valerie's House, a local Florida organization supporting children who've lost parents.

This distribution-first approach protects relationships while allowing flexibility. Regarding direct sales to contractors, Abbott explained, "If they're buying full pallets, I can sell them a full pallet of material. But if you have a distributor relationship, you're going to protect the distributor in that market, absolutely."

Building a sales force on relationships and expertise

All of PROFLEX's sales representatives are employees—many of whom were hired from the flooring trades. Abbott deliberately seeks people with deep industry relationships and expertise. One representative came from Tampa Tile before it closed, bringing established connections and credibility. The national accounts manager came from Florida Tile.

Abbott's preference is clear: "My love has always been with the hard surface tile world." This focus shapes hiring decisions. While the company manufactures some luxury vinyl and carpet adhesives, Abbott has prioritized hiring hard surface and tile specialists, believing that tile and hardwood remain the best investments for home value.

Innovation driven by market needs

Research and development is led by Alan Kin, an industry veteran whom Abbott met at an NTCA event. The R&D team

includes three additional staff members focused on quality control, product development, and compatibility testing.

Distributor feedback and market demands drive product development. When Florida's moisture issues became a concern, PROFLEX developed a two-part epoxy for unlimited moisture mitigation. Another innovation was a rain-safe waterproofing product that can be applied over wet substrates.

"With all the rain that we have in Florida, if you need to tile a balcony, you can squeegee that water off and then put the waterproofing and crack isolation down," he said. "It's rain-safe in 45 minutes, and then you can start tiling."

The Liberty series, packaged in plastic bags onsite, offers a two-year shelf life compared to one year for paper-bagged products. Even more notably, a portion of proceeds from every Liberty series bag sold goes to three charities: the Gary Sinise Foundation, Children of Fallen Heroes, and Valerie's House, a local Florida organization supporting children who've lost parents.

Market focus: residential and commercial balance

PROFLEX's market is about 50% residential new construction and 50% commercial. The company works extensively with major builders like Lennar and dominates the multifamily condo market, where sound-control specifications often lead to sales of the company's complete product systems.

ALPHA



BLACK BELT Wet Cutting System

- Professional Quality Rail Saw for Large Format Tiles
- Best Turbo Rim Tile Blade on the Market
- Designed for Cutting Quartzite/ Granite and Porcelain Paver Tiles



** Shown with optional 8-Roller Side Table and Side Counter-cut accessories*

 **Alpha Professional Tools**

16 Park Dr Ste 9, Franklin, NJ 07416 • 800-648-7229
www.alpha-tools.com

Copyright © 2025 Alpha Professional Tools. All rights reserved.



■ ONE-TO-ONE

Top sellers in the tile and stone division include liquid waterproofing products, particularly the Hydrosil line with NOA approval for Miami-Dade standards—crucial for hurricane-prone Florida. Thinsets ranging from entry-level to premium drive consistent sales, as do self-leveling products. A single St. Petersburg project consumed approximately 60,000 bags of self-leveling compound per floor.

Competitive differentiation through service

In an industry with many competitors, PROFLEX differentiates through comprehensive solutions and exceptional service. “The thing that makes us different from every single one of them is the fact that we have solutions for any type of floor covering,” Abbott said. “There’s no one that can really out-service us.”

Change to: Orders placed before noon are shipped before noon the next day—a 24-hour turnaround compared to the industry standard of three to five days. Jobsite deliveries are available, and technical support is readily accessible. Abbott personally sits on the NTCA Technical Committee and remains involved in customer support.

Expanding into exterior applications

Recognizing market trends, PROFLEX is expanding into exterior applications with the company’s rain-safe waterproofing. A pedestal system launch is anticipated in Q3 or Q4 of 2026, addressing the growing market for large-format and thick tile installations.

Supporting the Industry

PROFLEX actively supports industry training and standards through participation in NTCA Technical Committees and programs. The company provides onsite technical assistance to prevent installation failures, recognizing that floor preparation remains the most common issue affecting product performance.

