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Hello and welcome to the Summer 2026 edition of Tomorrow's Tile & Stone.

We begin this issue with a special focus on Spanish ceramics, as I was lucky enough to join the Time of Spain programme back in the spring. Organised by the Spanish Ceramic Tile Manufacturers' Association (ASCER), the three-day event enabled me to gain first-hand insight into how history and innovation is shaping the future of the country's ceramic sector. Find out more on page 10.

Continuing the theme, in her article on page 24, María D Arraez, Director of Tile of Spain UK, examines why provenance remains a defining strength of Spanish tile production and the value it brings to specifiers, retailers and installers alike.

Technical performance also comes under the spotlight in our Adhesives & Grouts section. Pro Tiler Tools explains why adhesive flexibility is increasingly important on modern tiling projects, while Palace Chemicals showcases a comprehensive range of solutions covering every stage of installation.

With outdoor living continuing to influence design trends, we also look at the growing demand for durable external installations. The ARDEX Group UK – BAL and ARDEX – shares best practice for fixing external porcelain and stone, while Mapei discusses how its UltraCare range helps maintain and protect hard landscaping in challenging conditions.

Finally, our Hospitality & Leisure features highlight the creative power of ceramics in commercial interiors, from a vibrant Italian-inspired restaurant in the Caribbean created with Ape Grupo Ceramics, to a contemporary Korean-inspired coffee shop in Greece featuring striking surfaces from WOW Design.

I hope you enjoy the issue.



Sarah Robinson, Editor



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ENVELOPE COMPLETION FOR KERAKOLL UK'S NEW PLANT

Kerakoll UK Ltd and Barnfield Construction Ltd have announced that Barnfield Construction has finished the installation of windows, doors, wall cladding, and solar panels for Kerakoll UK Ltd's new plant in Preston.

Phase 1 of this landmark project includes a state-of-the-art distribution centre, research and development centre and training campus, allowing Kerakoll to showcase its products and systems.

The new facility represents a significant investment in the region and will support Kerakoll's continued expansion across the UK and Northern Europe. Building completion and handover is programmed for November 2026.

The site is being constructed to BREEAM standards with a predicted score of very good, with 2360m² of photovoltaic panels installed on the roof, generating an

estimated 340 MWh per year, and saving 65 tonnes per year in CO₂ emissions.

The building has also been developed to allow rainwater harvesting with a capacity of 30,000m³, serving the toilets in the main offices, giving an estimated water saving of 3000 l/day.

Tim Webber, Chairman and Managing Director of the Barnfield Group, said: "Reaching envelope completion is a significant milestone for the project and a testament to the strong collaboration between Barnfield Construction and Kerakoll UK. It's been great to work with the excellent team at Kerakoll – we've worked together as one team throughout, and that partnership has helped deliver such strong progress to date. We're looking forward to seeing the final outcome on completion, which reflects our shared commitment to quality, innovation and sustainability."

Carl Gardner, Managing Director of Kerakoll UK, added: "Thanks to Barnfield Construction the project

has been running smoothly and to schedule, allowing us to welcome our key customer partners to view the site in the second half of this year."

<https://gb.kerakoll.com>
www.barnfieldconstruction.co.uk



SETCRETE LAUNCHES NEW TILE ADHESIVES AND GROUT RANGE

Following the success of its industry-leading floor levelling compounds, Setcrete has launched a new tile adhesives and grout range. Backed by the company's reputation for high quality products and proven performance, Setcrete tile adhesives and grouts are aimed at building professionals who want an easy-to-use, no-nonsense product that is consistent and reliable.

Suitable for both wall and floor tiles, the launch range includes Rapid S1 Tile Adhesive and Standard S1 Tile Adhesive, which provide excellent bond strength and flexibility to combat moderate movement and vibration. These adhesives are complemented by Rapid Flex Tile Grout, suitable for joints up to 15mm wide.

All adhesives and grouts are specially formulated for internal and external applications, and are ideal for tiling wet rooms and power showers.

They can be used with porcelain, ceramic and natural stone tiles and can be applied over absorbent and non-absorbent surfaces. They are also suitable for use over underfloor heating systems.

Rapid S1 tile adhesive has an open time of 25 minutes, a pot life of 45 minutes

and is ready to grout from three hours, while Standard S1 tile adhesive offers an extended open time of 40 minutes, a pot life of four hours and is set, ready for grouting from 16 hours.

Rapid S1 and Standard S1 tile adhesives and Rapid Flex Tile Grout are available in white and slate grey.

Commenting on the launch, Setcrete National Sales Manager Michael Hoe said: "Extending the Setcrete range into wall and floor tile adhesives and grouts is a natural progression for us, complementing our popular floor levelling compound range, which has enjoyed huge growth in demand over

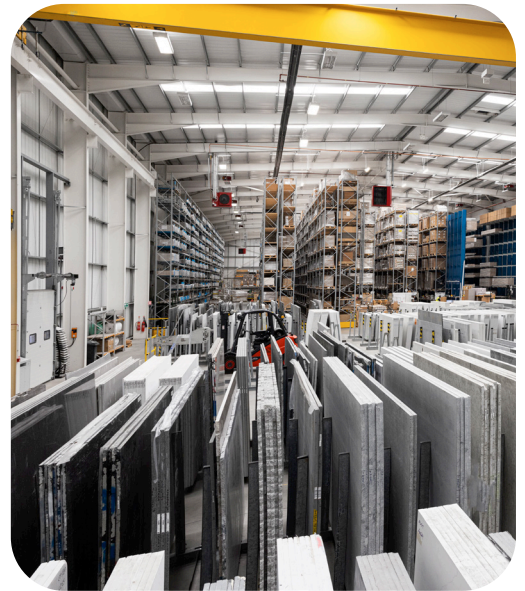
the last few years. Merchants and installers can be confident in the same levels of quality from the adhesives and grouts as they experience with Setcrete subfloor levelling compounds, as well as superior levels of consistency and product availability."

Setcrete tile adhesives are supplied in 20kg sacks, with grouts available in 3kg packs.

Setcrete tile adhesives and grouts conform to European standards EN12004 and EN13888 respectively.

www.setcrete.co.uk





UK MANUFACTURER PWS ENCOURAGES THE INDUSTRY TO LOOK FOR THE NEW WFF QUALITY MARK ACCREDITATION

The conversation around silicosis has intensified significantly in recent months, with increased scrutiny into the industry. PWS, one of the UK's largest, best-invested, specialist fabricators of quality bespoke surfaces, is reinforcing its commitment to safe working practices, calling for greater industry-wide accountability.

Proper regulation and safe fabrication when handling quartz are essential to ensuring the safety of workers and the environment. However, unsafe practices across the industry have led to cases of silicosis; an incurable lung disease caused by inhaling silica dust.

To elevate industry standards, improve workplace safety, set a clear benchmark for professionalism and ensure operational excellence across the fabrication sector, PWS has teamed up with the Worktop Fabrication Federation (WFF) to create a new industry Quality Mark. This new mark introduces a structured framework for fabrication businesses to ensure commitment to best practice and workforce protection.

