

TileLetter

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APPLICATIONS**

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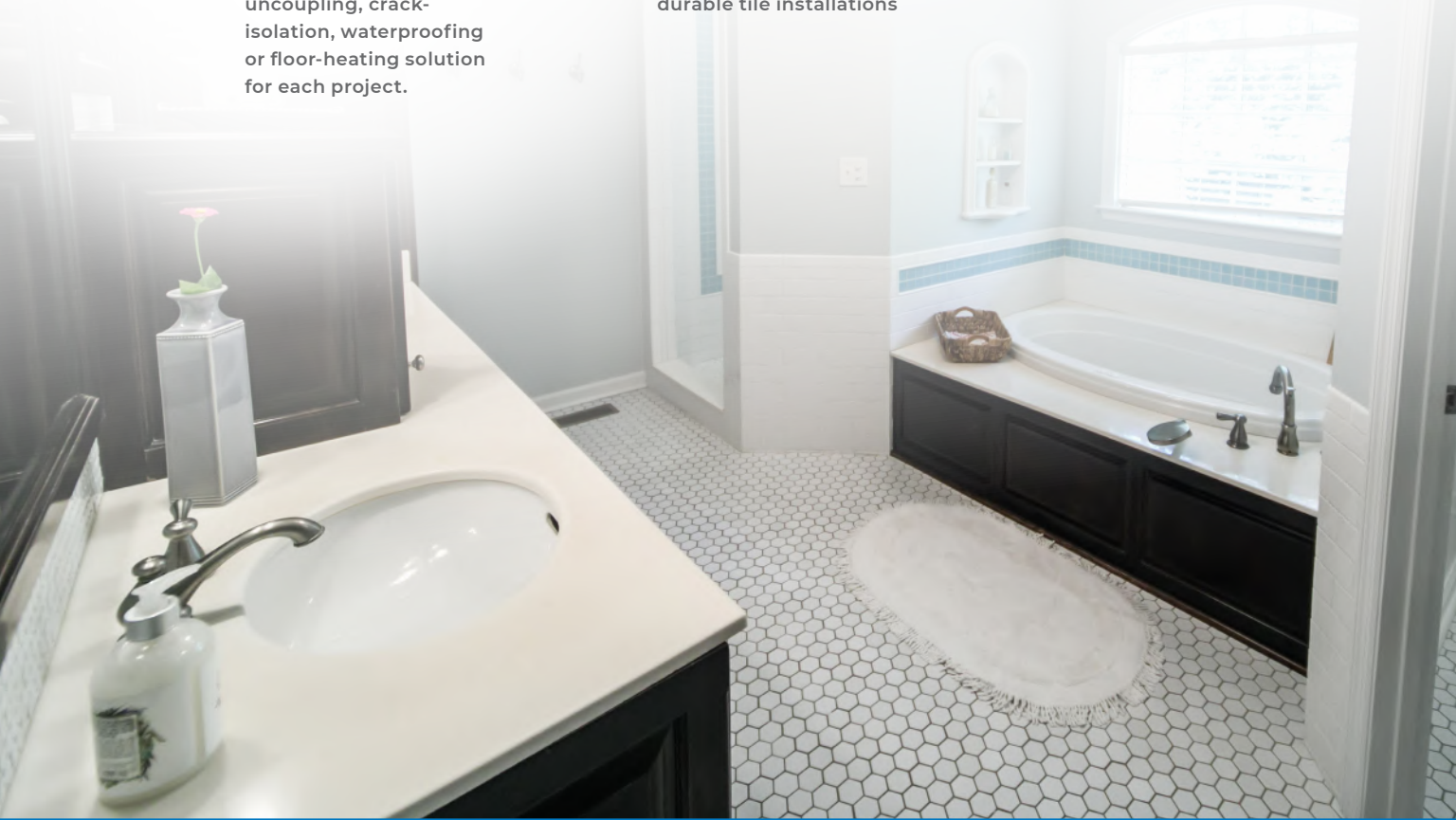
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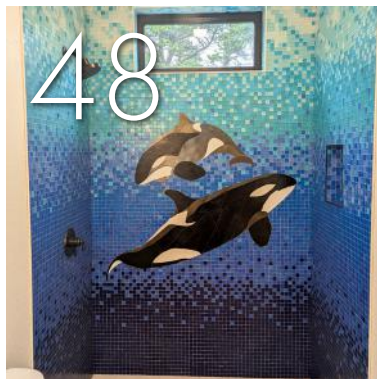
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Ahead of the Curve

You could say that Arturo Luis Franco, founder of HF Tile LLC, specializes in tile installations where geometry refuses to behave. His work lives in the spaces most installers avoid: curved walls, multi-angle transitions, and layouts where nothing runs perfectly straight for long.

A recent project pushed this idea even further. Centered around a skylight feature, the installation required tile and waterproofing work to wrap seamlessly around a complex curved structure while maintaining clean visual alignment from every angle. At first glance, it reads as a clean, architectural installation. Underneath, it's controlled geometry under pressure, with circles breaking into octagons, radii folding into flat planes, and tile lines shifting through multiple directions without losing alignment.

"The challenge isn't just setting tile," Arturo explains. "It's making sure the design still makes sense when it wraps around something that is not flat."

That meant heavy pre-planning before a single tile was installed. Layout lines were mapped carefully across curved surfaces surrounding the skylight, with symmetry treated as non-negotiable. Even mosaic sections were rotated to a 45-degree orientation to prevent visual distortion once the surface began to bend and shift.

Waterproofing introduced another layer of complexity. Using Schluter products, including KERDI waterproofing membrane and KERDI-BAND, Arturo adapted a flat sheet system to a cylindrical structure through careful segmentation. The membrane was cut into pie-like sections so the seams followed the curve naturally instead of fighting against it.

"You can't pretend a curve is flat," he says. "The material tells you very quickly if you're wrong."

That same attention to detail carried through the rest of the build. KERDI-BOARD helped create stable backing surfaces throughout the installation, while the KERDI Shower Tray and KERDI-DRAIN streamlined the shower assembly and waterproofing process. Even the KERDI Shower Niche had to be carefully integrated into the curved wall layout so it felt intentional within the surrounding geometry, adding both functionality and visual continuity to the tiled space.

Tile lines were carried through corners and transitions so precisely that the finished surface appears continuous, even though the structure beneath is anything but simple. Every line had to resolve into the next without visual drift, requiring constant recalibration during installation.



For Arturo, using a complete Schluter system helped eliminate unnecessary guesswork.

"When you're working with curves and complex geometry, Schluter makes the process faster, cleaner, and far less stressful because everything is designed to work together."

Projects like this sit at the intersection of design ambition and installer discipline. They reward patience more than speed, and planning more than improvisation. The result is work that looks effortless only because the complexity has already been solved in advance.

In Arturo's world, the real craft is not in making things simple. It is in making complex geometry behave like it was always meant to be there. That's what keeps his work ahead of the curve.

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TileLetter

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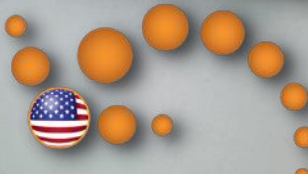
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Training Department
Manager



Randy Fleming



Chad Jones



Kate Koerber



Bill O'Connor



Amber Fox
Director of Strategic
Initiatives



Anthony Oliver



Robb Roderick



Alex Smith

2026 NTCA Workshop Programs *

To confirm dates and for more information visit NTCATraining.com

JULY

- 13 **Floor & Decor** – Atlanta, GA
- 13 **Floor & Decor** – Thornton, CO
- 14 **Daltile** – Reno, NV
- 14 **Daltile** – Roanoke, VA
- 14 **Floor & Decor** – Colorado Springs, CO
- 15 **Daltile** – Loxley, AL
- 16 **Floor & Decor** – Schererville, IN
- 16 **Floor & Decor** – Covington, LA
- 16 **Floor & Decor** – Virginia Beach, VA
- 16 **Daltile** – Albuquerque, NM
- 20 **Floor & Decor** – Tolleson, AZ
- 21 **The Tile Shop** – Rockville, MD
- 21 **Daltile** – Beaumont, TX
- 21 **Floor & Decor** – Santa Ana, CA
- 22 **Daltile** – Las Vegas, NV

- 22 **Floor & Decor** – Grapevine, TX
- 23 **Daltile** – Houston, TX
- 23 **Daltile** – Bethpage, NY
- 23 **Daltile** – St. George, UT
- 27 **Floor & Decor** –
North Richland Hills, TX
- 28 **Floor & Decor** – Plano, TX
- 30 **Floor & Decor** – Humble, TX

AUGUST

- 4 **Emser Tile** – Sacramento, CA
- 10 **Floor & Decor** – Bakersfield, CA
- 11 **Daltile** – Ontario, CA
- 11 **Daltile** – Lakewood, WA
- 12 **The Masonry Center** – Spokane, WA
- 13 **Emser Tile** – Phoenix, AZ

- 13 **Daltile** – Missoula, MT
- 18 **Daltile** – Ogden, UT
- 18 **Daltile** – Cranberry Township, PA
- 19 **Floor & Decor** – Bethel Park, PA
- 20 **The Tile Shop** – Nashville, TN
- 20 **Daltile** – Bedford Heights, OH
- 25 **The Masonry Center** – Boise, ID
- 25 **Daltile** – Wilmington, DE
- 26 **Daltile** – Fort Myers, FL
- 27 **The Masonry Center** – Missoula, MT
- 27 **Floor & Decor** – Fort Lauderdale, FL

2026 NTCA Regional Programs *

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JULY

- 16 **Floor & Decor** – Pleasant Hill, CA
- 23 **Louisville Tile Distributors** –
Louisville, KY
- 23 **Arizona Tile** – Anaheim, CA
- 28 **Floor & Decor** – Mission Viejo, CA
- 30 **Daltile** – Nashville, TN

AUGUST

- 6 **Floor & Decor** – Happy Valley, OR
- 6 **Daltile** – Lenexa, KS
- 11 **Floor & Decor** – Everett, WA
- 20 **Floor & Decor** – Lombard, IL
- 20 **Floor & Decor** – Denver, CO
- 27 **Floor & Decor** – Gaithersburg, MD
- 27 **Uzin Utz** – Waco, TX



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*

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— THICH NHAT HANH



Lesley Goddin

It is a strange thing to realize that we are already past the halfway point of the year, well into summer and a celebration of our country's birthday, and scheduling work in the breathing space between the spring and fall convention seasons and holidays, vacations and summertime activities.

And yet here we are. Before you read any further, I invite you to take a deep breath, let go of an even longer exhale—and just BE for a moment.

NOW, you'll be ready to absorb some of the content the *TileLetter* team and contributing writers have prepared for you in this issue.

In our Business section, Joe Lundgren takes a deep dive into the benefits and challenges of private labeling for the distributor and touches on advantages for contractor customers, too. NTCA's Bart Bettiga shares a recap of his "Inside the Industry: Leaders on Tile Today" panel at the recent Coverings show. And Melissa Willis offers empowering suggestions for business owners during challenging economic times.

In our Member Spotlight, Joppe Aguirre, Owner of Cascadia Tile Company, LLC in Bend, Ore., shares his path from high school to today in the tile industry, and what challenges and inspires him in his work.

In this issue, Bettiga also checks in with Alex Keene, General Manager of Platform Performance Flooring Systems, to detail the evolution of the company from FloorPrep by Dependable and the integration of Compotite for a true one-stop shop for the contractor.