Working with PROFLEX

Distributors and contractors can reach PROFLEX by calling 1-877-577-6353. Abbott himself can be reached at TAbbott@Proflex.us via email. A national accounts manager travels the country to meet with potential partners and facilitate onboarding. Or contact PROFLEX through the company website’s dealer network by scanning this QR code. In an industry where relationships matter, PROFLEX is proving that growth and values can go hand in hand. **TL**



St. Petersburg’s 400 Central is one of the largest developments on the West Coast of Florida, both in size and amenities. Sigma Marble, Tile and Terrazzo used PROFLEX solutions to manage sound and moisture challenges on this project.



TILETV

Keep your skills sharp with monthly episodes featuring technical tips and the latest news from across the industry.

TileTV is made possible through the generous sponsorship of our industry partners. Their ongoing support allows us to deliver high-quality content to our viewers. We are incredibly grateful for their partnership and shared commitment to elevating the NTCA TileTV experience for our entire community.



Visit YouTube at /c/NationalTileContractorsAssociation

Foundations of WET AREAS:

NEW FREE NTCA WORKSHOP FOR 2026



By Lesley Goddin,
Editorial Director and Senior Writer

Kitchens and bathrooms—especially showers—are among the most common areas in a home to receive tile. These wet environments pose unique challenges, because moisture can cause serious damage if installations are not executed correctly. Building a durable, waterproof, and high-performing shower is a critical skill for professional tile installers. Yet not all installers are fully versed in the essential principles and best practices required for long-term success in wet areas.

Classroom instruction: building the foundation

NTCA Training Department Manager Matt Welner explained that the workshop begins by clarifying the difference between complete manufacturer systems and time-tested methods published in the *Tile Council of North America (TCNA) Handbook for Ceramic, Glass and Stone Tile Installation*. Understanding this distinction is essential for making informed decisions about materials and installation approaches.

From there, instructors break down every required component of a shower system: walls, floors, shower pans, curbs, and drains.

“It doesn’t matter if it’s a \$100,000 house or a \$10 million house—every shower requires certain things: your walls, your floors, your shower pan,” Welner said. You’re going to have a curb. You’re going to have a drain. There are required components.”

The workshop also explores optional features such as niches, shelves, benches, grab bars, heated flooring, mirrors, towel hooks, and more. While these upgrades can increase profitability, they also introduce additional risk. Each penetration or added feature presents another potential failure point if not properly waterproofed and integrated into the overall system.



The NTCA Foundations of Wet Areas workshop aims to educate installers so they can prevent catastrophic failures in wet areas and shower installations.

Instructors emphasize critical technical standards, including proper substrate slope to drain, wall flatness tolerances per ANSI standards, and best practices for correcting misaligned studs. Participants learn about different types of backer boards, including cementitious backer units, foam panels, and traditional mud methods, and how to select the right system for each application.

The *TCNA Handbook’s* Product Selection Guide is introduced as a valuable tool for choosing compatible tile, mortars, grouts, backer boards, and waterproofing membranes. By understanding how individual components work together, installers can avoid mixing incompatible materials that compromise performance.



International Product Assurance
LABORATORIES

Testing for Materials Characterization

Materials characterization helps you better understand the effect and performance of materials in your products.

IPA Laboratories partners with Clemson University to offer state-of-the-art testing to provide you with a clearer picture of the properties of the materials you work with:

X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) w/ Loss on Ignition

X-Ray Diffraction (XRD)

Particle Size Analysis

Gradient Firing Test

Dilatometry for Coefficient of Thermal Expansion (CTE)

Carbon & Sulfur Content

Soluble Salts (Anions/Cations)

Defect Analysis

Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)

Inductively Couple Plasma-Mass Spectroscopy (ICP-MS)

International Product Assurance Laboratories













100 Clemson Research Boulevard, Anderson, SC 29625 USA

Phone +1 855-IPA-LABS testing@IPALaboratories.com

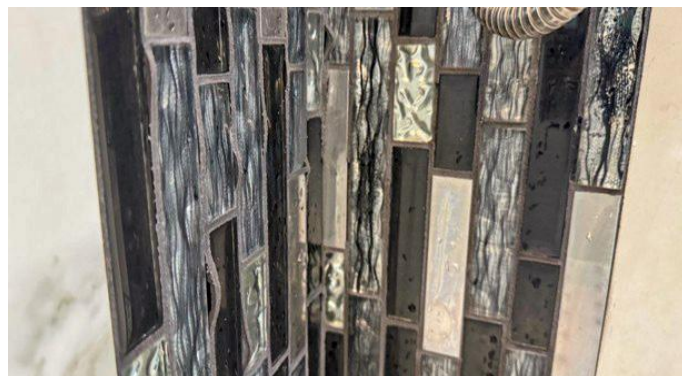
www.IPALaboratories.com



Industry Methods VS Manufacturer Systems

<p>< Methods <i>TCNA Handbook</i></p>  <p>< Standards ANSI A108</p>  <p>< Best Practices <i>NTCA Reference Manual</i></p> 	<p>Manufacturers of Shower Systems</p>          <p><small>©2021 Property of the National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA)</small></p>
---	---