Developed with the support of scientific research and industry collaboration, the WFF hosted Health and Safety Executive (HSE) teams and gathered expert input from across the supply chain. A key milestone in the programme's development included the HSE's Chief Executive Officer, Kevin Bampton, presenting the significance of occupational hygiene standards and the role of the WFF Quality Mark in driving safer, responsible and more consistent practices across the industry.

Underpinned by regular, independent workplace assessments conducted by professionally registered occupational hygienists, the quality mark focuses on the recognition, evaluation and control of workplace health hazards.

A landmark for British manufacturing, the WFF urges KBB specifiers, retailers and designers to partner only with trusted and reputable fabricators, ensuring they also question non-members about their industry standards. With these strong internal processes, robust health and safety measures and the backing of the HSE, it is a major step in the right direction.

Chris Wragg, Managing Director of the Danesmoor Group, said: "Sadly, these silicosis cases are a result of unregulated fabricators and manufacturers that don't prioritise employee safety or health. All of this is entirely preventable, but the responsibility lies with the industry to do it properly – so companies need to be held accountable as a matter of necessity.

"As one of the major companies in the worktop market, we have a responsibility to not only our staff but also to our customers, to ensure we are advocating for best safety and working practices. We are proud to be working with the WFF on this new accreditation. By creating a culture of responsibility, transparency and continuous improvement, the industry can safeguard its workforce while maintaining high standards of craftsmanship at the same time."

www.pws.co.uk/section/worksurfaces



PREMTOOL LAUNCHES NEW DIAMOND BLADE RANGE ENGINEERED FOR PRECISION, PERFORMANCE AND VERSATILITY

PREMTOOL, known as The Tiler's Brand, has introduced a new range of diamond blades designed to meet the evolving demands of modern tiling, offering trade professionals a clear choice of high-performance cutting solutions that deliver accuracy, consistency and value on site.

As tile materials become harder, thicker and more varied – from large-format porcelain to specialist surfaces such as Dekton, installers are under increasing pressure to achieve clean, precise cuts while maintaining efficiency. The new PREMTOOL diamond blade range has been developed specifically to address these challenges, providing a comprehensive selection of blades tailored to different materials, cutting styles and finishes.

With a focus on simplifying product selection without compromising performance, the range is structured around clear, practical options. Each blade is available in either Pro or Premium specification, allowing installers to choose based on the level of performance required. Premium blades feature a higher diamond concentration, delivering smoother cuts and extended lifespan, while Pro versions provide reliable, cost-effective performance for everyday use.

The range includes a variety of blade types to suit specific applications. Turbo blades are designed for fast, efficient cutting on hard materials, while Venom blades offer ultra-thin, high-precision cutting with minimal chipping. Raptor blades provide slower, controlled cutting for exceptionally neat finishes, and Razor blades deliver ultra-clean, chip-free results on porcelain. Completing the range is 'The GOAT', a versatile multi-purpose solution capable of cutting, grinding, shaping and finishing specialist materials with ease.

Each blade has been engineered with precision manufacturing techniques to ensure consistent performance, cleaner cuts and improved control. This level of accuracy helps reduce rework, save time on site and achieve a higher-quality finish, supporting installers in meeting the standards expected on modern tiling projects.

Eddy Hyde, Head of Marketing at Pro Tiler Tools, said: "Cutting requirements in tiling have become much more demanding, particularly with the growth of thicker porcelain and specialist materials. With this launch, the aim was to create a blade range that reflects real on-site needs, giving tilers clear choices depending on the material, finish and level of precision required. By offering both Pro and Premium options across the range, we've made it easier for installers to select the right blade while maintaining the performance they rely on."

Available exclusively through Pro Tiler Tools, the PREMTOOL diamond blade range is supported by specialist trade knowledge, competitive pricing and nationwide availability. Installers can access expert advice alongside a comprehensive selection of tiling tools and materials, ensuring confidence both at the trade counter and on site.

With a strong focus on performance, versatility and ease of selection, the new PREMTOOL diamond blade range provides a practical solution for professional tilers working with today's increasingly demanding materials.

www.protilertools.co.uk



KERAFLEX EXTRA S1 ZERO JOINS MAPEI ZERO LINE

Mapei UK has further extended its Zero line with the addition of Keraflex Extra S1 Zero. The high performance, flexible cementitious adhesive – now with CO₂ fully offset in the entire life cycle – also benefits from a very low VOC EMICODE: EC1 Plus certified formulation, providing a safe, high-performance solution for installers.

Suitable for all tile types – including ceramic, porcelain, moisture-stable natural stone and mosaics – Keraflex Extra S1 Zero is a highly versatile adhesive suitable for internal and external walls and floors. The formulation provides many benefits to the installer, including no vertical

slip, high wetting capacity and an extended open time of approximately 30 minutes; it can be used either in a fluid consistency for large-format floor tiles, or as a thixotropic paste on walls and facades. It's also suitable for areas that are constantly immersed such as inside swimming pools, and for overlaying old floors with new tiles.

After installation with Keraflex Extra S1 Zero, tiles are set to light foot traffic and can be grouted after approximately 24 hours and surfaces, are ready to use after approx. 14 days.

www.mapei.co.uk



BAL RAPID-MAT IN WHITE – NEW COLOUR, IMPROVED PERFORMANCE

Full tiling solutions specialist BAL has introduced the improved BAL Rapid-Mat thin uncoupling mat, which now comes in white.

This latest development provides the same trusted performance installers rely on for tiling onto problematic substrates with movement, with additional improvements to make every installation smoother and more efficient.

The move to a white mat – with red gridlines and markings – provides enhanced visibility for setting out plus easier-to-see wetting out of the adhesive, helping installers easily confirm full coverage during installation.

Add to this the improved roll-out and mat stability, and you've got a system designed to speed up workflow without compromising reliability.

And the benefits don't stop there: the updated mat colour also delivers a 2.5% CO₂ reduction in the production of the non-woven fleece – a small change that supports BAL's ongoing sustainability efforts.

Alex Underwood, Head of Marketing at BAL, said: "Our improved BAL Rapid-Mat provides great new benefits for installers, on top of its already outstanding performance as a thin, low-height build-up uncoupling system.

"Importantly, nothing changes about its fundamental design. The unique fast-

track thin uncoupling mat is still utilising our exclusive technology to accommodate lateral movement and counteracts tension stresses between the substrate and the floor to be installed.

"This means, BAL Rapid-Mat is still lightweight and easy to install with only 1mm thickness. Crucially, BAL Rapid-Mat uses 20% less adhesive when compared to using a cavity mat systems while being suitable for all tile types and thicknesses.

"To help installers recognise it instantly in-store, every roll is still wrapped in a red plastic cover, keeping the look consistent while delivering improved functionality underneath."

BAL Rapid-Mat: a fresh new look, with all the performance you expect.

www.bal-adhesives.com/products/rapid-mat



MAPEI DELIVERS THE GOODS AT VIBRANT CAMDEN DESTINATION

A Mapei tile installation system has been used, by Stone & Ceramic, to complete an extensive project on Block A at Camden Goods Yard. Part of a new destination in North West London, the finished development will include 644 new homes and high-quality amenities, delivered by St George, a member of the Berkeley Group.

