

# INTERIOR DESIGN GUIDE



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# GLAZED & CONFUSED

Wending your way through the decorative tile jungle

By the mid-1930s, the short heyday of California tile making was over. The Batchelder-Wilson Co. of Los Angeles, the Malibu Tile Co. on the beach in Malibu, and William Wrigley's Santa Catalina Tile Co. were all out of business, victims of the Great Depression. But tile designs have a way of speaking across the ages, so today

the early California styles may be entering their Golden Age.

Batchelder, Malibu and Catalina reproduction tiles are being installed in new houses and in remodels all over San Diego and the West Coast, joining the renaissance of even older designs from the Spanish-Moorish era of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries.

By Neal Matthews



**TOP:** Three hundred-year-old antique tiles from Andalusia, in southwestern Spain, illustrate the cuenca, the raised outline between the colors created by press-molding.

**ABOVE:** Interior and tile design by Paul Schatz for a bathroom niche.

**RIGHT:** The mural on this room divider was created by Fernanda Gamboa of Talavera Santa Catarina, in Puebla, Mexico. The handpainted tiles employ most of Gamboa's muted colors, unusual for Talavera.



## Glossary

TERMS TO HELP YOU CONVERSE WITH THE TILE EXPERTS:

- **Abrasion resistance:** The amount of friction a tile can withstand
- **Absorbency rating:** Measure of how much moisture the unglazed portion of a tile can absorb, as a percentage of its weight
- **Backer board:** Water-resistant panel used as underlayment for thin-set tile installation
- **Backsplash** (also called splash-back): The area above the kitchen countertop and below the cabinet
- **Bullnose:** Trim tile with a convex rounded edge
- **Ceramic:** Fired clay
- **Crazing:** Fine cracks spreading across a glazed surface, giving an aged appearance
- **Cuenca:** The raised outline on molded tile used to keep the colors separated
- **Delftware:** White-glazed tile or earthenware, originally from Holland
- **Encaustic:** The process in which a decorative tile is made by inlaying differently colored clays
- **Frit:** A vitreous substance made from ground-up glass and ceramics that form the medium of a glaze that carries pigment
- **Gauge:** The thickness of a tile
- **Glaze:** A protective finish formed by a glass compound, colored with metallic oxides, bonded to a tile's surface by the heat of a kiln
- **Grout:** Mortar used to fill the spaces between tiles
- **Impervious tiles:** Fired at high temperatures, with a porosity of 0.5 or less, such as porcelain
- **Liner:** A narrow tile lining the edges of field tiles
- **Mastic:** An adhesive compound used for cementing tiles to a surface
- **Membrane:** A layer of sheeting beneath the mastic or mortar to protect from water or cracks
- **Mosaic:** Tile or stone smaller than 2.4 inches square
- **Non-vitreous:** Low-fired tiles with absorption rates above 7 percent
- **Paver:** A floor tile shaped by molding
- **Pique assiette:** French term for a mosaic made of broken tile pieces
- **Semivitreous:** Tiles with porosity between 3 and 7 percent
- **Surround:** The walls enclosing a bathtub or shower
- **Terra-cotta:** Molded non-vitreous or semi-vitreous unglazed tiles
- **Vitreous:** High-fired tiles with a water absorbency between 0.5 and 3 percent



Decorative ceramic tiles possess a quality of fusion, soft clay roasted into hard beauty, a cool surface passionately colored. The mix of pattern and hue offers a common tongue in which people can express themselves through accented surroundings.

Laird Plumleigh supplies a lot of Batchelder-style reproduction tiles for remodelers from his cavernous Alchemie Studio workshop in Leucadia. Near a grouping of moss-green tiles laid out on the floor in the shape of a fireplace-in-progress, he says he has spent years developing glazes and press-molding techniques that make his tiles more durable than the original Batchelders, which used an "Engobe" finish rather than a tougher glaze.

People are delving even further back through the centuries for a sense of connection.

"I always ask, 'How old do you want the house to feel?'" says Paul Schatz, principal owner of Interior Design Imports. "And how well maintained?"

Schatz and other designers who use a lot of tile are helping to drive decorative tiles back in from their traditional place in the borders of a plain expanse of monochrome "field" tile. They're using them to cover large areas of bathrooms, spas, kitchens and living rooms with multicolored patterns, representational murals, and intricate tile "rugs."

Schatz is the U.S. representative of Mexican tile artisan Fernanda Gamboa, whose Puebla-based company, Talavera Santa Catarina, uses 15th-century techniques to reproduce historic tile designs that originated in Spanish palaces and homes, from both old and new Spain.

Tile making has been around for 7,000 years, and has never stopped evolving. The current surge in design reflects tile's dual nature by looking both ways: back in time for inspiration as well as forward in the direction of new/old materials, like glass and stone.