CTEF's Scott Carothers guides us through ANSI A108.01's General Requirements: Structures, Substrates, and Preparation for Tile, which includes a wealth of jobsite requirements offering workflow guidance, proper jobsite conditions, and safeguards for completed work. These are essential for all tile work, but especially for commercial projects.

And our Ask the Experts professionals share information about hollow-sounding tile. What does it mean? Is it always a problem? Read our story and find out!

RTC Products delivers a one-two punch with a second cover feature in as many months, this time focusing on purpose-built tools that facilitate the logistical challenge of installing 250 48" x 110" gauged porcelain tile panels at the Lennar Corporation Corporate Headquarters in Miami.

In Cool Tools, Mike Sima of Midtown Tile enthuses about the Ring King Ruler and why it's such an essential tool to have on the job.

NTCA President Rod Owen shares his wisdom about essential aspects of commercial tile installation, as well as an alert about surviving tile installation projects carried out in the summer heat.

And our Mindset Matters contribution draws a comparison between the qualities that helped build our country—like resilience, strength, freedom and interdependence—and how we can employ those in our own personal growth trajectories.

At this theoretical summer lull (your work schedule may not reflect this!), keep BREATHING—consciously, that is. Use your breath to ground you, energize you, and literally in-spire you. How? Breathe slowly in for a count of 4, and slowly out for a count of 8. Repeat until you can feel your body grow calm. It's something you can do anytime, anywhere, whether on the job or at home—your secret weapon to release overwhelm and securely anchor yourself in calm purpose.

God bless,

Lesley

lesley@tile-assn.com

OOPS!

Well, folks, apologies from the *TileLetter* staff. People sometimes make mistakes (it shows we are real humans and not AI!), and that was evident when our proofreader was on vacation during proofing of the June issue. We caught several mistakes when we were all back on deck and proofing the *TileLetter* digital flipbook. We corrected the digital version, but wanted to set things right for print readers, too.

So, again apologies - and corrections:

Page 42 Technical Story: **"Flatness matters: A Practical Conversation about Concrete, Specification and Tile Success"**

This story was mistakenly attributed to CTEF's Scott Carothers instead of James Woelfel, Principal of J.G. Woelfel & Associates and Chairman of the NTCA Technical Committee.

Page 20 One-To-One: **"Best of Everything (BOE): a Partnership Built on Industry Legacy and Innovation"**

We got the names and the faces reversed on the opening page of this story. Here are the correct name-face match ups.

We endeavor to be accurate and appreciate your patience and graciousness when errors occur!



James Woelfel



Rick Baldini



Rich Maggio



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Rod Owen

Commercial APPLICATIONS

This month's *TileLetter* theme is Commercial Applications, and it's a good reminder that this side of our industry demands a high level of discipline in almost every area of the work.

Many of you, like myself, were introduced to this trade through commercial jobsites, where expectations are high. Those experiences shape how we view the work going forward and why discipline, coordination, and consistency become second nature over time.

Commercial projects don't leave much room for guesswork. Success starts long before the first tile is set. Planning is critical—proper sequencing, understanding the applications, coordinating materials, and aligning expectations. The more complex the project, the more important it is that teams understand not just how to install, but how to work within a larger system of schedules, specifications, and standards.

Communication becomes constant. From the office to the field, and across multiple trades, everyone has to stay aligned. Contract interpretation and clarity in drawings and specifications are not just administrative tasks, they directly impact production, efficiency, and quality. Misunderstandings at this level can ripple across an entire job.

Scheduling and documentation carry just as much weight. Commercial work is driven by timelines, and staying on track requires accurate planning and consistent updates. Documentation protects everyone involved and ensures that decisions, changes, and progress are clearly recorded.

In short, commercial applications require structure. And structure is what keeps complex work moving forward successfully.

There is also another factor that deserves attention this time of year: summer conditions.

As temperatures rise, so do the challenges on the jobsite. Most construction environments are not climate controlled, which means crews are often working in the summer heat. That introduces additional considerations: hot-weather installation methods, manufacturer limitations, and material performance in elevated conditions.

But, most important is the well-being of the people doing the work. Heat-related stress is a real risk in our industry. Hydration, rest breaks, awareness of early warning signs, and jobsite planning all play a role in keeping crews safe and productive. Safety is not just a policy, it's a responsibility.

When you combine the demands of commercial work with the realities of summer conditions, it's clear why preparation matters so much. The more intentional we are with planning, communication, training, and safety, the better positioned we are to perform at a high level.

Commercial work will always raise the bar. It challenges us to stay sharp, organized, and aware, not just of the work, but of the people doing the work.

Because in the end, successful projects are built on more than successful tile systems. They're built on prepared teams, safe working conditions, and people working together with purpose.

As always,
Educate for Excellence.

Rod Owen
NTCA President
rod.owen@ccowen.us

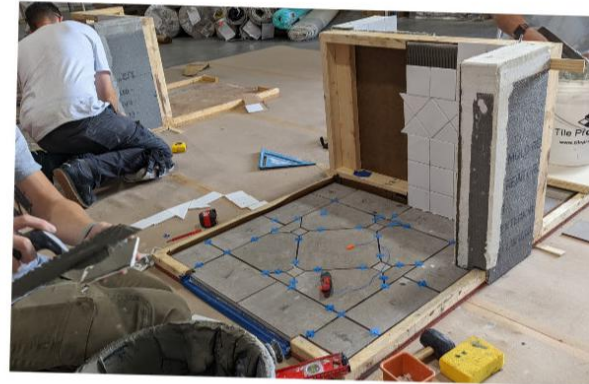


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- August 15 - Richmond, CA
- August 20 - Mansfield, TX
- August 21 - Harrisburg, PA
- September 9 - Stockton, CA
- September 18 - King of Prussia, PA
- October 1 - Mesa, AZ MUD
- October 6 - Glendale, AZ
- October 9 - Grand Junction, CO
- October 9 - Gatlinburg, TN
- October 16 - Las Vegas, NV
- October 16 - Portland, OR
- November 20 - King of Prussia, PA
- November 20 - Orlando, FL
- December 3 - Louisville, KY



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...and more to come throughout the year. Check our calendar often for new dates and locations added!

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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cathey@tilecareer.com

INSIDE THE INDUSTRY:

NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY, OPPORTUNITY, AND TRANSFORMATION IN TILE

LEADERS SHARE REAL-TIME INSIGHTS FROM COVERINGS 2026

By Bart Bettiga, Executive Director, NTCA

At Coverings 2026 in Las Vegas, one question echoed across the convention floor: “What is truly happening in the tile industry?”

To answer that question, the panel “Inside the Industry: Leaders on Tile Today” brought together some of the most respected voices in manufacturing, distribution, and strategic advisory, moderated by Bruce Zwicker, Owner of Zwicker Advisory and former CEO of J.J. Haines.

What emerged was not a narrative of decline, but one of recalibration. In a market shaped by volatility, shifting consumer behavior, and macroeconomic pressure, tile continues to prove its resilience. While many segments of the flooring industry have struggled to regain momentum following the post-COVID correction, tile has quietly outperformed. Flat performance in today’s market is not a sign of stagnation—it is a sign of stability. More importantly, it is a signal that the industry is positioning itself for the next cycle of growth.



“If your sales were flat or better, you actually won.” – Moderator Bruce Zwicker, Owner of Zwicker Advisory and former CEO of J.J. Haines



The ‘Leaders on Tile Today’ panel (L to R): Bart Bettiga, NTCA; Scott Maslowski, Dal-Tile; Bruce Zwicker of Zwicker Advisory, moderator; Brent Emore, AHF; and Ray Mancini, UCX.

Market reality: stability in a volatile environment

Zwicker presented data during the discussion that reinforced a critical point: demand in the tile category has remained relatively stable in dollar terms, even as unit volume has declined.

This reflects pricing strength, product innovation, and continued relevance across multiple channels. Imports still represent a significant portion of supply, accounting for the majority of volume, yet domestic manufacturing is beginning to gain strategic importance.

The industry is no stranger to disruption. Since 2008, it has weathered waves of global competition, supply chain challenges, and economic uncertainty.

What makes the current environment unique is the speed at which conditions are changing. Tariffs, energy costs, and geopolitical tensions are influencing decisions daily. In this environment, businesses are being forced to operate with agility and clarity—balancing short-term pressures with long-term opportunity.



“Tile is a great category for us due to good margins and lower claims. Tile is well diversified in the residential and commercial markets.” –Raymond Mancini, Jr., CEO of UCX

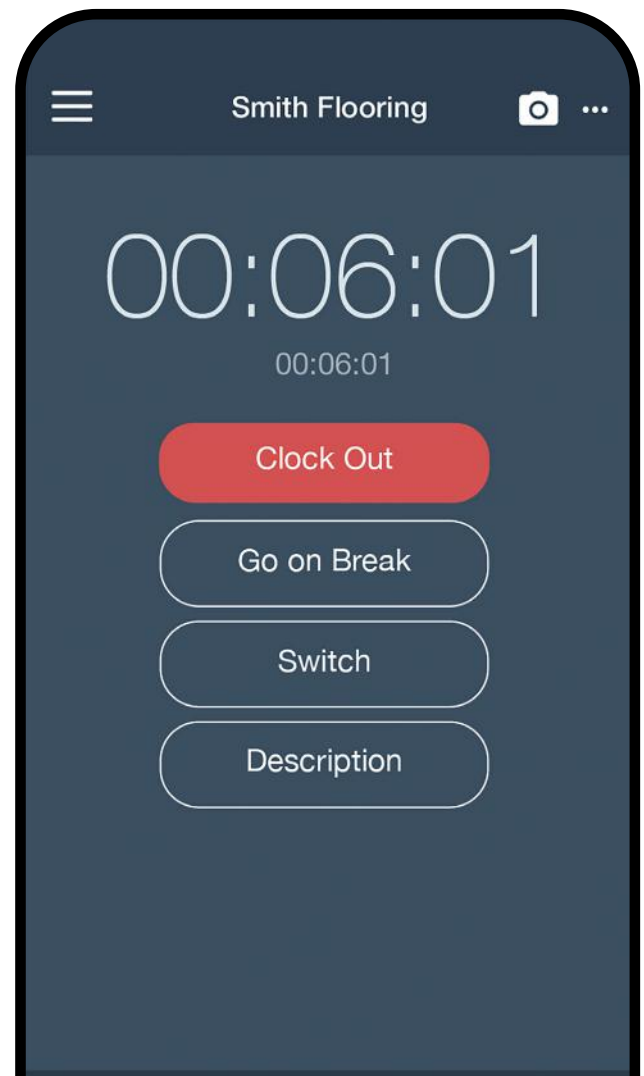
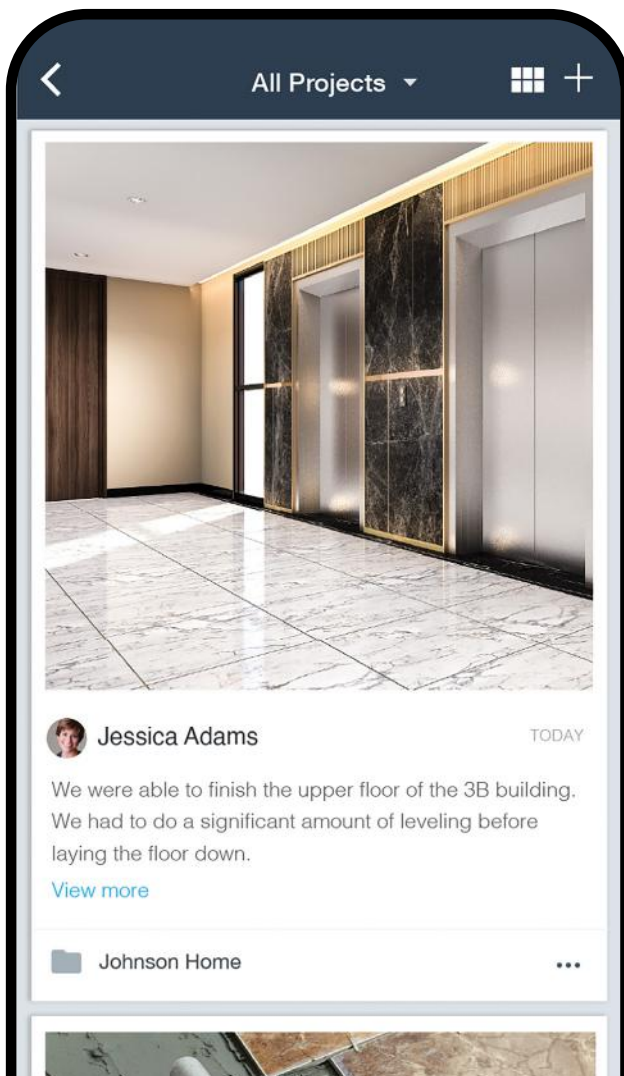
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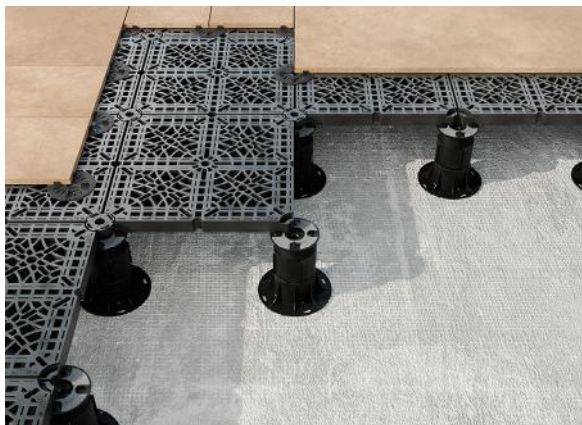
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* Consult with the natural-stone manufacturer as to whether its products are suitable for heavy pedestrian traffic..