The workshop explores the differences between industry methods as found in industry publications and the complete systems offered by manufacturers.



Different grout types are reviewed, including drying and curing requirements to avoid outcomes like THIS!

TCNA shower methods and common failures

A major portion of the workshop focuses on shower pan construction methods outlined in the *TCNA Handbook*. Instructors concentrate on three common approaches:

- B-421 (surface-applied membrane method)
- B-422 (bonding flange drain method)
- B-415 (traditional water-in/water-out method)

Special attention is given to B-415, one of the most frequently built—and most frequently failed—shower types. This traditional method often involves assembling components sourced separately from lumber and plumbing suppliers. While the *TCNA Handbook* outlines performance requirements and final assembly standards, it allows flexibility in how installers achieve the result. That flexibility can lead to inconsistencies.

Over time, informal tips and tricks passed between installers can distort best practices, much like a game of telephone, Welner said. Critical steps skipped or misunderstood can result in failures, particularly for less-experienced installers.

From there, the importance of conducting a flood test is stressed. Different kinds of drains and the corresponding *TCNA Handbook* methods are investigated while illustrating the proper way to build the shower.

Curbs, membranes, and vapor management

The curriculum continues with instruction on building shower curbs and on selecting appropriate waterproofing membranes and vapor retarders. Trainers reference the *TCNA Membrane Selection Guide* to help participants understand performance ratings and proper applications.

A key clarification involves waterproofing versus vapor management, and the special needs of steam showers. Welner pointed out that not all membranes that meet ANSI A118.10 waterproofing standards qualify as low-permeance vapor

Drain Types

3-Piece Clamping Drain	Bonding Flange	Divot	Linear
			
B414 B420 TR418 B441 B426 TR420 B415 B431 B417	B422 B422C SR613 SR414	B421 B421C	Varies by drain type Liner = No specific method

©2021 Property of the National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA)

Learn about different types of drains and how to install them in this new workshop.



Optional features such as niches, shelves, benches, grab bars, heated flooring, mirrors, and towel hooks can increase profitability, but each penetration or added feature presents another potential failure point if not properly waterproofed and integrated into the overall system.

CTEF

Ceramic Tile Education Foundation

• Qualified Labor • Certification •
• Tile Industry Recognized •

Mohawk's tile brands—Daltile, Marazzi, and American Olean—continue to support the tile industry by partnering with the Ceramic Tile Education Foundation (CTEF) to advance installer certification and workforce development.

Through their facilities and industry leadership, these brands help create opportunities for installers to earn the Certified Tile Installer (CTI) credential.

Last year, CTEF conducted CTI testing at the Daltile facility in Grand Junction, Colorado, expanding access to certification for installers in the region.

Another testing event is already scheduled there this October. A special thank you to Matthew Hansen, Branch Manager, for his support planning and executing the test!

Visit the CTI Registration page to secure your place and put your skills to the test.

ANNUAL SPONSOR

Spotlight

 **daltile**[®]
IMAGINE WHAT'S POSSIBLE™

MARAZZI [®]
DARE TO BE BOLD™

 **AMERICAN OLEAN**[®]
PROVEN IN TILE™



ceramictileeducationfoundation.org



Slope to drain is a core concept covered in the new workshop.

Can All Tile Be Used in a Shower? Short Answer: No

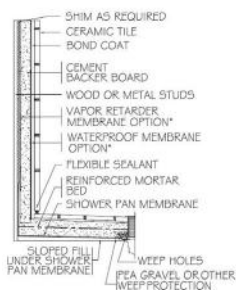
Tile type alone does not determine suitability — performance data and manufacturer approval do

• NTCA Reference Manual – Tile Suitability & Decorative Tile Considerations

©2015 Property of the National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA)

Always confer with the tile manufacturer to determine the suitability of use in a wet area.