The surface specification within Block A included four porcelain tile formats, along with Mapei preparation and fixing products, featuring very low VOC EMICODE: EC1 Plus-certified formulations and products from Mapei's Zero Line, with CO2 fully offset in the entire life cycle.

Situated on a former brownfield site, Camden Goods Yard is a new mixed-use neighbourhood comprising a mix of one,

two and three bedroom apartments, residents' facilities including a 24-hour concierge, gym and wellness spa, a rooftop terrace and restaurant, a flagship Morrisons supermarket, shops and office space. The Stone & Ceramic installation included the pool entrance lobby, circulation lobby, cinema lobby, lift lobbies and all apartment bathrooms.

During works in the communal areas, Stone & Ceramic prepared surfaces with Mapei Ultraplan Eco 3210 ultra-hardening smoothing compound. Mapeguard UM 35 matting was also applied before the installation of tiles, to provide an anti-fracture membrane with waterproof and vapour control benefits.

The tile specification within the lobby areas included 600 x 600 x 10mm

porcelain floor tiles, which were bonded with Keraquick S1 Zero – a quick setting cementitious adhesive. Mapei Ultracolor Plus, a fast-track cementitious grouting mortar, was used to grout tile joints; also from the Zero Line, Ultracolor Plus features mould-resistant BioBlock and water-repellent DropEffect technology.

Within bathrooms, Mapeguard WP 200 waterproofing and anti-fracture membrane was used to prepare floors, along with Mapegum WPS paint on waterproofing membrane. Tiles were then installed with Keraquick S1 Zero adhesive and Ultracolor Plus grout, with designs including 600 x 600 x 10mm porcelain floor and wall tiles, and 240 x 60 x 10mm feature glazed wall tiles.

www.mapei.co.uk



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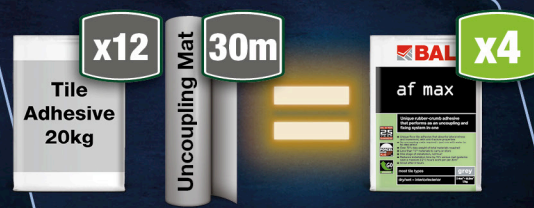


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for uncoupling mats**

**Removing the need
for uncoupling mats
on problematic floors.**

BAL AF Max anti-fracture technology absorbs lateral stress movement from the floor protecting tiles from failures.

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needed –
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SPANISH SHOWCASE

Tomorrow's Tile & Stone joined ASCER's Time of Spain programme in Castellón to gain first-hand insight into how the Spanish ceramic sector is navigating the future through innovation, sustainability, exports and international collaboration.

In the spring, I joined a group of 50 international journalists on a visit to Castellón as part of The Spanish Ceramic Tile Manufacturers' Association (ASCER)'s Time of Spain initiative – a coordinated programme of events and activities designed to showcase latest developments, innovations and design direction of the Spanish ceramic tile sector.

Time of Spain brought together a series of industry and company-led events held throughout February and March under the Tile of Spain banner. The initiative aimed to place Spanish ceramics firmly in the spotlight during a key period in the global design and interiors calendar – as the Cevisama trade show, traditionally held at this time, has moved to the autumn.

At the heart of the programme was a packed schedule of presentations, launches and networking events. The initiative also provided the backdrop for major sector events including the Tile of Spain press conference, the Tile of Spain Awards ceremony and a series of presentations highlighting the latest ceramic trends and product innovations from Spanish manufacturers.

INDUSTRY OUTLOOK AND MARKET RECOVERY

One of the key moments of the trip was ASCER's international roundtable conference, which brought together almost 100 attendees, including 50 journalists from 15 countries, alongside representatives from the Spanish ceramics industry and trade organisations. The discussion featured ASCER Chairman Ismael García Peris, ICEX Director General for International Trade Pablo Conde, and ASCER Vice-chairman and ITC representative Miguel Nicolás, who addressed the sector's current performance, future opportunities and long-term sustainability goals.





tiles in the world.” At the same time, he acknowledged the significant challenges still facing the industry, including limitations in infrastructure capacity and the technological maturity required to achieve full decarbonisation.

INSIDE THE FACTORIES AND SHOWROOMS

As part of the international press trip, we visited a number of manufacturers and showrooms across Castellón, gaining first-hand insight into the technical capabilities and scale of the Spanish ceramics industry.

What became immediately clear throughout the trip was the industry’s continued investment in innovation, sustainability and design-led manufacturing. From large-format surfaces and textured finishes to advanced production technologies and energy-efficient processes, Spanish manufacturers demonstrated why the country remains one of the global leaders in ceramic tile production.

HERITAGE AT THE HEART OF THE INDUSTRY

Beyond the factory visits and conference programme, the trip also offered a deeper understanding of the heritage and provenance that continue to shape the Spanish ceramic tile industry today. Walking tours through Onda and Castellón de la Plana revealed the region’s long-standing relationship with ceramics, with traditional tiles and architectural details still visible in-situ throughout the streets and historic buildings.

The visits reinforced how closely the industry remains connected to the identity of the region itself. With 68 ceramic tile manufacturers based across the Castellón area, the sector has developed into a tightly connected industrial community built on generations of expertise, family businesses and shared knowledge. While the manufacturers showcased cutting-edge technologies and contemporary design thinking throughout the programme, there was also a clear sense of pride in the craftsmanship, tradition and local culture that continue to underpin Spanish ceramics today.

INTERNATIONAL REACH

Alongside the international press delegation, a separate UK delegation organised in partnership with The Tile Association (TTA) also took place during March 2026. Supported by IVACE, the Valencian Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Innovation and Trade, the educational visit brought TTA members to Spain for a programme of factory and showroom tours focused on the latest trends and innovations emerging from the sector.

ASCER also welcomed distribution groups from the United States during the final week of February, reinforcing the increasingly international scope of the new programme.

ESTABLISHING A NEW INDUSTRY CALENDAR

More than simply a series of events, Time of Spain felt like a strategic effort to establish the end of February and beginning of March as a key annual moment for architects, designers, distributors and media to engage with the latest developments in Spanish ceramics. Judging by the scale of participation and the calibre of companies involved, the initiative has already begun to achieve exactly that.

<https://tileofspain.com/en>



During the conference, ASCER revealed provisional 2025 figures showing signs of stabilisation and recovery across the sector. Estimated turnover reached €4.834bn, representing a 1% increase, while exports, which continue to account for 72% of total turnover, rose slightly to €3.484bn. Domestic sales also increased by 3.1% to €1.35bn, while production climbed 2.7% to 427 million m². Employment figures also improved, with direct jobs rising by 1.4% to an estimated 15,939 positions.

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the industry’s focus on quality, innovation and international positioning over price competition. Pablo Conde stressed the importance of continuing to prioritise high-value sales channels and the contract market, positioning Spanish ceramics as a premium international product distinguished by design, service and technical expertise.

SUSTAINABILITY AND DECARBONISATION

Sustainability and decarbonisation also formed a major part of the conversation. Miguel Nicolás highlighted the sector’s ongoing investment in electrification and renewable energy, describing Spanish ceramic tiles as “the most sustainable

SETTING STANDARDS

Setcrete is bringing its reputation for quality subfloor preparation products into the tiling sector with the launch of a new adhesives and grout range designed for dependable, professional performance on every job.