## Superb Italian Craftsmanship



## Expressive individual style



## Ageless design innovations



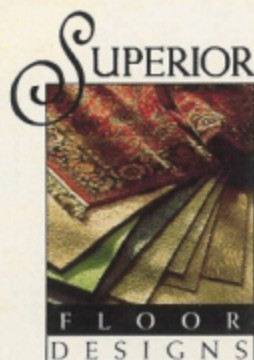
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DECORATIVE doesn't have to mean colorful. The ceramic tile mirror frame and relief-patterned wall tiles are from Laird Plumleigh's Alchemie Studio, whose burnished, updated Batchelder-style ceramics capture old times with new techniques.







## TALAVERA SANTA CATARINA

To be a certified maker of Talavera ceramics, Fernanda Gamboa's glazed-tile workshop in Puebla, about 60 miles southeast of Mexico City, must meet strict standards set by the local Council of Talavera Regulations.

"We have to pass 16 laboratory tests every six months, measuring color, transparency, absorption, lead content and other characteristics," Gamboa explains. "We cannot use machinery at all."

Gamboa's workers mix the local clay in the traditional way — with their feet. But Talavera, this most Mexican of handicrafts, also is a mini-melting pot of world culture when it comes to tile making. She sees the Moorish touches in the Islamic-style patterns, the Italian in the colors of yellow, green and orange, and the Chinese in the blues and whites. The colors in her tiles, which have been used in palace reconstructions and are in the Hispanic Society Museum in New York, are muted, which is unusual for Talavera, but historically more accurate.

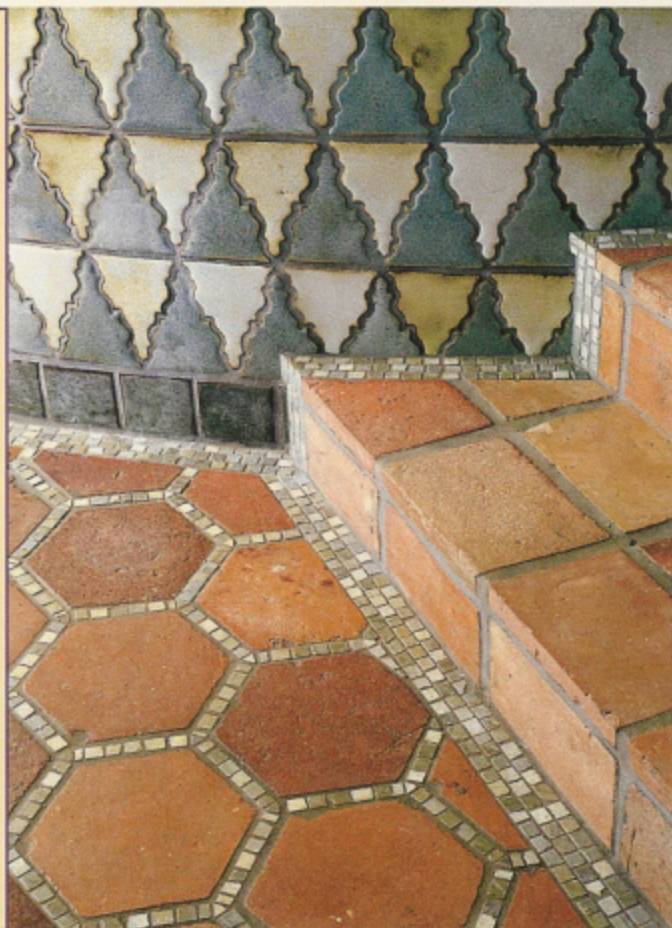
"It looks antique, which is the main reason people like my tile," Gamboa observes.

Gamboa has prepared a line of historical decorative tiles for Paul Schatz at Interior Design Imports. She has six painters laboriously painting up to 500 tiles a day. The pigments in the glazes, like the two kinds of clay, must be from the local area.

"The orange color comes from a certain stone called a kidney stone found near the river in Guanaquato," she says. "We use iron oxide for the black, copper oxide for green, antimony for yellow — all ground and mixed here."

Befitting their multicultural provenance, the subtle colors of Santa Catarina tiles look at home in the differing ambient light qualities of various continents. Gamboa has a client in Germany who says he will only buy from her.

"He says ceramics from other Talavera workshops look kitschy when he gets them home," she relates. "He tells me only mine look right in German light."



OPPOSITE: Tiles by Fernanda Gamboa enliven a bathroom designed by interior designer Paul Schatz. THIS PAGE, TOP AND BOTTOM: More interior design with decorative tiles by Paul Schatz. DETAIL: An antique tile