Water In Water Out – B415



Courtesy: TCNA

©2015 Property of the National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA)

Method B-415 is the most popular method for building a shower, and also results in the most failures. Learn how to avoid failures in this workshop.

barriers. For example, steam showers require membranes with a perm rating of 0.5 perms or less. Simply knowing how to waterproof a standard shower does not automatically qualify an installer to build a successful steam enclosure, he said.

Clearly, one of the things needed in a tiled shower is, well, tile. Not all tile products are suitable for wet environments. The workshop guides installers to the best way to determine tile suitability, especially when using decorative, handmade, artisan, or crackle-glazed tiles that may have absorption or durability limitations.

The classroom portion concludes with mortar and grout instruction. Participants view NTCA's "Trowel and Error" video, which demonstrates how to achieve proper mortar coverage. Then different grout types are reviewed, including drying and curing requirements.

Movement joints are also discussed, referencing EJ-171 guidelines in the *TCNA Handbook*. Proper placement of movement joints and attention to changes in plane are especially critical in showers, where temperature changes and structural movement can stress rigid tile assemblies.

Finally, trainers address maintenance, sealing requirements, and proper cleaning procedures to ensure long-term performance after installation.

Hands-on learning

Beyond classroom instruction, the workshop includes hands-on modules that allow participants to practice

techniques in a controlled environment. Depending on location, modules may include:

- Constructing a mud pan with a central bonding flange drain
- Installing a B-415 PVC pan liner with a three-piece clamping drain
- Cement backer board and foam wall installation
- Sheet membrane installation
- Liquid waterproofing membrane application over pre-installed cement backer board
- Floating a shower curb

The mud modules have generated particular interest. Even installers who may not regularly build mud pans value the opportunity to learn proper techniques in a safe, supervised setting. Practicing these foundational skills strengthens overall system understanding and craftsmanship.

Industry feedback and additional benefits

Industry professionals have praised the workshop's clarity and depth. Woody Sanders of NTCA Five-Star Accredited Contractor D.W. Sanders Tile & Stone Contracting in Marietta, Ga., noted that the training benefits both seasoned installers and industry professionals in any role.

"The NTCA Technical Team does an excellent job demonstrating the true complexities of wet areas while breaking down tile industry standards (and in some cases, the lack of them), best practices, and manufacturer-developed systems," he said. "They clearly explain how today's wet-area products are designed to work, helping unwind the confusion and truly clarify the subject."

As with other NTCA workshops, attendees have opportunities to ask questions and learn about professional credentials such as Certified Tile Installer (CTI) and Advanced Certified Tile Installer (ACT). Additional benefits include networking with peers and vendors, discounts on NTCA membership, free meals, giveaways, and raffles.

Although relatively new, the Foundations of Wet Areas workshop has quickly gained popularity. It has already been requested more than 60 times for 2026 by hosts including Emser Tile, Floor & Decor, Daltile, and D&B Tile Distributors.

Find out where the NTCA Foundations of Wet Areas workshop will be in your neighborhood by scanning the QR code at right. **TL**



Hands-on modules provide tremendous engagement by attendees and a chance to learn skills in a safe, supervised, supportive environment.

ASK THE EXPERTS

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.



LARGER TILE and SLAB SIZES require more precise tile setting

QUESTION

As 2' x 4' tile and gauged porcelain tile panels (GPTP) become more common in both residential and commercial projects, are the same mortars used for standard large-format tile appropriate for these larger—and sometimes thinner—panels? What type of mortar should installers be looking for when selecting a product for tile of this size? Additionally, how do coverage requirements and trowel selection differ when installing panels and XL tile compared to more traditional 12" x 24" tile?