Best known for its industry-leading floor levelling compounds, Setcrete has now launched a new tile adhesives and grout range targeted at tilers and building professionals who want an easy-to-use, straightforward product that is both consistent and reliable.

Backed by the company's reputation for high-quality products and proven performance, Setcrete tile adhesives and grouts adhere to the same 'quality first' approach that has come to define its floor levelling compound range.

Explaining the company's decision to expand into tiling adhesives and grouts, Setcrete National Sales Manager Michael Hoe said: "Extending the Setcrete range into wall and floor tile adhesives and grouts is a natural progression for us, as it complements our popular floor levelling compounds range, which has enjoyed huge growth in demand over the last few years.

"Because of that track record, stockists and installers alike can be confident in the same levels of quality from the tile adhesives and grouts as they experience with Setcrete subfloor levelling compounds, as well as superior levels of consistency and product availability."

DEBUT PRODUCTS

Setcrete has been very deliberate in terms of the initial products in the range, focusing on the most popular requirements of tilers and professional builders.

The launch range features two types of tile adhesive – Rapid S1, a three-hour, rapid setting formulation, and Standard S1, which has a standard setting time of 16 hours – and a rapid setting grout that can be used in joints up to 15mm wide and sets after four hours. Both adhesives are available in white and grey colours, and grout is available in white and slate grey.

Suitable for both wall and floor tiles, including large-format tiles, Setcrete tile adhesives and grouts are specially formulated for both internal and external applications, and are ideal for tiling wet rooms and power showers.

They can be used with porcelain, ceramic and natural stone tiles and can be applied over absorbent and non-absorbent surfaces, including Setcrete levelling compounds, concrete, sand/cement and anhydrite screeds, render, tile backer boards, plaster and plasterboard. They are also suitable for use over underfloor heating systems.

Apart from their difference in open times, pot life and setting times, Rapid S1 and Standard S1 tile adhesives both provide excellent bond strength and flexibility; an important performance benefit that enables the adhesives to combat moderate movement and vibration.

IMPROVED PERFORMANCE

Both tile adhesives conform to BS EN12004 and are classified as C2 S1 – improved performance cementitious tile adhesives,

SETCRETE RAPID S1 TILE ADHESIVE

Open time: 25 minutes

Pot life: 45 minutes

Set and ready to grout from three hours

Supplied in 20kg lined paper sacks

Colours: White and Grey

Conforms to BS EN12004 – C2 FT S1

which are suitable for areas subject to limited movement and vibration, and are ideal for demanding installations, large-format tiles, and high-traffic areas’.

The two tile adhesives are complemented by Setcrete Rapid Flex Tile Grout, a flexible, polymer modified cementitious tile grout that is suitable both for floors and walls.

Rapid Flex Tile Grout is also efflorescence-free, mould-resistant and is easy to apply and wash off, delivering full, functional and aesthetically pleasing joints. Conforming to BS EN13888, the grout is classed as an ‘improved cement grout’, with low water absorption and high abrasion resistance.

As with Setcrete’s entire range, users of the new tile adhesives and grout can access expert technical support from the Setcrete Technical Services Team, including advice about applications, substrate suitability and subfloor preparation. If customers encounter an unusual situation on site and need expert assessment and advice, Setcrete can arrange for a member of the technical team to visit the site and provide recommendations of how best to proceed.

For a faster assessment, the technical team can use video calls with customers to provide an instant diagnosis.

Setcrete Rapid S1 and Standard S1 tile adhesives and Rapid Flex tile grout are available through builders’ merchants across the UK. A merchant locator tool is available on the Setcrete website.

SETCRETE STANDARD S1 TILE ADHESIVE

Extended open time of 40 minutes

Pot life: 4 hours

Set and ready to grout from 16 hours

Supplied in 20kg lined paper sacks

Colours: White and Grey

Conforms to BS EN12004 – C2 TE S1

SUPERB PRODUCTS, OUTSTANDING SUPPORT

As well as lauding the outstanding product quality, performance and consistency of the new tile adhesives and grout, Michael Hoe is keen to emphasise the customer service that is a hallmark of Setcrete’s operation. “First and foremost, it’s essential that products are always available in stock when customers want to purchase them,” he said. “We have lorries making deliveries across the UK every day to ensure stock arrives promptly to order. We have an explicit three-day delivery promise from receipt of an order to any merchant in the UK, but will often deliver next day or within 48 hours.

“And when it comes to end user customer support, Setcrete’s reputation is second to none. The company’s entire ethos is based on customer satisfaction, whether that is the quality and performance of our products, helpful technical support and expert advice.”

<https://setcrete.co.uk>

SETCRETE RAPID FLEX TILE GROUT

40 minute working time

Setting time: 4 hours

Supplied in 3kg lined paper sacks

Colours: White and Slate Grey

Conforms to BS EN13888 – CG2 WA





FLEXIBILITY MATTERS

Pro Tiler Tools provides a practical guide to understanding adhesive flexibility on modern tiling projects for today's installer.

For many tilers, selecting the right adhesive has become less straightforward in recent years. With larger tile formats, more complex substrates and the widespread use of underfloor heating, understanding how adhesives perform on site is more important than ever.

One of the most commonly discussed specifications is 'S1 vs S2' but while these labels are widely recognised, their real-world implications are often less clear.

At its core, the 'S' classification relates to deformability, in simple terms, how much movement an adhesive can accommodate before it fails. An S1 adhesive offers a moderate level of flexibility, while S2 adhesives are designed to handle higher levels of movement and stress.

While this may sound technical, it becomes highly relevant when you consider the conditions of a typical modern installation. Heating and cooling cycles from underfloor heating systems, slight deflection in timber or suspended floors, and the reduced grout joints associated with large format tiles all contribute to movement within the tiled surface.

In these situations, the adhesive is doing more than bonding the tile, it is helping absorb movement and protect the installation from cracking or debonding over time.

MATCHING THE ADHESIVE TO THE JOB

Rather than defaulting to the highest specification, the key is to match the adhesive to the specific demands of the project.

For many internal applications, such as tiling onto a well-prepared screed or installing large format porcelain in domestic settings, a quality S1 adhesive is often sufficient. These products provide the flexibility needed for standard underfloor heating systems and stable substrates, while remaining cost-effective and easy to work with.

However, there are scenarios where stepping up to S2 is advisable. Installations over timber floors, areas with greater structural movement, external spaces such as balconies, or projects involving more complex build-ups can all benefit from the additional deformability that S2 adhesives provide.

It's also important to recognise that flexibility is only one part of the specification. Other characteristics such as open time, slip resistance and setting speed can have just as much impact on how the adhesive performs during installation.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ON SITE

Despite widespread use of S-ratings, there are still several misconceptions that can lead to over- or under-specifying products.



One of the most common is the idea that S1 is for walls and S2 is for floors. In reality, the classification has nothing to do with orientation it is purely about movement and the conditions of the substrate.

Another is the assumption that more flexibility is always better. While S2 adhesives provide a greater margin for movement, they are not always necessary. On a stable, well-prepared substrate, a correctly specified S1 adhesive can deliver excellent long-term performance without adding unnecessary cost.