"Tile remains a fashion-forward product. Due to discretionary spending in all of the three commercial, builder, and residential remodel segments, I think the industry has done a good job at differentiating itself [aesthetically], based on its historical characteristics of lifecycle and durability, which plays as a strength for all of us." – Scott Maslowski, Dal-Tile Executive Vice President of Sales and Operations

Innovation and design drive growth

A major theme of the panel was innovation. Over the last decade, advancements in digital printing and manufacturing have transformed tile into a design-driven product category. Tile is no longer competing solely on durability, it is competing on aesthetics, versatility, and performance.

The development of large-format and thinner tiles has significantly expanded the application of tile, particularly in exterior environments and high-end design projects. These innovations are opening new markets and



"The manufacturing capabilities of larger and thinner tiles have opened up greater opportunities for tile to dominate the market, especially in the exterior market." – Bart Bettiga, NTCA Executive Director

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Patent Pending Design





"I think this year will be a fight. There are new technologies and innovations on tile, so hopefully good headwinds become better."
 –Brent Emore, AHF CEO

increasing per capita consumption. However, they also introduce complexity in installation, requiring a highly-trained workforce capable of executing at a higher level.

Economic pressures and consumer behavior

While innovation continues to push the category forward, macroeconomic conditions remain a significant headwind. Rising energy costs, inflation, and interest rates are influencing both business operations and consumer decision-making.

Flooring, particularly in the residential segment, is often a discretionary purchase. When uncertainty increases, projects are delayed, rather than cancelled. Consumer confidence has emerged as one of the most critical variables for our industry. Until interest rates begin to decline and affordability improves, many homeowners will remain hesitant to invest in large-scale remodeling projects. At the same time, there is significant pent-up demand waiting to be released.

Years of deferred spending, combined with aging housing stock and strong home equity positions, suggest that when conditions shift, the industry will experience a meaningful rebound.

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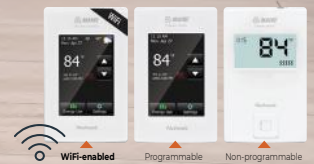
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Labor, backlog, and the risks ahead

From a contractor perspective, the conversation highlighted a shift in concerns. While labor shortages have dominated the industry for years, some contractors are now expressing concern about maintaining a backlog and filling schedules into late 2026 and beyond. This reflects the broader uncertainty in the market, particularly within certain commercial segments.

“The commercial side of our members has been good, but I am hearing they are worried about filling their backlogs in 2026 and into 2027,” said Bettiga. “High-end residential remodel seems to be holding steady.”

At the same time, there is a growing concern about the quality of labor entering the market. As cost pressures increase, there is a risk that less-qualified labor will be introduced, potentially impacting installation quality and long-term performance. Maintaining standards, investing in training, and reinforcing professionalism will be critical to protecting the industry’s reputation.

Consolidation and strategic positioning

Another major theme was consolidation. Across

distribution, manufacturing, and retail, the industry is experiencing increased activity from private equity and large-scale acquisitions. This trend is reshaping the competitive landscape and creating both challenges and opportunities for independent businesses. Organizations that can differentiate through service, expertise, and relationships will be best positioned to compete in a more concentrated market.

Preparing for the next cycle

The overarching message from Coverings 2026 was clear: the tile industry is not waiting for certainty—it is learning to operate without it. The companies that will lead the next phase of growth are those that prepare now—investing in people, strengthening relationships, and embracing innovation.

At NTCA, we remain committed to supporting that journey. Through training, advocacy, and industry leadership, we will continue to equip our members with the tools they need to succeed. The demand will return. When it does, those who are prepared will lead. **TL**

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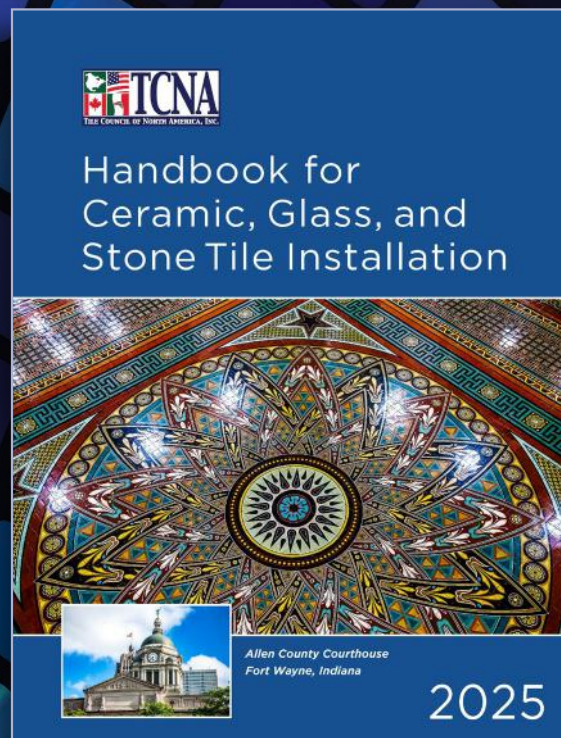
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PRIVATE LABELING IN THE CERAMIC TILE INDUSTRY:

Owning the SKU, the MARGIN, and the CUSTOMER

By Joe Lundgren, President,
Joseph Lundgren Consulting



In today's ceramic tile market, distributors are navigating a landscape defined by margin pressure, SKU proliferation, and increasing price transparency. At the same time, global sourcing has never been more volatile. Since 2019, distributors have been attempting to import tile and stone in the most turbulent market any of us can remember. With this being the deck you're dealt, private labeling has evolved from a secondary strategy into a central pillar of growth for many distributors.

Private labeling is no longer just about putting your name on a box. It's about controlling your assortment, protecting your margins, and strengthening your position in the channel. In short, it's about ownership. This is a mindset change for many distributors.

Distributors have always lived in the space between manufacturer and contractor, but that space has tightened. Manufacturers have expanded their own branding efforts, while digital platforms have made price comparisons easier than ever. Private labeling offers a clear response:

- ☐ Reduce dependence on branded price structures
- ☐ Improve landed cost through direct or strategic sourcing
- ☐ Capture margin that would otherwise remain upstream

In a category where products can quickly become commoditized (a "benefit" of ink jet printing), margin control isn't optional; it's required to stay in the game.

As I discussed in my April 2026 *TileLetter* article, "Why SKU Discipline and Channel Strategy Matter More than Ever," one of the most overlooked challenges in tile today is SKU discipline. Manufacturers often introduce broad collections with dozens of SKUs across sizes, colors, and finishes. This may serve a global audience—manufacturers around the world have as many as 70 different markets they can export to, hence giving



Qualis Ceramica, developed by Scott Levy and the Arley team, serves as a compelling example of how private label programs are being executed in today's market.

them a vast advantage to produce lines with multiple SKUs. However, it doesn't always align with the realities of stocking and selling at the domestic level.

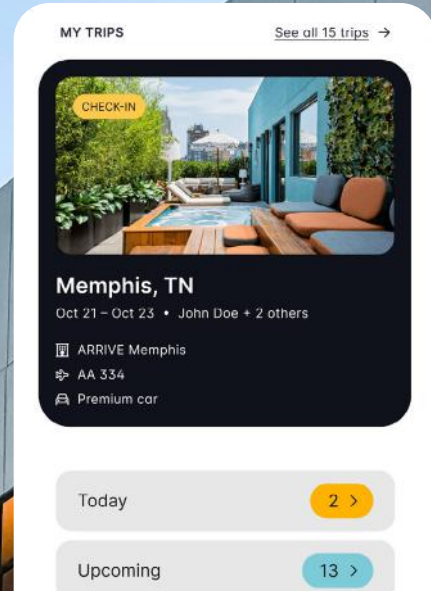
Taking control of inventory

Private labeling allows distributors to take control:

- ☐ Focus on high-velocity SKUs
- ☐ Eliminate redundancy
- ☐ Align inventory with actual demand

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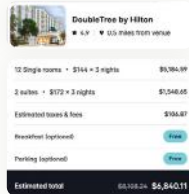
Loyalty points



Flexibility

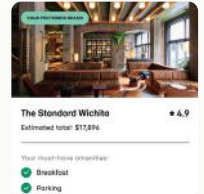
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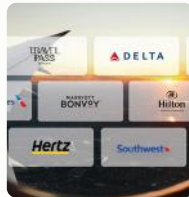
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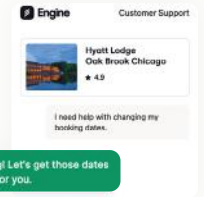
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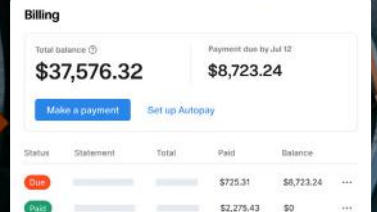
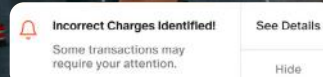
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Adaptability is another benefit. Sometimes, a relationship with a branded manufacturer may be unexpectedly short-lived. But when branded products are all you have, the ability to change is more difficult. The private label option allows you to “turn on a dime” and seek new suppliers.