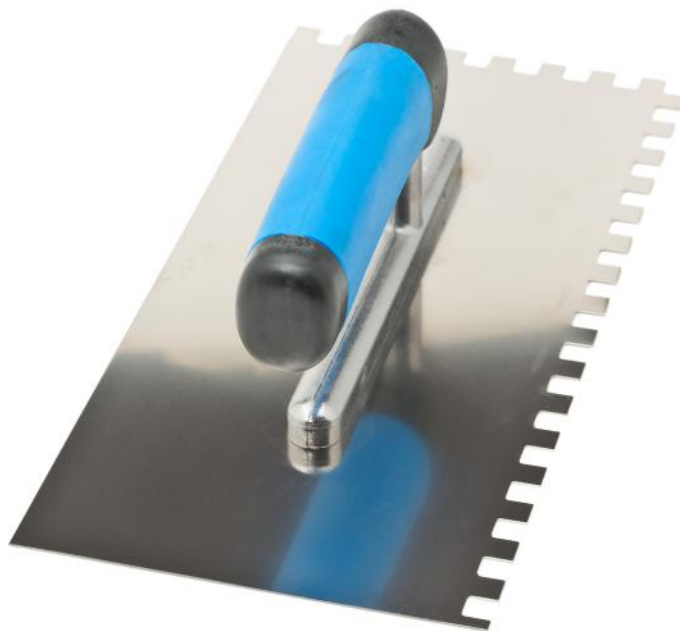
ANSWER

Thank you for reaching out with this great question. There's a lot to unpack here!

As tile continues to evolve, it is important to clearly define what we mean by "large."

A large-format tile (LFT) is any tile with one side greater than 23".

A gauged porcelain tile panel/slab (GPTP) is defined as a panel that is one square meter or larger. These products typically range in thickness from:



While traditional 1/2" x 1/2" square-notch trowels are commonly seen in the field, they are not always the most effective choice for large-format tile or GPTP/S.

- 3.5 mm to 4.9 mm for wall applications
- 5.0 mm to 6.5 mm for floor and wall applications

These products are not simply larger versions of traditional tile. They require greater precision in substrate preparation, mortar selection, and installation technique.

ANSI A108 specifies that any tile with one side greater than 15" requires the substrate to meet a flatness tolerance of:

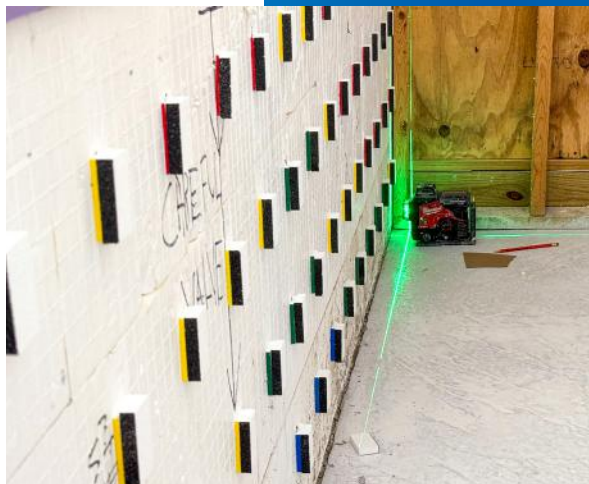
- 1/8" in 10'
- 1/16" in 24'

These are minimum requirements. As tile size increases, substrate flatness becomes increasingly critical. Larger tile (and panels) will not compensate for irregularities—they will magnify them. Many bond and coverage issues attributed to mortar are actually substrate preparation deficiencies.



cool tools

Nathan Parsons, Porcelain Slab Company, Rocky Mount, N.C.



“Using a three-plane laser makes everything make sense for me,” Parsons said. “I can find where the measurements deviate, where the vertical plane is wonky, and ensure that the bubble in my level isn’t off.”

When installing porcelain slabs with a laser and creating a grid system for reference, Parsons said, “We can find the highs and lows before we have broken a sweat. It has sped up so many installs, from prep to measure to lining up pieces at the joints. The clients see a laser and know you are going for accuracy.” Parsons favors the Milwaukee 360-laser level, and advises getting a green-line laser since he said it “is easier to see from afar.”

Contractors and tile setters share their favorite tools and equipment. Share yours at lesley@tile-assn.com.



www.progressprofiles.com



PROFILES & SYSTEMS

The most innovative technical solutions for commercial and residential environments.