THE ROLE OF PREPARATION AND SYSTEMS

Adhesive performance does not exist in isolation. Substrate preparation, priming and overall system compatibility all play a critical role in the success of an installation.

Using a compatible primer helps create a stable, uniform background, improving adhesion and reducing the risk of issues such as rapid moisture loss or weak bonding. When adhesives and primers are designed to work together as part of a system, it can also simplify decision-making on site and reduce the likelihood of compatibility problems.

Manufacturers are increasingly responding to this need by developing more streamlined, system-led ranges that align

preparation and fixing stages, helping installers work more efficiently while maintaining performance.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

For installers, the most effective approach is to focus on a few key considerations:

- Assess the substrate: is it stable, or prone to movement?
- Consider environmental factors: will there be heating, cooling or external exposure?
- Factor in tile size and material: larger and denser tiles demand more from the adhesive.
- Follow manufacturer guidance for both adhesive and substrate systems.
- Where possible, use a coordinated primer and adhesive system to reduce variables.

Ultimately, understanding what adhesive classifications mean in practice allows tilers to make more informed decisions, avoid unnecessary over-specification and deliver installations that perform reliably over time.

www.protilertools.co.uk

THE FULL PACKAGE

Palace Chemicals explains how its comprehensive range of tiling solutions supports every stage of a project, from surface preparation and tile fixing through to grouting, sealing and aftercare.

As a leading company in the tiling sector, Palace Chemicals has every aspect of any tiling project covered – from start to finish. The company can offer an unrivalled product range, delivered with a strong commitment to customer service from a dedicated technical sales team, backed up by a comprehensive website, which includes a library of technical datasheets, product videos and a wealth of other information.

“At Palace Chemicals we are proud to offer the market a massive choice of tiling solutions, from priming and levelling through tile fixing and grouting to sealing and cleaning,” says Steve Ball, Commercial Director. “Today’s product range is the result of our 48 years of accumulated experience in this market, and our aim is to help every tile fixer achieve a successful result on each tiling project that they are working on.”

Starting with surface preparation – the most important stage of any project, designed to provide a solid and level substrate for tiling on to – Palace offers everything that is needed, including waterproofing kits, levelling, decoupling and primers.

Palace has two different waterproofing kits in its range – AQUA-BAN and SHOWER-TIGHT, both of which conform to the new EAD standards. Meanwhile levellers form a key part of the surface preparation range, and the company offers more than 10 different water mix and 2-part latex products, including fast track levellers, such as FAST-TRACK, thick bed levelling compounds, smoothing compounds, surface preparation aids and DPMs.

The latest addition to the preparation range is PRO GYP-BASE FAST TRACK SEALER, which greatly reduces the minimum drying times required for anhydrite screeds. It allows for fast-track installation of floorcoverings, without detracting from

the overall screed strength, acting as a barrier within the overall build-up between the screed and the tiles.

When it comes to fixing the tiles themselves, Palace has a very wide range of S1 and S2 adhesives. The company is a pioneer in the tile adhesives sector, and recently-launched highlights include the new GEL-FLEX, which contains up to 33% recycled material, making it ideal for the increasing number of projects where sustainability is a major concern. It provides a high bond strength and instant grab, essential for fixing ceramic, marble, natural stone, mosaic, porcelain and large-format tiles to walls and floors either internally or externally.

This type of adhesive meets the demands of today’s tiling market, offering tile fixers an easy application thanks to its smooth, creamy texture. With non-slip performance and instant grab, it provides the confidence to fix all types of tile for both wall and floor installations. Its excellent coverage further enhances efficiency.

Lightweight tile adhesives are in demand from the market currently. The EXTRA-LITE range from Palace is an ultra-lightweight, thin and thick-bed, flexible tile adhesive available as either a white or grey cement-based powder which contains more than 40% recycled materials and doubled coverage capability, meaning users require smaller volumes on each job. This means faster, easier installation with a reduced carbon impact across the supply chain, from manufacturing to transportation.

Elsewhere the company’s range includes C1 adhesives such as RAPID-SET, C2 adhesive in the TRADE-FLEX, S1 adhesives including EASI-FLEX and MULTI-FLEX, as well as S2 adhesives such as SUPER-FLEX for situations where higher levels of movement or vibration are expected. There is also a range of ready-mixed products.



Palace offers a selection of grouts, including standard grouts and wide joint grouts. Headline products are ANTI-MOULD GROUT which contains a fungicide to inhibit the formation of black mould and COLOUR-LOCK, which is an efflorescence-free grout and is also mould-resistant and comes in a range of 12 colours to allow for creative tiling designs.

Tile aftercare represents the final stage of any tiling project, and within the last year Palace has relaunched its aftercare range. This comprises seven products, which are now all available in stylish new packaging, covering all the key requirements. The range features haze and stain removers, sealers and cleaners for all types tiles, including porcelain, marble and natural stone.

www.palacechemicals.co.uk

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EXTERNAL EXCELLENCE

The ARDEX Group UK – BAL and ARDEX – outlines best practice for direct fixing external porcelain and stone, ensuring durable, weather-resistant installations across patios, terraces and outdoor living spaces.

The rise in popularity of external tiling over recent years has transformed the way homeowners and professionals approach patios, terraces and outdoor living spaces. Installers today work with a wide variety of materials, but the most common choices remain external self supported porcelain – often 20mm thick – along with natural stone, slabs and concrete pavers. As demand has grown, so too has the need for reliable guidance on ensuring long lasting, trouble free installations.

Two key installation methods dominate external tiling: traditional monolithic fixing, which involves laying pavers onto a mortar bed, and the more tile-focused method of direct fixing onto a concrete base. As we move into the busy summer season, it is the direct fixing method that most tilers favour. This approach closely mirrors internal tiling practices, offering a familiar technique that can be adapted for patios, terraces and even driveways.

Direct fixing is suitable when installing porcelain, slabs, natural stone or pavers – provided the materials are rated for external use – and when an existing sound concrete base is available. Before work begins, it is critical to ensure the concrete substrate has fully cured and is free from laitance, efflorescence, contamination or any loose material. Mechanical preparation may be necessary to create a surface with exposed but stable aggregate, delivering reliable adhesion. An effective damp proof membrane must also be in place to prevent moisture transmission, particularly where the concrete is laid directly onto earth.

As with any external installation, environmental factors must be carefully considered. Adequate falls must be incorporated into the design to ensure efficient drainage and avoid standing water. Expansion joints are also essential, helping accommodate movement within the substrate and preventing tile failure.



Dampening the concrete prior to applying adhesive helps control suction, but care must be taken to avoid leaving standing water. Where the substrate requires smoothing or gradient adjustment, an external levelling compound can be used – such as BAL Level Out or ARDEX K 301. The installer should protect levellers from adverse weather –including sun, wind, rain and frost – until properly cured.

Once the substrate is prepared, tiles can be fixed using a suitable external grade adhesive – such as BAL Rapid-Flex One or ARDEX X 78. Because external environments are prone to lateral movement, an uncoupling solution may be required. Traditional uncoupling mats are not always ideal outdoors, as any trapped moisture can lead to issues unless drainage channels are built in. An alternative option is a rubber crumb, anti fracture adhesive such as BAL AF Max, which provides both adhesion and uncoupling in one system. Water and frost resistant, it is a practical choice for external porcelain and ceramic tiles.