Another example of the Qualis Ceramica private label program from Arley, showcasing large-format and plank offerings.



With Wilcox Fifty Five, Louisville Tile demonstrates how private label programs let you customize the assortment to match your client base.

Branded products, while valuable, come with a built-in challenge: they are easily comparable. A contractor or homeowner can quickly search online and find competing prices, often eroding the distributor’s ability to maintain margin.

Private labeling disrupts that cycle. When the product is exclusive to your brand, it becomes more difficult to shop, easier to position on value rather than price, and—most importantly—stronger in supporting your sales team’s credibility.

The ability to build equity

For decades, the ceramic tile industry has been driven by manufacturer brands. While those brands remain important, private labeling creates an opportunity for distributors to build equity in their own name.

A distributor’s long-term goal would be to establish their brand name in the market, hence building trust with contractors and designers, which in the end shifts demand towards the distributor’s offering and not just their inventory. Remember, when customers begin asking for your brand by name, the relationship has fundamentally changed.

Flexibility in the face of market conditions

Private labels provide a level of flexibility that branded programs often cannot. Since 2019, distributors have been managing the impact of the G.F.A.C.T. drivers: Geopolitical, Freight, Availability, Cost, and Tariffs.

Being able to change sources but not the product allows them to:

- ☐ Have products made at whichever manufacturer is the best choice at the time
- ☐ Maintain continuity of supply for core products

This optionality is a competitive advantage, especially when others are constrained. No manufacturer can perfectly anticipate every regional need. Whether it’s a specific size, a targeted price point, or a design nuance, gaps inevitably exist.

Reliability for the contractor

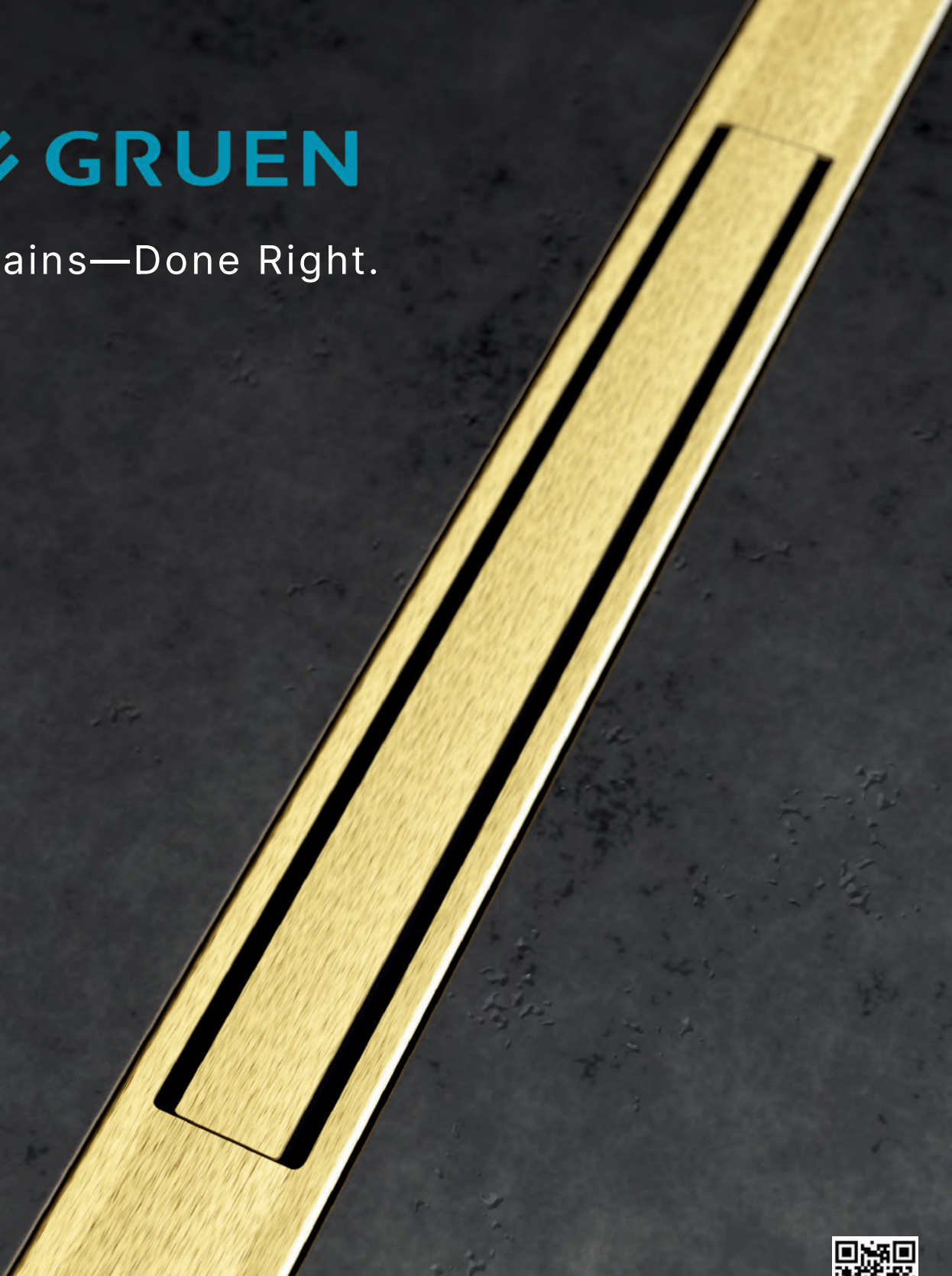
Private labeling allows distributors to respond directly:

- ☐ Introduce products tailored to local demand
- ☐ Expand into underserved price segments
- ☐ Evaluate new formats without full line commitments

In many cases, the most successful private label programs are built not on copying, but on identifying and filling these gaps. At the end of the day,



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the contractor values reliability above all else: product availability, consistency, and speed. When contractors know they can rely on your product, your brand becomes part of their workflow, not just a purchase decision.

Challenges and complementary relationships

Private labels are not without their challenges. With greater control comes greater responsibility:

- ☐ Quality assurance must be consistent.
- ☐ Specifications must be clearly defined.
- ☐ Claims and performance issues fall on the distributor.

Success requires discipline in sourcing, strong supplier relationships, and a clear commitment to brand integrity.

Private labeling is not a replacement for manufacturer partnerships, it's a complement. The strongest distributors balance both, leveraging branded products where they add value and private labeling where control and differentiation matter most. In a market that continues to evolve, the distributors who succeed will be those who take ownership not just of their inventory, but of their strategy.

Own the SKU. Own the margin. Own the customer. That is the power of private labeling. **TL**



Lint Tile's private label display showcases a wide array of products sourced from multiple manufacturers, bringing diverse looks and materials together in one cohesive, easy-to-shop presentation.

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.

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STOP BLAMING THE ECONOMY:

FIVE WAYS SMART BUSINESS OWNERS TAKE CONTROL IN ANY MARKET

By Melissa Willis



Smart business owners focus on what they CAN control rather than worrying about what they CAN'T control. No amount of pacing and handwringing will change the current economy nor the pace of inflation. While it might be tempting to keep lamenting about what's not working, business owners whose doors will stay open will be putting on blinders and tracking ways to win.

Here are five ways you can take control of key areas in your business without spending any additional money on staffing, marketing, or advertising.

1. Take control of pricing and stop discounting

Everywhere you turn, prices are going up. The cost of supplies rises almost daily.

When small businesses are talking about raising prices, it invokes the type of fear you felt as a child when you thought there were monsters under the bed.

If a business hasn't raised its prices in two or more years, it is past time. More importantly, there should never be an apology with a price increase. No grocery store on the planet puts a little note next to the butter saying, "Sorry about that extra 50 cents, we had no choice." You noticed it, and you put it in the basket anyway.

Now, about that discounting that business owners think "gets people in the door." Stop doing that. Instead of a discount, what can you offer that has a high perceived value and goes with the purchase? Think cosmetic companies with their crowd-pleasing "gift with purchase" or a caterer offering a free dessert with the purchase of a family meal pack. Low cost, high

value. Scrap those discounts and add value. Everyone likes "free."

2. Get clear on your expenses

Tough markets don't create inefficiencies; they shine an interrogation light on them.

This is the time to put your P & L under a microscope. Where can you make some changes? Here are some areas to consider:

- ☐ Employee redundancy
- ☐ Cost of supplies
- ☐ Insurance—shop it around
- ☐ Other services like internet, cellphone, and other regular expenses

Negotiate with your vendors. Ask if they would be willing to offer you better pricing if you sign a yearlong contract instead of a month-to-month agreement. This will take a bit of time, but it could add up to big savings.

One final note about expenses: many business owners use Amazon to purchase supplies, and they also veer off into other areas when they need personal items, too—"we need printer paper, and I also need paper towels for the house." Keep personal and professional purchases separate by using different cards to pay for them.

WHAT THEY SAY...



Struzik joined NTCA, valuing the education it offers as well as workshops, online resources, and networking with other members. "And of course the vouchers are always a bonus!" he says. Membership helps him stay up to date on education, new product features, "and who's the best and brightest in the industry, pushing boundaries with what's feasible with tile," he said.

*Nick Struzik, Owner,
Sovereign Tile & Stone
Magnolia, Texas*

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3. Recognize that there's more business in your existing customer base

If you have a business with 1,000 customers and you add on a new product or service that costs \$50, with only half of your customers taking advantage of this new offer, you've added \$25,000 in revenue.

Who better to make an offer to than the folks who already know, like, and trust you?

The point here is that many businesses offer multiple services, but the majority of their customers only use

one or two of them. How many times do you "make the sale" and stop asking if the customer needs or wants anything else? Thirty-four percent of customers will spend more money at checkout time *if asked*. Most business owners and sales professionals don't ask.

Take a good, long look at your current customers or clients. What else can you offer them to be of service and give more value, and at the same time, make more money for yourself? The same fear that keeps business owners from raising prices also keeps business owners and sales professionals from asking, "Would you like fries with that?" We may not be offering fries, but you get the idea. Upsell and cross-sell. You'll thank yourself later.

4. Follow up to convert prospects to paying customers

How many businesses go to the trouble of preparing a quote or a proposal for a prospect and then never follow up? Over 50% never follow up at all. The fortune is in the follow-up, but money is left on the proverbial table more often than it is picked up.

Without a system in place for follow-ups, they will likely never happen. Create a system that makes all those proposals turn into closed deals.



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Studies show that it takes 8-12 contacts to even have a meaningful conversation with a prospect, much less close a sale. You might be surprised to learn how often people say, “I tried to call twice and then gave up.” You never know what is going on with a prospect behind the scenes. There could be someone who really needs you, and you gave up. Don’t give up.

5. Know your numbers

Business owners often leave the numbers to the bookkeeper and the accountant, but business owners must know their numbers. How can one track growth or address issues without knowing the numbers? While it is often said by many an accountant, “Let us worry about your numbers so you can run your business,” that often leaves the business owner in the dark, and problems become unwanted surprises.

Consider monthly meetings with the bookkeeper and/or accountant. The numbers are a clear indicator of how the business is running, and the owner should be up to speed in all aspects of the business.

An unexpected benefit of knowing the numbers is the confidence that comes with it. A business owner will feel more in control of the business when there is financial visibility.

The bottom line here is that focusing on what you can control versus worrying about what you can’t control will put your business on a path to success and

prosperity. Making small changes every day will lead to big improvements in every business and will diminish the overcast economic conditions. **TL**

Melissa Willis is a coach and consultant who has helped owners and sales professionals over her career. She can shine a light on the areas that need the most work while acknowledging what has been successful.