PRODESO® DRAIN 8 & PROTERRACE DOUBLE DRIP SYSTEM



PRODESO® DRAIN 4 SYSTEM



PRODESO® HEAT GRIP 5 & STICK SYSTEM



PROSHOWER SYSTEM



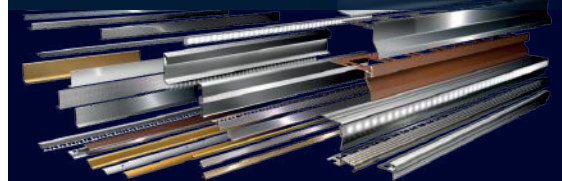
PROLEVELING & WEDGE SYSTEM



PROSUPPORT TUBE, PRORAIL PROSUPPORT SLIM SYSTEM



PROFILES/TRIMS, STAIR NOSING, MOVEMENT JOINTS, BASEBOARDS



Filiale /Branch Office & Warehouse
Progress Profiles America Inc.
 750 Veterans Pkwy,
 Bolingbrook, Illinois 60440
 U.S.A
 Tel. 1 973 584 2650

usa@progressprofiles.com

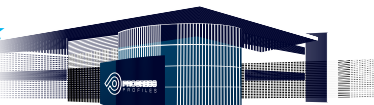


GET IT ON
Google Play

Available on the
App Store

Corporate: **Progress Profiles SpA**
 Certified company UNI EN ISO 9001:2015

40
 1986-2025
 ANNIVERSARY




Level up your tile game

Download on the **App Store**

GET IT ON **Google Play**

We're excited to announce the launch of our new mobile app! Share tips, ask questions, swap stories, and get advice from experts and colleagues that are just as passionate about tile as you! Join the conversation today!




Gauged porcelain tile panel/slab (GTP/S) products are not simply larger versions of traditional tile—they require greater precision in substrate preparation, mortar selection, and installation technique.

Mortar performance

As tile size increases, mortar performance becomes more important.

Most U.S. mortar manufacturers label their packaging according to ANSI A118 classifications, which indicate the testing the mortar has passed. For example:

- ANSI A118.1 – Dry-set mortar
- ANSI A118.15 – Improved modified dry-set cement mortar

You may also see letters following the ANSI designation:

- F – Fast setting
- H – Large and heavy tile
- T – Sag resistance
- E – Extended open time

These classifications and designations provide important performance information. As tile formats increase, installers may need mortars with enhanced performance characteristics such as improved bond strength, extended open time, or non-sag/non-slump properties.

Always confirm mortar selection with both the mortar manufacturer and the tile manufacturer to ensure compatibility and compliance with installation instructions.

Coverage

Coverage becomes more critical as tile size increases. For standard tile installations:

- 80% minimum coverage in interior dry areas
- 95% minimum coverage in wet areas and exterior installations
- Full support under edges and corners is required

For gauged porcelain tile panels/slabs (GTP/S):

- 80% minimum coverage on walls
- 85% minimum coverage on floors
- Full support under edges and corners is required



As tile size increases, substrate flatness becomes increasingly critical. Larger tile (and panels) will not compensate for irregularities—they will magnify them.



A gauged porcelain tile panel/slab (GTP/S) is defined as a panel that is one square meter or larger. These products typically range in thickness from 3.5 mm to 4.9 mm for wall applications, and 5.0 mm to 6.5 mm for floor and wall applications.

Unlike smaller tile, it is often impractical to remove a properly-embedded gauged porcelain panel to check coverage—removal will likely result in breakage. For that reason, coverage must be engineered into the installation process before the panel is placed.

This includes:

- Ensuring substrate flatness meets or exceeds minimum tolerances
- Selecting the appropriate mortar
- Mixing mortar strictly per the manufacturer's instructions
- Using an appropriate trowel design

Trowel selection

Trowel selection plays a significant role in achieving the required coverage.

While traditional 1/2" x 1/2" square-notch trowels are commonly seen in the field, they are not always the most effective choice for large-format tile or GTP/S. Trowel designs such as euro-notch or slant-notch configurations can help installers more easily achieve required coverage

while reducing air entrapment.

Equally important is proper technique:


- Comb mortar in straight, parallel ridges.
- Trowel in the shortest direction of the tile.
- Embed tile or panels perpendicular to the ridges.
- Use proper beating tools or vibration systems when installing panels.

Coverage is not achieved by notch size alone. It is the result of proper substrate preparation, mortar selection, trowel design, and installation technique working together.

As tile formats grow larger (and thinner), there's more opportunity for error. The fundamentals of tile installation have not changed—but the precision required has increased.