For time-sensitive or budget-restricted projects, some external adhesives can be applied directly onto tamped concrete, eliminating the need for a leveller. Where large-format tiles or heavy natural stone are used, rapid setting or semi rapid, pourable tile adhesives – such as BAL XL Floor One or ARDEX X 325 PTB – can provide the necessary strength and coverage. These thick bed systems – sometimes accommodating depths of up to 25mm – are ideal for uncalibrated stone or uneven

substrates. Back buttering should be considered, particularly for deeply keyed tiles, to ensure full coverage. Spot fixing must always be avoided as it contradicts British Standards and increases the risk of staining and failure.

After the adhesive has cured, grouting can begin. High-performance cementitious grouts – such as BAL Micromax3 ECO or ARDEX FLEX-FL – offer durability outdoors, although pre sealing tiles may prevent staining during application. Admixtures can enhance flexibility and longevity, especially in challenging environments. Epoxy grouts provide an alternative solution: waterproof, chemical resistant and easier to maintain, making them well suited to external use. Consider BAL Absolute Grout or ARDEX EG 18 Plus.

Finally, keeping external grout in good condition requires a regular cleaning regime using products appropriate for the tile type. Avoid harsh chemicals or acids that may erode the grout surface.

For detailed installation advice or on site specifications, contact ARDEX Group on 01440 714939 or email info@ardex.co.uk.

<https://ardex.co.uk>

www.bal-adhesives.com



**“DIRECT FIXING IS SUITABLE WHEN
INSTALLING PORCELAIN, NATURAL
STONE OR PAVERS ONTO A SOUND
CONCRETE BASE.”**

COMPLETE CARE

Mapei discusses how its UltraCare range delivers a comprehensive solution for cleaning, protecting and maintaining hard landscaping, helping external tiles and stone retain their appearance and performance in even the toughest conditions.

In all environments, a good protection and maintenance regime is essential in order to retain a tile's aesthetic and performance. Outdoors, this can be a particular challenge, especially with increasingly wet weather and the advent of heavily textured engineered tiles. Mapei UltraCare provides a solution, from installation to the protection and maintenance of all types of external surfaces in domestic and commercial settings. Many treatments now form part of Mapei's Zero Line – with CO₂ fully offset in the entire life cycle – and feature water-based formulations, for a safe and environmentally-friendly application.

MAINTENANCE MADE EASY WITH ULTRACARE

For everyday maintenance, UltraCare Multicleaner Zero is a versatile and highly concentrated pH-neutral solution. Use diluted 1:200 it is perfect for routine cleaning on external surfaces. It can also be used diluted 1:30 to tackle heavier organic dirt. The solution is formulated for all types of engineered and natural stone surfaces, including external porcelain, and is also available in a pump spray bottle for indoor tile care.

TACKLING RESIDUES, STAINS & DEPOSITS

Slippery algae and organic matter, greasy deposits, fixing residues and rust can be difficult to remove from tiles and stone, especially from acid-sensitive natural stone. The UltraCare range includes six products to tackle these issues, restoring appearance and performance:

UltraCare HD Cleaner Zero is a concentrated deep cleaner for porcelain and unpolished natural stone. It quickly removes organic dirt, grease and wax – as well as algae, blackspot, tree sap and stains caused by leaves – restoring a paver's aesthetic, as well as slip-resistant properties.

UltraCare Grout Release provides benefits both before and after grouting. Applied before installation, it prevents grout ingress on porous stone and acts as a sacrificial sealer on porcelain. After installation, it makes the removal of grout easier from both natural stone and external porcelain.



UltraCare Acid Cleaner Zero and UltraCare Keranet Zero are formulated to remove cementitious residues and rust marks, as well as efflorescence and limescale from porcelain and acid-resistant natural stone. Pump spray-format – UltraCare Keranet Easy Zero – is particularly useful for removing cementitious grout residues during fixing; it can be used as soon as grout becomes opaque, significantly reducing the time to undertake a Builders Clean.

To tackle rust and oil-based stains, the range includes UltraCare Rust Remover and UltraCare Stain Remover Zero. UltraCare Rust Remover is a fast-acting, acid-free treatment designed to remove surface and deeply penetrated rust from all types of tile, including acid-sensitive stone. For organic grease and oil stains – including engine and hydraulic oil – UltraCare Stain Remover Zero quickly removes marks from porous surfaces. Both treatments have a thick paste-like consistency that allows targeted treatment and reduces waste.

PROTECTION - BEFORE & AFTER INSTALLATION

Alongside Mapei's UltraCare cleaners, the range also includes a series of UltraCare protectors and intensifiers designed to meet specific requirements, from protection against grout ingress, to natural-effect and colour-enhanced protection after installation. All of the solutions are non-film forming, breathable and UV resistant.

www.mapei.co.uk



LEVEL BEST

Mapei supports outdoor installations with Profilpas PP Level Duo Maxi.

Good levelling is essential in outdoor porcelain paving installations. Subfloors are rarely even and other factors, like stability and drainage, can also create additional challenges. Mapei offers a solution with its Profilpas PP Level Duo Maxi adjustable raised floor supports, enabling landscapers to precisely level pavers while creating a durable, well-drained structure beneath the surface.

Ideal for patios, paths and pool surrounds, Profilpas PP Level Duo Maxi adjustable supports are designed to lift slabs away from the substrate. This provides a series of benefits including easier installation and replacement of tiles, improved water run-off and the ability to run cables and pipes beneath the slabs. The support's self-levelling head compensates for slopes up to 5% and can be extended with dedicated extensions. It can also be converted to a fixed head by removing the self-levelling head ring.

Profilpas PP Level Duo Maxi supports are made from robust, recyclable bi-component PP + PTE material which provides resistance to heavy loads. They also help reduce impact noise by attenuating sound transmission between the tiles and the supports. The supports are pre-engraved, for easy cutting and are offered alongside a series of installation accessories for height adjustment, slab lifting and vertical perimeter closures.

Additional support is provided with Mapei's Profilpas PP Level Duo Maxi calculator tool, which provides an estimate of the quantity of supports required, presented in a clearly illustrated PDF summary.

For more information, please contact: info@mapei.co.uk or visit the website below.

www.mapei.co.uk



ROCK-TITE SOLUTIONS

Palace Chemicals discusses how to select the optimum fixing system for exterior tiling projects.

Palace Chemicals offers the Rock-Tite 3-part system for fixing increasingly popular 20mm exterior porcelain and stone tiles.

The Rock-Tite Exterior Porcelain & Stone System comprises a Primer, a Mortar and a choice of Brush-In or Flow Grout. The mortar is available either as a pre-blend or a concentrate that requires the addition of sand, as the user prefers.

Rock-Tite is designed for use by landscapers and garden designers, as well as tile fixers and builders, and accords with a lifestyle trend which is seeing internal tiled space being extended to terrace or patio areas outside.