Specializing in profit acceleration and communication styles, Willis helps businesses make more money and keep more of it. If you’d like a complimentary 15-minute profit acceleration call with her, scan here:



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PRECISION AT SCALE: INSTALLING GAUGED PORCELAIN TILE PANELS IN A MULTI-PHASE HIGH-RISE

Steve Sprung, COO, RTC Products





Gauged porcelain tile panels (GTP) continue to gain traction in commercial construction, offering large-format aesthetics with durability and reduced maintenance. However, successful installation at scale requires careful planning, specialized equipment, and disciplined execution, particularly in active commercial environments.

At the Lennar Corporation corporate headquarters in Miami, Fla., a multi-phase installation highlighted both the opportunities and challenges associated with GTP in high-rise applications. The project included approximately 8,000 sq. ft. of GTP wall cladding and flooring across multiple floors, completed over several years.

Porcelain Slab Services, a Fort Lauderdale-based NTCA member contractor company specializing exclusively in GTP installations, was brought in to execute the work. The company is led by Owner Rich Smith, whose decades of tile experience and dedicated focus on gauged porcelain tile panels have positioned the firm as a specialist in this demanding segment.

The installation covered high-traffic and high-visibility areas, including lobby floors, reception areas, full-height wall cladding, elevator surrounds, and elevator cab flooring.

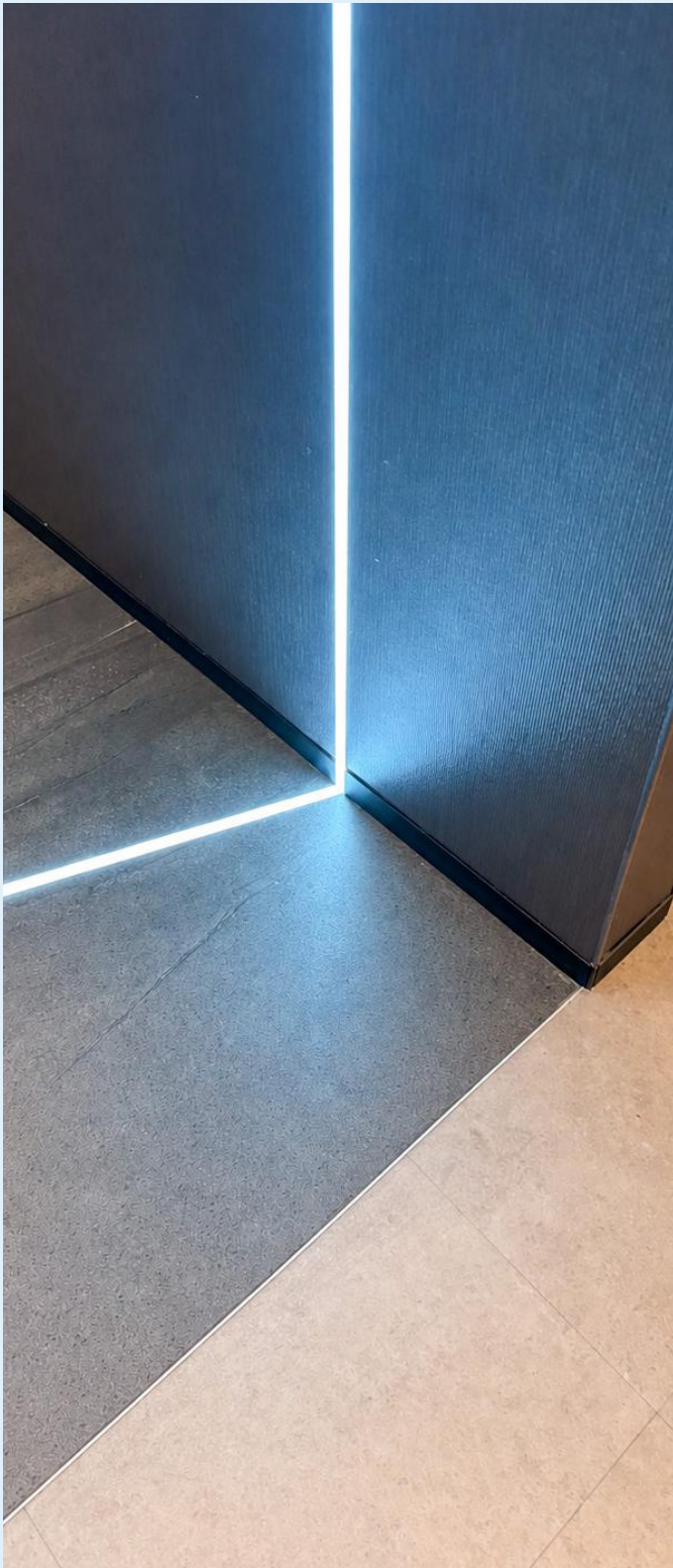
Panel logistics and scheduling challenges

A key challenge was the panel size. At 48" x 110", the material pushed the upper limits of handling, transport, and cutting precision. In total, approximately 250 panels were installed.

The project was further complicated by its multi-phase schedule and the fact that the building remained occupied throughout the installation. Each phase required independent coordination of material delivery, staging, and installation logistics across multiple floors.

"Coordinating delivery, staging, and installation floor by floor while the building remained in use required meticulous planning," said Smith.

Maintaining consistency across phases—spanning from 2021 through 2026—added another layer



LED-integrated gauged porcelain tile panels create a continuous, high-impact surface across lobby and circulation areas.

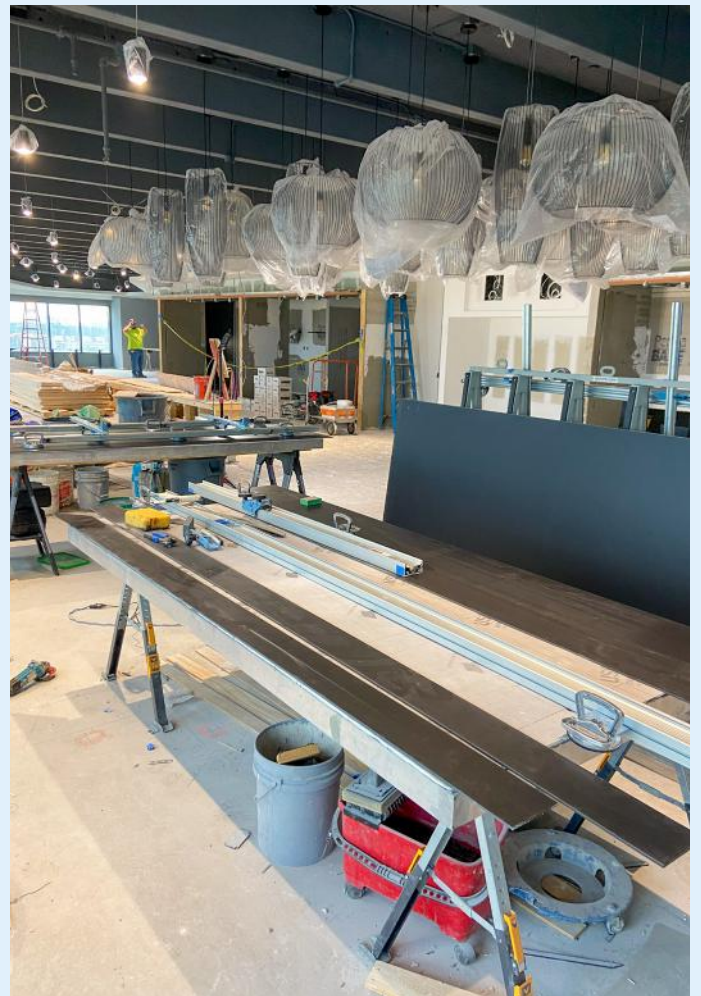
of complexity, particularly with regard to substrate conditions and visual continuity.

The work was completed in four phases, beginning in June 2021. A five-person crew handled all aspects of the installation.

Given the panel size and jobsite conditions, execution relied heavily on planning and coordination. Panel movement was pre-planned, with no room for improvisation during handling or placement.

“Every panel move was planned, not improvised,” Smith emphasized.

Handling was performed using a suction-based lifting system, allowing controlled movement of large panels in tight, active jobsite conditions. Cutting operations were completed using rail-guided scoring systems designed specifically for large-format porcelain.



Primary work area where gauged porcelain tile panels were staged, cut, and fabricated using Sigma rail systems prior to installation.



A crew member trowels mortar onto the wall substrate in preparation for installing the next gauged porcelain tile panel.

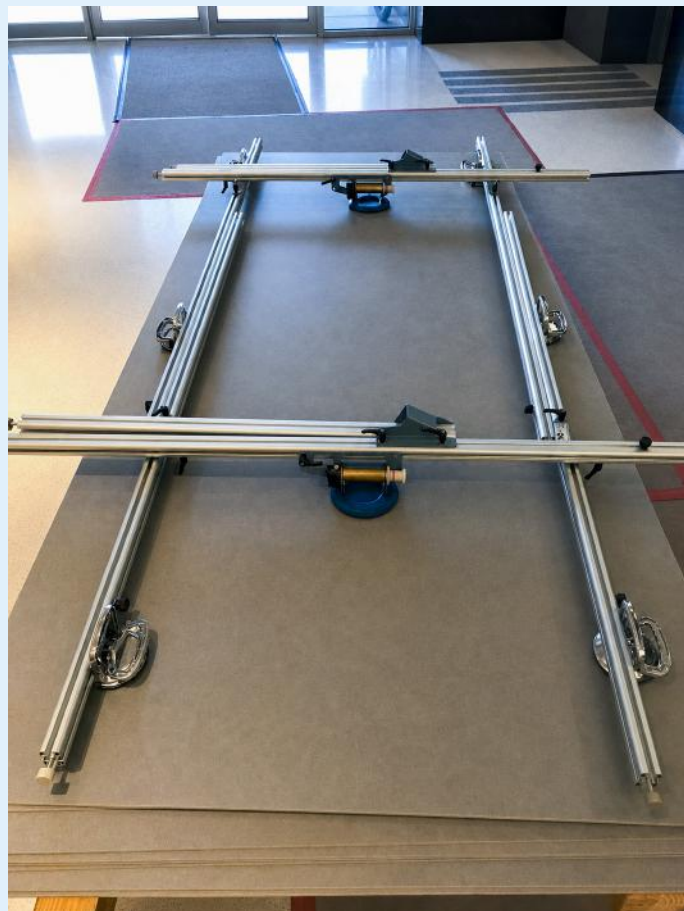
In addition to standard cuts, the project required precision detailing for integrated design elements, including LED light rail channels and recessed tracks for security grilles—applications that required repeatable accuracy across multiple phases.

Sigma's Kera series shines

Tool selection was a critical component of the installation strategy. The contractor utilized Sigma's Kera series systems for all cutting and handling operations, including the Kera Cut, Kera Flex, and Kera Lift systems. These products are distributed in the United States by RTC Products.

"These tools are purpose-built for GPTP," said Smith. "No other system handles panels of this size safely and accurately at scale."

Across the full scope of the project, the tools delivered consistent scoring and clean breaks,



A Sigma Kera Lift system is used to safely handle and position gauged porcelain tile panels before cutting and installation.

minimizing material waste and eliminating rework. Reliability was also a key factor.