The next generation of tile installation demands a higher level of technical awareness and execution. Understanding substrate tolerances, mortar classifications, coverage requirements, and proper trowel techniques is essential for success with today's large-format tile and gauged porcelain panels.

I would highly recommend attending one of NTCA's Interior Installation of Gauged Porcelain Tile Panels/Slabs Regional Training Programs. These hands-on programs follow recognized industry standards and provide practical, real-world instruction that will allow you to build confidence and give you the knowledge needed to succeed as tiles become larger.

To learn more about upcoming training opportunities, visit www.NTCATraining.com or scan the QR code at right. 



Coverage becomes more critical as tile size increases. For gauged porcelain tile panels/slabs (GTP/S), installers need to achieve 80% minimum coverage on walls, 85% minimum coverage on floors, and full support under edges and corners.



Visit TileLetter.com for information on these products, and more.



iQ Power Tools

The iQ252 from iQ Power Tools is a high-performance dry-cut tile saw designed for speed, precision, and jobsite cleanliness. Engineered with integrated dust-control

technology, the iQ252 allows tile professionals to cut indoors without water, while maintaining clean air and a mess-free workspace. Its powerful motor, smooth cutting action, and portability make it an ideal solution for installers looking to increase efficiency, reduce setup time, and deliver high-quality results in demanding environments.



iQ252 Saw

Crowne Tools



The NIP Nut is a non-marking, impact-resistant plastic nut. It's designed and patented specifically for tile installers. It replaces the standard steel nut that comes with your grinder. Unlike the steel nut, this plastic cone-shaped nut will not mark, mar, or damage the tiles in any way. The shape assists

when mitering as well. The nut simply deflects off the edge or surface. It's basically training wheels for a grinder.



NIP Nut



GRABO

The GRABO PRO BRUSHLESS Vacuum Lifting Tool's powerful brushless motor operates on GRABO's 20V battery platform, delivering rapid suction of 30 liters per minute and full vacuum in five seconds.

Weighing 4.4 lbs. with battery, it is compatible with GRABO accessories, and features ergonomic rubberized handles and an LED digital display that provides real-time feedback on vacuum levels and battery status.



GRABO



QEP

The QEP® Gauged Porcelain Tile Panel Solution Series features the GPTP™ Vibrating Suction Cup for

large floor and wall tiles. It eliminates trapped air bubbles under tile with a variable trigger control speed vibration, drastically cutting down the time spent on each individual tile. The Vibrating Suction Cup includes two 20V lithium batteries, a wall charger, and carry case.



QEP

RTC Products

The Battipav Class Plus Tile & Stone Saw is a radial tile cutter ideal for straight and 45° angle cuts on porcelain stoneware, tiles, and marble. The new design—which incorporates vanguard technical

innovation—is strong and precise, and it is equipped with a powerful motor, sliding cutting head, and a plunging motor.



RTC Battipav Saw

WHERE GROWING YOUR BUSINESS IS OUR PURPOSE.

Joe Lundgren is a globally recognized product and marketing expert in the ceramic and stone worldwide markets. His specialty is Business Development, Product Management, and Marketing.

Joe has developed his expertise in strategic planning, new product development, and marketing strategy for North America during his 27 year career at Dal-Tile, a subsidiary of Mohawk Industries.

Joe has extensive experience in multiple sales channels including distribution and Home Centers.

Additionally, Joe represents the Tile Council of North America (TCNA) for its testing laboratories, which has Joe at the epicenter of the industry for all new initiatives.

Please contact Joe Lundgren for a free consultation proposal!



+1.214.641.7773
JOSEPHLUNDGRENCONSULTING.COM



mindset matters:

Mind/body wellness

Wellness of mind and body defines the new generation of leaders in our industry. They are normalizing open conversations about emotional wellness, understanding that a resilient mindset helps people manage pressure, adapt to change, stay mentally healthy, and build fulfilling lives—even in uncertain times. Physically, they take a long-term approach, recognizing their bodies as their most valuable professional tools. They invest in ergonomic equipment, share knowledge openly, and learn through social media, AI, YouTube, and in-person training.

Mindset Matters is a safe, supportive space to heal, grow, and optimize our mental and physical well-being—together. Join us.