Traditionally, these areas might be covered with concrete pavers or timber decking, which can look tired quite quickly. However, the latest generation of 20mm porcelain and stone tiles brings a number of advantages. They are equally suitable either for the home or in higher trafficked commercial spaces.

Many porcelain tiles are also moisture, rot, frost and UV resistant, being easier to clean and offering good slip resistance, provided they are kept clean.

The first element of the system is the Rock-Tite Porcelain Primer, which is supplied in three 5kg bags, complete with a 15kg mixing bucket. This is a fibre-reinforced, polymer-modified, cement-based primer, designed to improve adhesion when used with porcelain, stone and other low absorption types of paving.

Secondly, there is high strength fibre-reinforced Rock-Tite Mortar. There are two mortars available, depending on the type of project being undertaken. These come as either a pre-blend 20kg version, that very easily just mixes with water or a more traditional version, which is supplied in a 15kg bag that mixes in a 1:6 ratio with sharp sand to create the ideal bedding mortar for all external patio projects.

Finally, the system includes a choice of a 15kg cement-free Brush-In Grout/Joining Compound or a Flow Grout, the latter being preferable for areas which will be subject to early and sustained traffic. The grouts come in three 5kg bags supplied in a 15kg bucket. Each are available in a choice of three different colours.

"The Rock-Tite System is very straightforward to use," says Steve Ball, Commercial Director. "It allows home designers to come up with a durable and effective solution for working with the new generation of 20mm porcelain and stone tiles, so that they can complete projects which accord with current fashions and are entirely on trend."

Rock-Tite from Palace Chemicals is supported by a range of promotional material, including a new brochure and a video, easily explaining all the benefits of the system and its ease of use – details of which can be found [here](#).

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WHY PROVENANCE MATTERS

María D Arraez, Director of Tile of Spain UK, looks at the enduring strength of Spanish tile manufacturing.



In today's increasingly competitive and fast-moving interiors market, provenance has become more than a marketing narrative – it is a marker of quality, consistency and long-term value. For tile and stone professionals, understanding where a product comes from, how it is made, and the standards behind it is critical when specifying materials that are expected to perform over time.

Spanish ceramic tile manufacturing offers a compelling example of why provenance continues to matter. With a heritage rooted in decades of craftsmanship, combined with a forward-thinking approach to innovation, Spain has established itself as one of the world's leading producers of high-quality ceramic tiles.

At the heart of this reputation is the ceramic cluster in Castellón, where a unique ecosystem of manufacturers, designers and technology specialists work in close collaboration. This concentration of expertise enables a level of quality control, technical development and creative exchange that is difficult to replicate elsewhere. For the trade, this translates into products that are not only aesthetically refined but also technically robust and reliable.

Provenance also speaks directly to manufacturing standards. Spanish tile producers operate within some of the most stringent European regulatory frameworks, ensuring high levels of consistency, traceability and environmental responsibility. For specifiers and retailers, this provides



GAYAFORE



PERONDA

reassurance that the products they are sourcing meet recognised benchmarks for performance, safety and sustainability.

However, provenance is not solely about compliance – it is equally about culture and design heritage. Spanish ceramics are deeply influenced by a long tradition of artistry, from handcrafted techniques to contemporary interpretations of natural materials. This balance between heritage and modernity is what allows Spanish tiles to remain both timeless and relevant, appealing to a broad spectrum of residential and commercial applications.

In recent years, technological advancement has further strengthened Spain's position in the global tile market. Investment in digital printing, surface finishes and large-format production has enabled manufacturers to push the boundaries of what ceramic can achieve. From hyper-realistic stone and wood effects to intricate decorative designs, Spanish tiles offer a level of versatility that supports both creative freedom and practical performance.

For retailers and distributors, provenance can also play a valuable role in storytelling and differentiation. As consumers become more design-conscious and informed, there is a growing appetite for products with a clear origin and authentic narrative. Being able to communicate the story behind Spanish tile – its heritage, innovation and quality – adds depth to the sales process and helps build trust with end customers.

Equally, for architects and designers, specifying products with a strong provenance can contribute to the overall integrity of



GAYAFORES

a project. Materials are no longer viewed in isolation; they are part of a wider design story that encompasses sustainability, durability and aesthetic coherence. Spanish tiles, with their proven track record, offer confidence that these elements are aligned.

Sustainability is another area where provenance is becoming increasingly important. Spanish manufacturers have made significant strides in reducing environmental impact through energy efficiency, waste reduction and responsible sourcing. By producing within a well-regulated European framework, they are able to offer greater transparency around environmental credentials - an aspect that is becoming ever more critical in both residential and commercial specification.

Ultimately, provenance is about trust. In a market where choice is vast and competition is intense, it provides a clear point of distinction. Spanish tile manufacturing continues to stand out not only because of its history, but because of its ongoing commitment to quality, innovation and responsible production.

For the tile and stone sector, the message is clear: understanding where products come from is not just a matter of interest – it is a strategic advantage. By prioritising provenance, the industry can ensure it is delivering materials that meet the expectations of today's projects, while also supporting long-term performance and value.

<https://tileofspain.com/en>



PORCELANOSA



POOL PERFECTION

Mapei provides a top-class finish at The Belfry Hotel & Resort in Warwickshire.

A comprehensive Mapei system has been used to complete a ceramic installation at The Club – the newly opened leisure and fitness centre at The Belfry Hotel & Resort in Warwickshire. The project included concrete repair, waterproofing, the installation of over 1000m² of tiles by JP Tiling Contractors and a full swimming pool solution by Neuman Aqua. The project was delivered by main contractor, Elliott Group.

Opened in September, The Club is home to an extensive gym overlooking the resort's championship PGA National golf course, as well as a multi-purpose sports hall, four spacious studios and a 25-metre lap pool, amongst much else. It forms the centrepiece of a wider £90m development project at The Belfry Hotel & Resort, which also includes a state-of-the-art events space and 149 new bedrooms.

The leisure installation areas spanned the 25-metre lap pool, a separate family pool and channel – incorporating careful interfacing with play features and a water slide installation, an indoor bubble pool, balance tanks and an outdoor bubble pool. Meanwhile, areas completed by JP Tiling included the sauna and steam rooms, changing areas and Revive Café.

Mapei's specification included formulations from Mapei Zero Line – with CO₂ fully offset in the entire life cycle, along with very low VOC EMICODE EC1 Plus-certified formulations for a safe installation environment.

During Neuman Aqua's pool preparation phase, a series of mortars were applied to repair concrete surfaces. They included Mapemortar HB R3 Zero, Planitop Smooth & Repair R4 Extra Zero, anti-corrosion Mapefer 1K Zero and Mapefill GP Zero. In addition, Mapei Mapeproof Swell and Planitop Smooth & Repair R4 Extra Zero were used to seal

around light fixtures and penetrations and Mapefix VE SF was used to anchor bolts for pool balustrades and ladders. To waterproof the pool tanks, Mapelastic Zero cementitious mortar was applied, along with Mapenet 150 – an alkali-resistant fibre glass mesh and Mapeband Easy rubber tape to form waterproof elastic joints. The screed specification included Topcem fast-drying hydraulic binder which was bonded with Eporip epoxy adhesive. Meanwhile, walls were levelled with Planitop Fast 330 rapid-set, fibre-reinforced cementitious mortar.