"Over a multi-year project, the only thing I replaced was a scoring wheel," Smith noted.

Handling panels of this size in a high-rise environment typically requires significant manpower and introduces risk during transport and placement. The use of purpose-built lifting and cutting systems allowed the contractor to complete the installation with a five-person crew. Without these systems, additional labor would have been required to safely manage panel movement.

Kera tools empowered a five-man crew to handle 250 panels!

"The Kera tools are the only reason a five-man crew could handle 250 panels at this scale with the precision and safety this project demanded," Smith said.



Crew members cut channels for integrated LED light strips using a Sigma Kera Flex adapter on a Kera Cut rail, paired with a Sigma water feed kit for dust control and precision.

Consistent cutting performance also contributed to efficiency by ensuring panels were installed correctly on the first attempt, reducing waste and avoiding delays associated with rework.

One of the primary challenges in multi-phase GTP installations is maintaining consistent tolerances and appearance across extended timelines. At the Lennar headquarters, the installation achieved tight tolerances and uniform visual results across all floors. Panels installed years apart maintained a cohesive appearance, meeting the expectations of a corporate environment where consistency is critical.

This outcome was the result of controlled processes, experienced installers, and reliable tooling working together throughout each phase.

Purpose-built tools, like those from RTC, improve outcomes

This project highlights several considerations for contractors working with gauged porcelain tile panels in commercial settings. Logistics planning is critical, especially in occupied buildings and multi-phase projects. Panel size increases risk, requiring specialized handling and cutting systems. Consistency must be



LED light strips are tested after installation to verify alignment and consistency within precision-cut channels in gauged porcelain tile panels.

maintained across phases, and purpose-built tools improve outcomes by reducing breakage, rework, and labor requirements.

“There is no comparable alternative for panels at this size,” Smith emphasized. “If your equipment isn’t designed for GPTP, you’re making the job harder than it needs to be.”

Demand for GPTP continues to grow across commercial sectors, particularly in high-traffic environments such as lobbies, elevator interiors, and feature walls. As panel sizes increase and design expectations continue to evolve, successful installations will depend on a combination of technical expertise, planning, and the use of systems designed specifically for large-format materials. **TL**



NTCA member Rich Smith, Owner of Porcelain Slab Services, prepares a gauged porcelain tile panel using a Sigma Kera Cut rail system during installation.



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ALEX KEENE

Vice President of Operations
for Keene, Inc.
and General Manager
of Platform Performance
Flooring Systems

PLATFORM PERFORMANCE FLOORING SYSTEMS:

Keene, Inc.'s Strategic
Expansion into Full-Service
Floor Preparation



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

The flooring industry is experiencing a significant shift, and Keene, Inc. is leading the charge with an ambitious rebrand and expansion strategy. I recently sat down with Alex Keene, Vice President of Operations for Keene, Inc. and General Manager of Platform Performance Flooring Systems, to discuss the company's evolution from a single-product manufacturer to a comprehensive floor preparation solutions provider.

A 70-year legacy reimaged

Keene, Inc., founded in 2002 by Jim Keene, operates as a building products conglomerate encompassing multiple specialized organizations. While Keene Building Products serves as the company's primary division, Platform Performance Flooring Systems represents a particularly exciting evolution within the portfolio.

The story of Platform begins with Dependable, a company acquired by Keene, Inc. in 2012. Founded in 1956, Dependable had spent decades as a single-product company, manufacturing White Skim Coat—a patching product that remains one of Platform's flagship offerings today. However, recognizing that the company had evolved far beyond its original scope, Keene, Inc. made the strategic decision in 2025 to rebrand from Dependable to Platform Performance Flooring Systems.

"The company that we acquired in 2012 is not the company that we have today," Alex Keene explained. "We're now beyond just being a white patch company—we're now a floor preparation company."

Expanding beyond floors: the Compotite acquisition

A pivotal moment in Platform's growth came with its recent acquisition of Compotite, a leading shower pan liner and membrane manufacturer. This strategic move positioned Platform as a comprehensive solutions provider for both floor and shower applications.

"When we bought Compotite last year, it was to increase our ability to enter the marketplace not just on floors, but also in showers," Keene noted. While Compotite maintains its own brand identity—a decision Keene, Inc. has no intention of changing—it now operates under the Platform Performance Flooring Systems umbrella.

Compotite provides several avenues to help Platform Performance grow in the marketplace. Compotite's shower systems pair well with Platform's new KeedeRoll WT uncoupling mat, allowing the company to offer a full package installation for bathrooms—the most common place tile is installed. And Compotite's strategic distribution points through Floor & Décor offer Keene, Inc. a potential avenue to expand its reach in the marketplace.



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A comprehensive product portfolio

Platform's product range reflects its commitment to solving virtually any flooring challenge. The company manufactures a full line of thinsets, grouts and mortars, including the KeedeSet line produced at the company's own facility in Rocky River, Ohio. Additionally, Platform offers uncoupling mats under the KeedeRoll brand, with two distinct versions addressing different market needs.

KeedeRoll MT represents a particularly innovative offering, leveraging proprietary technology from sister companies within the Keene, Inc. organization. This uncoupling mat not only protects tile from cracking and decouples floors, but also provides acoustic protection that can meet or exceed building codes in high-rise and multi-family applications.

The recently-launched KeedeRoll WT (Watertight) provides a more traditional waterproof uncoupling solution.

Strategic distribution and market reach

Platform has built a robust distribution network spanning major flooring distributors across the country. The company works with industry leaders including UCX and William Bird on the East Coast, DeSoto Sales on the West Coast, plus Hank's Specialties and E.J. Welch in the Midwest.

A recent partnership with Contractors Direct represents Platform's push toward more direct contractor access. "That's about as close as you can get to a direct line to Compotite," Keene explained, with expectations that the full Platform line will be available through this channel by summer's end. Compotite is also available at Floor & Décor locations throughout the country.

For the most current product availability and distributor information, contractors can visit platformperformance.com, where a dedicated product library section highlights all tile-setting materials, crack isolation, and waterproofing products.

Building a world-class sales and technical team

Platform's growth ambitions are backed by significant investments in personnel. The company hired long-time tile industry professional Robert Williams last August to lead and expand the sales organization. Williams has established a two-tiered sales structure comprising regional managers and independent representatives. Regional managers include Joe Principe (Northeast), Henry Havre (Midwest and Great Lakes), Dan Davis (Southeast), and Jim Bradshaw (West), supported by independent reps covering the entire country.



Robert Williams, Director of Sales



On the technical side, Platform strengthened its expertise with strategic hires from industry competitors. Craig Hacker brings extensive floor preparation and self-leveling experience, while John Trent, a former contractor member of NTCA and respected manufacturer representative, was hired in December. They have been instrumental in integrating the Platform and Compotite product systems.

Commitment to contractor training

Recognizing that product excellence requires proper installation, Platform opened a training center in Cleveland, Ohio—headquarters of both Platform and Keene, Inc.—to train contractors on the complete product ecosystem. The training program offers modular instruction across four main areas: commercial leveling, multi-family repair and remodel, tile installation systems, and Compotite shower systems. The company covers all travel, accommodation, and meal expenses for visiting contractors, whether they attend for a single day or a full week.

"We believe that we need to work with the contractor and give them the technical support they need on a daily basis to properly install our products," Keene emphasized.

Platform aims to train 3,000 installers nationwide and plans to expand its training center network across the country.

Product simplification: the L3 flagship

Despite offering comprehensive product lines, Platform believes in simplicity. The company's philosophy centers on solving most flooring problems with three products or fewer.

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■ ONE-TO-ONE

The L3 self-leveling underlayment exemplifies this approach. A decade-old cement blend technology, L3 is designed for accelerated drying without substrate tension. Used with the P360 Universal Primer, this combination addresses approximately 90% of leveling applications across virtually any substrate without mechanical preparation.

Innovation and future growth

Platform's commitment to innovation is evidenced by Keene, Inc.'s extensive patent portfolio, which currently includes more than 20 patents. The company's research and development efforts, led by Kevin Brininger, Director of R&D and Product Management, continue to generate new solutions.

Upcoming launches include Platform ALG (Advanced Liquid Gypsum), a fast-drying, fiber-reinforced product for rapid chip repairs; and a new adhesive line developed through partnerships with sister companies.

Conclusion

Platform Performance Flooring Systems represents Keene, Inc.'s confidence in the flooring and tile



Kevin Brininger, Director of R&D and Product Management

markets, even during challenging economic times. Through strategic acquisitions, talent recruitment, infrastructure investment, and unwavering commitment to contractor education, Platform is positioning itself as a comprehensive, innovative partner for flooring professionals nationwide.

As the company continues its expansion and prepares for future product launches, contractors can expect Platform's presence at major industry events, including Coverings, alongside growing availability through expanded distribution channels. **TL**

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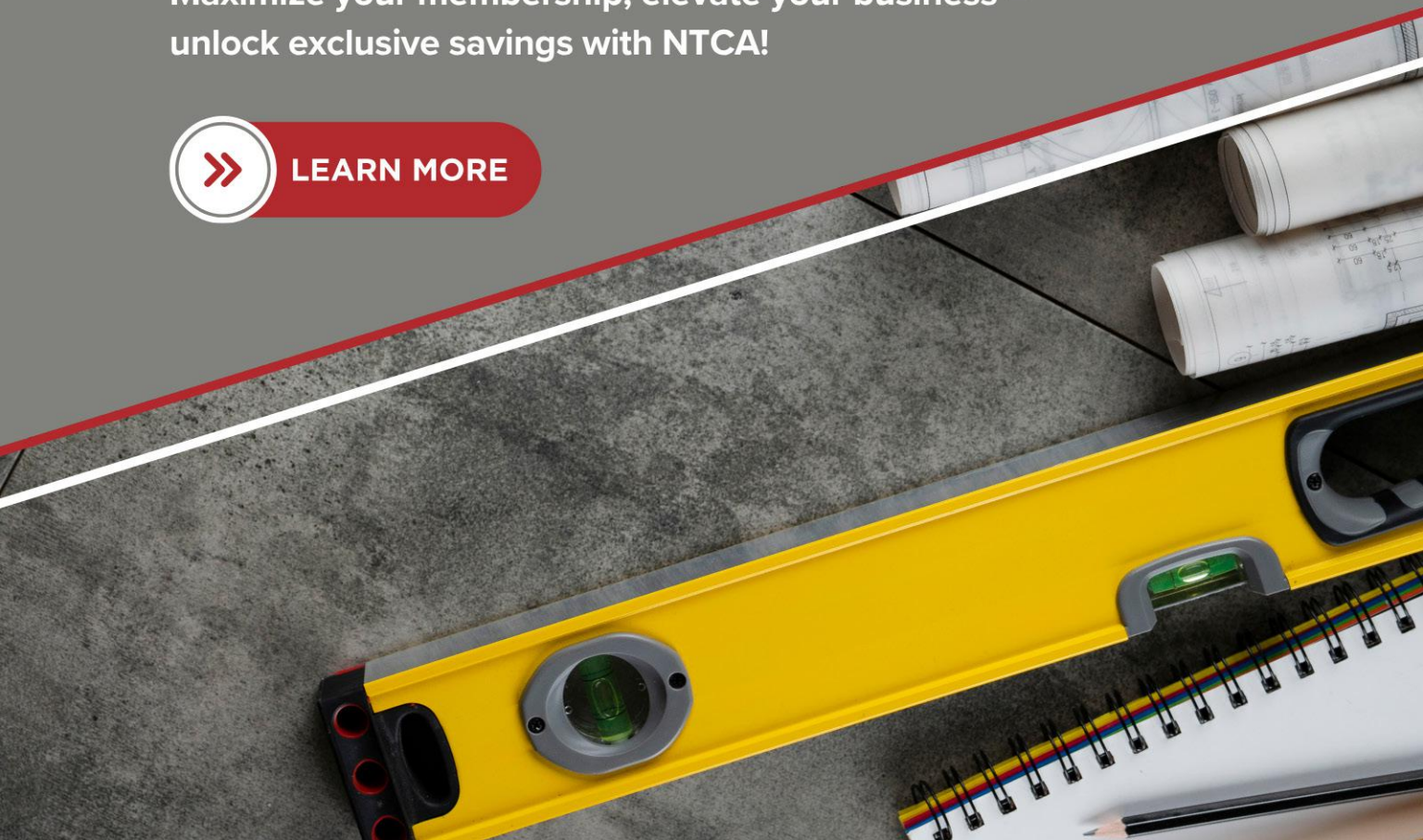


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- 6mm large-format porcelain can flex during handling
- Flex leads to cracks, callbacks and project delays



SOLUTION

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RESULT

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HIGHLY-CREDENTIALLED OREGON CONTRACTOR EXPANDS BUSINESS WITH CUSTOM MOSAIC WORK



By Lesley Goddin, Editorial Director and Senior Writer

Joppe Aguirre, Owner of Cascadia Tile Company, LLC in Bend, Ore., has known since graduating high school that he was in love with tile. “I’ve always enjoyed working with my hands and seeing a space come to life,” he said.