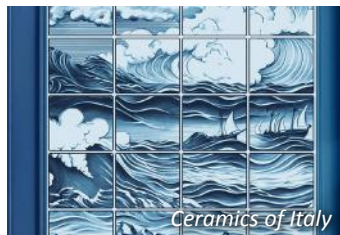


Find us on Facebook



NEWS TICKER

Visit Tileletter.com for details on the following headlines, and more.



Cersaie unveils the key visual for the 43rd International Exhibition of Ceramic Tile and Bathroom Furnishings, scheduled to take place in Bologna, Italy, September 21–25, 2026...**Merola's** new Ruanes collection brings the warmth of traditional terracotta to durable porcelain for walls and floors...**TileBar** brings its flagship showroom experience, designed by Gensler, to 4531 McKinney Ave. in Dallas' Knox-Henderson neighborhood...**Sika** relaunches its Sika Technical Education Program (STEP)—a yearlong, in-person flooring installation solution training curriculum designed to educate contractors and installers on best practices when using components of Schönox® and the Sika® Secure System...**Tile of Spain** has debuted the fifth edition of the *Tile of Spain USA Digital Look Book*, a catalog that highlights innovative collections from Spanish tile makers...**Shaw Contract** expands its porcelain portfolio with the new wall and floor Bask & Dusk collection, which offers contrasting cool and warm tones...**USG Corporation** announced that President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Christopher Griffin will retire later this year after more than 30 years of service to USG, with Christopher Macey—currently USG's Chief Operating Officer (COO)—stepping in as President and CEO effective April 1, 2026...**ISFA** (The International Surface Fabricators Association) launches the American Countertop Manufacturers Council (ACMC), a formal industry forum for consensus, action, and self-regulation...**Emser Tile** has launched a new marketing campaign called EMbody that puts a spotlight on what truly defines the Emser brand: its people, its passion for its customers' success, and the care put into every project and relationship, illustrated through employee features and storytelling...“Tile as art” is a defining trend for 2026, according to experts queried by **Ceramics of Italy**. Aquatic Creatures by Ceramica Bardelli is pictured.


Alpha Professional Tools _____	alpha-tools.com	47
ARTO _____	arto.com	15
Ceramic Tile Education Foundation _____	tilecareer.com	53
Crossville, Inc. _____	crossville.com	3
Custom Building Products _____	custombuildingcompany.com	35
Daltile _____	daltile.com	64 - inside back cover
IPA Laboratories _____	ipalaboratories.com	51
JLC Consulting _____	josephlundgrenconsulting.com	61
MAPEI _____	mapei.com	outside front and back cover, 14, 29, 36
Marazzi _____	marazziusa.com	9
NTCA TileTV _____	youtube.com/c/nationaltilecontractorsassociation	49
Platform Performance Flooring Systems _____	platformperformance.com	39
QEP Co., Inc. _____	qep.com	7, 19
RTC Products _____	rtcproducts.com	40-41
Schluter Systems, L.P. _____	schluter.com	43
TEC Specialty Products _____	tecspecialty.com	17
Tile Council of North America, Inc. _____	tcnatile.com	25



The **Largest** Selection. The **Highest** Standards.

TILE | NATURAL STONE | COUNTERTOPS | EXTERIORS

Photo features Luminique™, Remedy™ and Panoramic Porcelain Surfaces™.

 A DIVISION OF MOHAWK INDUSTRIES



PRSR.T. STD.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Jackson, MS
Permit No. 160

Your **build** Your way Backed by **MAPEI**



FLEXIBILITY

Complete, customizable shower solutions ranging from liquid membranes to waterproof boards and pre-formed accessories



PERFORMANCE

Engineered for total moisture control in residential and commercial environments, from spas to steam rooms



WARRANTY

Best-BackedSM protection that safeguards your craft and ensures a lifetime of leak-free reliability



Mapeguard[®] Shower Systems

Your Build. Your Way.

Learn more



Customized waterproofing. Backed by MAPEI.

From custom residential baths to high-traffic commercial gang showers, **Mapeguard[®] Shower Systems** offer a complete, integrated solution for total moisture control. Whether you prefer the speed of waterproof boards or the seamless protection of liquid membranes, our systems are designed to adapt to your specific project needs. Visit www.mapei.us.



#MAPEIUSA #BuiltMyWay