Before installation of tiles throughout wet areas, JP Tiling installed Mapeguard WP 200 alkali-resistant waterproofing and anti-fracture membrane and Mapeguard ST tape, using Mapeguard WP elastic cementitious adhesive to bond and seal the waterproofing before installation of tiles.

Mapei Keraflex Maxi S1 Zero cementitious adhesive was used to install ceramic tiles and mosaics throughout all areas, along with two grouts – Kerapoxy Easy Design anti-bacterial and acid/mould-resistant decorative epoxy grout and Ultracolor Plus – a fast-track cementitious grout featuring mould-resistant BioBlock and water-repellent DropEffect technology, also from the Zero Line. Primer FD bonding enhancer was applied to all movement joints which were then sealed with Mapei Mapeasil AC mould-resistant silicone sealant.

The tile specification included 600 x 600mm and 600 x 300mm porcelain tiles and 200 x 100mm ceramic tiles installed throughout common areas, and glass mosaics throughout the pool area.

www.mapei.co.uk

AN ODE TO ITALY

Ape Grupo Ceramics help bring the soul of Italy to Santa Domingo in the Dominican Republic.



In the heart of the Caribbean, a space has emerged that transports diners directly into the soul of an Italian home. Caruso, a restaurant designed by architecture studio Arquimilio, led by Ramón Emilio Jiménez Vicens, in the Dominican Republic, exudes joy, intimacy and a deeply evocative atmosphere. It pays tribute to the beloved figure of the Italian 'nonna' and to the warm spirit of homes filled with history, objects and affection.

Awarded an honourable mention in the second edition of the APE Grupo Architecture Awards, the project stands out for its theatrical character, sensory richness and bold, contemporary reinterpretation of traditional culture. Caruso's interior architecture celebrates both Caribbean popular roots and Italian heritage, creating a hybrid, uninhibited and profoundly human design language. This is a space not just to eat, but to feel, to remember, and to be moved.

Within just a few square metres, the restaurant delivers an exuberant and welcoming atmosphere. Every corner has been thoughtfully curated: walls clad in ceramic, colourful wooden shelves filled with Italian goods, and nostalgic decorative details. Chandeliers have been reimagined as upside-down planters with lemon trees, adding a fresh and original touch.

The bar features a striking installation: a lamp made of ceramic tomatoes suspended at varying heights, creating a delicate visual cascade. The design achieves a masterful balance between tradition and modernity, resulting in an immersive sensory experience.

Vibrant colours, hand-painted murals depicting classic Italian scenes and an abundance of decorative elements bring to life a space full of personality and warmth. Caruso is more than a restaurant – it is a story told through design, a shared memory captured in every dish, in every detail.

CERAMICS AS ENCLOSURE, MEMORY AND ATMOSPHERE

At Caruso, the Souk collection by APE Grupo plays a calm yet decisive role. Cladding the entire interior walls with this

material helps create a seamless, enveloping atmosphere where the boundaries between kitchen and dining area, between the technical and the sensory, fade away. Far from being a purely decorative element, the ceramics act as a skin that wraps the entire space, erasing the division between function and emotion.

"We used a small-format ceramic tile, with colour variation and slight imperfections that evoke a handmade feel," explains Ramón Emilio Jiménez Vicens. "This material helps us convey the nostalgia of the nonna's kitchen – a place centred around family spirit and the ritual of love expressed through food."

For the architect, design is not just visual but sensory. "We strongly believe in contrasts and in the idea that sensory experience is also tactile," says Ramón Emilio. "Ceramics are among the most versatile and poetic materials we use in our projects."

NARRATIVE MAXIMALISM WITH SOUL

Despite its vibrant and detail-rich aesthetic, Caruso does not feel overwhelming. Everything serves a purpose within the story. From the lemon tree chandeliers to the suspended ceramic tomatoes, each element has meaning within the restaurant's emotional universe. "Caruso is maximalist, but every element is tied to a narrative. We wanted each person to fall in love with a different corner, to feel the space belonged to them," explains Ramón Emilio.

Caruso was part of the central exhibition at the ninth Ibero-American Design Biennial (BID), held in Madrid under the theme Expanded Design. This exhibition brought together outstanding design works from Latin America, Spain and Portugal, showcasing projects with the potential to generate cultural, social and aesthetic impact. In this context, Caruso was presented as a symbol of Dominican interior design and an example of how spaces can tell stories, activate collective memory, and create a true sense of belonging.

www.apegrupo.com/en





EASTERN IDENTITY

WOW Design ceramic tiles help to create an immersive experience at a Korean-inspired café in Thessaloniki, Greece.

Moonkiz Café is conceived as a small narrative universe in which the everyday ritual of coffee is transformed into a slow, mindful spatial experience. Inspired by Korean aesthetics, the project proposes a way of inhabiting space based on rhythm, repetition and attention to detail, translating these values into an architecture designed to be explored and lived.

Within the café, WOW Design ceramics are integrated as a structural element of the interior design, establishing a serene material base upon which the entire project is articulated. Rather than acting as a decorative layer, ceramics become the architectural thread of the space, organising circulation and allowing graphic identity, colour and lighting to coexist without visual tension.

KOREAN CULTURE, MATERIALITY AND SPATIAL BALANCE

The project adopts a contemporary reading of Korean culture, understood not as a literal reference but as a spatial attitude. Calmness, precision and balance are expressed through an architecture of clean lines and soft geometries, set in dialogue with an expressive graphic identity that introduces colour, characters and subtle references to Korean urban and pop culture.

Designed by ARK4LAB, Moonkiz Café is organised as a fluid and accessible space capable of accommodating different modes of use. More intimate areas coexist with open zones conceived for social interaction, connected by continuous





pathways and a carefully controlled atmosphere that supports the experience without imposing it.

CERAMICS AS THE PROJECT'S SILENT FOUNDATION

In this context, WOW Design's Halo collection plays a key role. Inspired by natural stone and by the chromatic variations of light throughout the day, Halo unfolds to create a continuous surface that connects the different areas of the café and naturally accompanies the user's movement. Its small format and modular logic introduce rhythm and depth, reinforcing the human scale of the space with discretion.

The continuity of the flooring towards the exterior blurs the boundary between interior and city, reinforcing the café's open character and consolidating it as a small everyday stage integrated into its urban surroundings. Ceramics support this transition seamlessly, underlining the project's material coherence.

A GASTRONOMIC, CULTURAL AND EMOTIONAL SPACE

Located in Thessaloniki, Moonkiz Café brings this cultural imaginary into the city's urban scene without the need for explicit explanations. The setting acts as a backdrop, while the project asserts itself through its own identity and spatial language.

The proposal is completed by a gastronomic offering inspired by Korean coffee culture, featuring traditional drinks and desserts presented through a minimalist language consistent with the space. The integration of technological systems for lighting, climate control and comfort further enhances the overall experience.

Moonkiz Café thus stands as an example of how contemporary interior design can construct atmosphere, identity and emotion through materiality and ceramics. A project in which small-format ceramic tiles become an essential architectural tool for shaping an experiential, balanced and long-lasting space.

www.wowdesigneu.com



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