His career started in Central Oregon, with some time in Portland and the Bay Area, diving into high-end custom work and honing his skills in custom residential work. He returned to Bend in 2022 and established Cascadia Tile Company.

“What sets me apart is my focus on quality and craftsmanship, along with bringing that higher-end experience back to a smaller market,” he said. “I take a lot of pride in doing things the right way and creating something that lasts.”

His primary focus is on residential tile work—both new construction and remodels. “Recently, I’ve started incorporating mosaics into my projects, which has added a more artistic side to what I offer,” he added.

The value of NTCA

The same year he started Cascadia Tile Company, Aguirre signed on as an NTCA member to connect with like-minded people in the industry.

“I also really respect what the NTCA does, bringing education, training, and technical support to contractors. That kind of support is huge in helping raise the standard of our trade,” he said.

The biggest value for Aguirre has been the relationships he’s built through NTCA membership. “Being able to connect with other contractors, especially those with more experience on the business side, has been really helpful,” he explained. “It feels more like camaraderie than competition.”



Joppe Aguirre, Owner, Cascadia Tile Co., LLC

Earning credentials

As a solo contractor, Aguirre has equipped himself with an array of industry credentials, including the Certified Tile Installer (CTI) credential and four ACT certifications: LFT, GPTP, Mud Walls, and Mud Floors. He’s on track to complete the remaining ACT certifications soon.

“I think certifications and continued training are important,” he said. “They help elevate the trade and show clients you’re serious about your craft.”

Combining art with technical excellence

In the summer of 2024, Aguirre took part in the Artisans Revolution in Tile (A.R.T.) training on creating hand-shaped mosaics, held in Milwaukee, Wis. In the fall of that year, he joined Angie Ré’s mosaic class in South Salt Lake, Utah, to expand his mosaic prowess. Before these classes, Aguirre had yearned to create mosaics, but wasn’t sure how to begin.

“Those classes gave me the confidence to start taking on that kind of work,” he said. “Since then, I’ve completed four mosaic projects, and I’m looking forward to doing a lot more.”

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This infinity-edge spa was floated using a rendering mud over gunite. The layout was carefully planned to ensure all the tile finished on full pieces. After the float, the spa was fully waterproofed and finished with glass tile.

An important benefit of the classes has been the people he learned alongside. "I've made some great connections and friendships with others in the classes who are driven to keep learning and pushing themselves," he noted.

Giving a voice to the Spanish-speaking community

Over the years, there have been efforts at NTCA to bring more visibility and support to Spanish-speaking contractors, who comprise roughly 1/3 of the U.S. tile contractor community.

This year at Coverings, NTCA's Elena Grant brought together Spanish-speaking professionals for two discussion panels. Aguirre took part in the panel about continuing education and certifications in the tile trade, titled, "Educación, Certificación y Oportunidades en la Industria de la Loseta." He said, "I was really honored to be part of it.

"Over the years, I've noticed there aren't many Spanish-speaking folks at these events and trainings," he continued. "I don't think it's from a lack of interest; I think it's more about not knowing these opportunities

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This subfloor was built to a thickness of 1 1/4" plywood, meeting ANSI/TCNA standards for natural stone installation. The outer border was installed first, followed by the marble mosaic inlay. A silicone expansion joint was incorporated around the perimeter where the border meets the inlay, allowing for proper movement and long-term durability.

are out there. It's great to see the NTCA putting in the effort to change that and bridge that gap. I'm looking forward to helping out more any way that I can with this effort in the future."

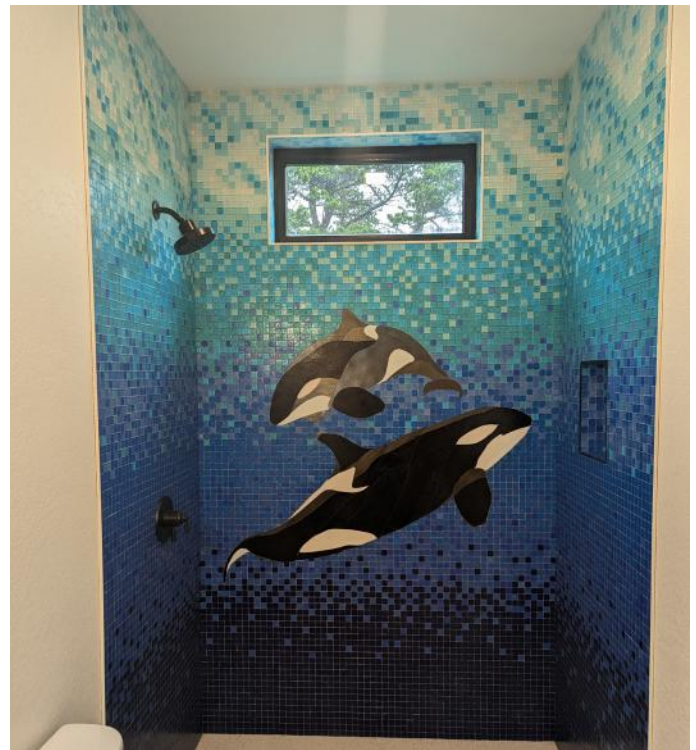
Growing pains

Having a successful business grow to the point of expanding is a good problem to have—but it has its own set of challenges. For Aguirre, it's a struggle to find the right employee who is motivated to learn and committed to quality work.

But Aguirre is optimistic about where things are headed. "I'm continuing to build my skills, expand into more custom work like mosaics, and slowly grow the business the right way," he said.

Hands-on satisfaction

"The best part of being a tile contractor is getting to work with my hands and create something from start to finish," Aguirre said. "Tile work has a lot of artistic elements—from layout to material choices—and that's something I really enjoy."



The Orca Shower is Aguirre's largest mosaic project to date. He individually designed and installed every detail, from the orcas themselves to the gradient work.



This bee mosaic accent in a luxury swimming pool was the first mosaic Aguirre completed after finishing his first mosaic class. He assembled the piece at his home, then transferred it to the project site using mosaic tape. Read more about it by scanning the QR code at right.



Bee Mosaic

He credits adding mosaics to his work as elevating it even further. "Honestly, it reignited my passion for the trade," he concluded. **TL**



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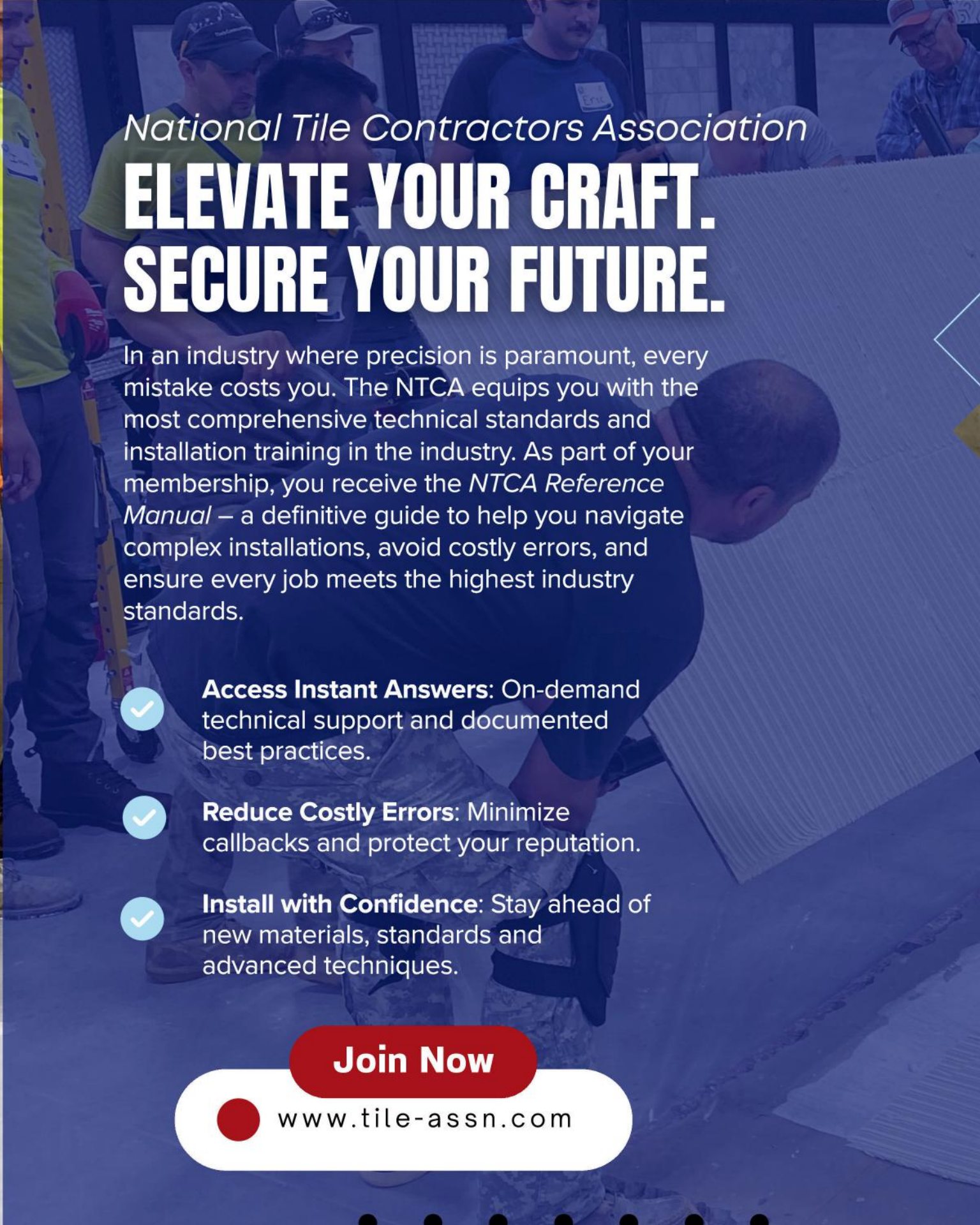
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INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMMERCIAL TILE APPLICATIONS



By Scott Carothers,
Academic Director, Ceramic Tile
Education Foundation (CTEF)

Standards published by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) provide guidance to the tile contractor in all aspects of tile work, but ANSI standards are especially critical in commercial installations. These worksites can result in many trades attempting to complete their portion of the project while vying for adequate space and the protection necessary to do so.

We will take a deep dive into **ANSI A108.01 General Requirements: Structures, Substrates, and Preparation for Tile**, which includes a wealth of jobsite requirements offering workflow guidance, jobsite conditions, and safeguards for completed work. Realize that these directly-quoted statements from ANSI are United States tile industry standards, not merely suggestions.



This is an example of a non-compliant subfloor. The 1/2" three-ply plywood does not have a tongue and groove running along the long dimension, nor any wood blocking to support the sagging joint.

2.1.1 Responsibilities of Other Parties: "The owner shall communicate in writing to the design professional and/or general contractor the intended use of the tile installation. The design professional and/or general contractor shall provide the project design necessary for the expected live load, concentrated loads, impact loads, and dead loads including weight of the tile and setting bed. The tile contractor shall not be responsible for structures or substrates not compliant with applicable building codes, or for verifying compliance with applicable building codes unless the tile contractor designs and installs the backing assembly including the structure, and/or substrate."

The latter portion of this standard is extremely valuable to the tile contractor since it removes the responsibility for structures and substrates that do not meet the applicable building code requirements.



Unfortunately, as seen in this image, many jobsites are not clean and free of contaminants as described in this standard. These materials must be appropriately removed before installing tile.

2.1.2 Substrate Requirements: "All substrates shall be clean, free of all contaminants such as sealers, coatings, dust, oil, wax, curing compound, and other coatings."



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2.1.5 Movement Joints: “Movement joints are required for tile work in vertical and horizontal surfaces, both interior and exterior.”



Without the design professional's details on the location of the movement joints, the tile installation can fail. As seen in this image, no movement joints were specified and the 6" x 6" quarry tile failed, resulting in tented tile.

2.1.5.2 Responsibility of the Design

Professional: “The design professional shall locate and detail movement joint locations.”

Many times, the design professional will assume that the tile contractor is responsible for locating and detailing the movement joints. This is not the case and is very effectively written: “The **design professional shall locate....**” The tile contractor should never assume this responsibility.

2.1.5.3 Sealant: “The design professional shall specify the required sealant for the project. Sealant performance tolerances should conform to ASTM C920 for type, grade, and use preparation of opening left by the tile contractor and installation of backup strip.”

2.1.5.4 Perimeter and Field Movement Joints:

“Perimeter and field movement joints within a tile installation are essential and required. Note: *For additional information on movement joints, refer to EJ171 of the TCNA Handbook for Ceramic, Glass, and Stone Tile Installation.*”

4.2 Temperature Requirements: “In areas, interior or exterior, where tile is to be set using cementitious mortars, the substrate temperature shall be maintained above 50°F (10°C) and below 100°F (38°C). When epoxy and/or furan setting materials are being used to set tile, the substrate temperature shall be maintained above 60°F (16°C) and below 90°F (32°C). Temperature shall be maintained for 72 hours after the completion of the tile installation.”

4.3 Protecting Work Areas: “General contractor must provide complete areas to tile contractor so that all work in each area may be completed, and no areas require remobilization or segmented protection of installation. The general contractor is responsible to keep spaces closed to traffic and other work in areas where tile is being set to ensure tile is not damaged. Tile contractor is not responsible for damage caused by other trades during the installation process.”

This standard gives the tile contractor full access to the work area and allows that work to be completed without interruption while eliminating expensive remobilization.

4.3.2 Protecting Work While Curing: “The tile installation shall be protected and traffic restricted once all work is complete and no pedestrian or wheeled traffic on new tile floor areas for 48 hours. Barricade all newly laid tile areas and remove barricades after 48 hours. When the tile contractor is responsible for protection of tile work, it shall be clearly outlined in the tile contract documents.”

4.3.3: “Keep all traffic off epoxy and furan installed floors for at least 72 hours after grouting, and heavy traffic off for at least seven days, unless otherwise specifically authorized by manufacturer.”

4.3.4 Protecting Completed/Work From Concentrated Loads: “When concentrated loads (scissor lifts, pallet jacks, automobiles, forklifts, and other heavy equipment) will be used on tile floor, the design professional shall specify up to 23/32-in. thick plywood or OSB protection over non-staining kraft paper to protect the floor and accommodate concentrated loads. General Contractor/Owner/Design Professional is responsible for protecting the tile work from damage.”

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This beautiful and well-installed barrier-free shower failed due to the ignorance of the shower door installer, who drilled through the stone tile, mortar bed, and shower pan membrane, which then leaked onto the ceiling below. (Courtesy of DW Sanders Tile and Stone)

4.4.1 Penetrations in Completed Tile Assembly: “Penetrations into waterproofed tile assemblies should be avoided whenever possible. If waterproofed tile assemblies must be penetrated, it is recommended that penetrations be made away from the stream of water (e.g., water from a shower head). The party responsible for the penetration is also responsible for the treatment and/or repair of the penetration. Penetrations into waterproofed assemblies must be treated and/or repaired such that they remain waterproof.”

5.1 Lighting and Viewing Distance: “When visually inspecting finished tile installations, do so without magnification under the permanent intended lighting (artificial and/or natural) and without the use of additional lighting such as flashlights, spotlights, or

temporary lights. View the installation no closer than 36 in. (0.9 m) from walls and no closer than 60 in. (1.5 m) from floors. Recognizing the hand-built aspect of tile installations, any aesthetic concerns not visible at these distances (but apparent at closer distances) are acceptable under industry best practices.”



These two images show how a commercial shower stall appears with the permanent lighting in place and is satisfactory, as seen in the image on the left. The image on the right shows the same shower utilizing a non-approved trick of shining a spotlight from directly above the shower wall, causing unsightly shadows. (Courtesy of Dave Gobis)

5.2.4 Effects of Lighting on Installation: “The use of wall-washer, cove-type, or lighting mounted on the wall surface can produce shadows and undesirable effects in tile work. Tile backing surfaces, installation materials and methods, surface flatness, and the location of light sources shall be specified to eliminate potential tile shadowing issues. Install permanent lights prior to the tile installation to provide the tile installer the maximum opportunity to reduce undesirable shadows.

Informative Note: If the lighting cannot be moved away from a tile wall, it is desirable to provide the finished lighting conditions prior to the tile installation. Even with this accommodation, some tiles will still exhibit shadows and inconsistencies that may be considered undesirable.”

These A108.01 standards were established to provide high-quality tile installations that will stand the test of time and protect the tile contractor. Use them wisely. **TL**



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HOLLOW-SOUNDING TILES AND INDUSTRY STANDARDS

A hollow sound, by itself, is not considered a failure or a defect. Current standards published by the Tile Council of North America and ANSI A108 provide guidance on evaluating installations based on mortar coverage and support, not acoustics.

QUESTION:

We recently completed a large commercial tile installation, and during the punch list, the owner and architect noted that some tiles sound hollow when tapped. They are now questioning the quality of the installation. Does a hollow sound indicate a failure, and how should this be evaluated?

ANSWER:

Thank you for reaching out to the National Tile Contractors Association regarding your concerns. A hollow sound in a tile installation is a topic that comes up frequently. From an industry standards

standpoint, it is important to clarify that a hollow sound, by itself, is not considered a failure or a defect. Sound is not a recognized method for evaluating the performance of a tile installation.

Current industry standards provide more specific guidance on how installations are evaluated. Standards published by the Tile Council of North America and ANSI A108 focus on mortar coverage and support, not acoustics. These standards require:

- Minimum 80% mortar coverage in dry interior applications
- Minimum 95% mortar coverage in wet or exterior applications



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■ TECHNICAL

- Full support at edges and corners of the tile
- ANSI A108.5.2.2.3 states: "Thoroughly embed all tile or tile assemblies into place to obtain maximum contact of mortar on the back of each tile, or back of each tile and back mounting material. Contact area shall not be less than 80%, or as specified in the contract documents, whichever is greater. Contact area on all exterior installations or interior wet installations shall not be less than 95%. The 80% or 95% coverage shall be sufficiently distributed to give full support of the tile with particular attention to all corners and edges of the tile. To achieve the 80% or 95% coverage, select a notched trowel sized to facilitate the proper coverage. It may be necessary to flat back trowel individual tiles or tile assemblies with bond coat to achieve the proper coverage. Embed the tile or tile assembly in the mortar by pushing in a direction perpendicular to the combed ridges to fully collapse them and achieve the specified coverage. Maintain joint alignment and spacing. Keep an adequate joint depth open for grouting."

A hollow sound can occur for a variety of reasons,

including minor voids, substrate conditions, or, in some cases, the use of membranes within the assembly. In many situations, tile that sounds hollow may still be adequately bonded and performing as intended.

When concerns arise, the only reliable way to evaluate an installation against industry standards is through direct verification of mortar coverage, which typically requires selective removal of tile.

As an association, NTCA is not a consulting or forensic inspection firm and does not perform site inspections, determine compliance on specific projects, or provide legal opinions. If you would like to further investigate your installation, we recommend engaging a qualified, independent tile consultant who can evaluate the installation in accordance with recognized industry standards. **TL**

Editor's Note: You can find qualified professionals using the NTCA consultant directory here:



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Ring King Ruler



NTCA Ambassador Mike Sima at Omaha's Midtown Tile said, "We like using the Ring King at Midtown Tile because of its simplicity. It's very easy to read the hole size and trace the size you need."

The Ring King Ruler simplifies circle drawing and hole cutting by giving you fixed, precision-sized rings from 1/2" to 8" to choose from.

Find it here:



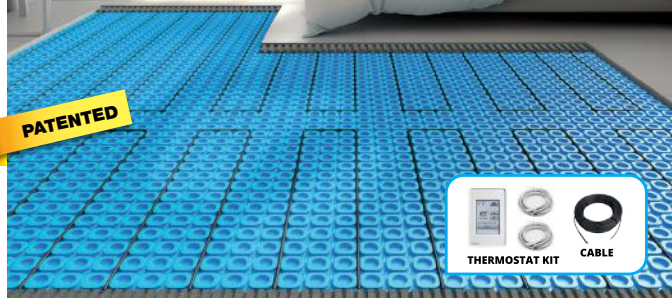
Ring King

In Cool Tools, contractors and tile setters share their favorite tools and equipment. Share yours at lesley@tile-assn.com.



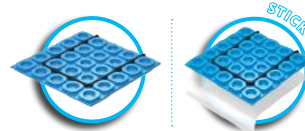
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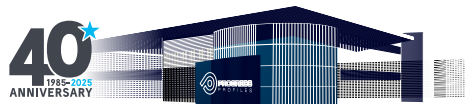
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GRABO

The OTTOVAC DIGITAL (shown) is a smart, compact, motorized lifting tool that automatically maintains suction via a built-in electric pump, delivering dependable grip and effortless control. GRABO U-Hoist is a

strong, rigid metal bar that accommodates up to four GRABO tools via evenly distributed hooks. These tools are engineered for use with glass panels, stone slabs, tile, and other heavy materials.



Tesselle

High Beam and Low Beam breeze blocks by designer Karin Jeske can be used individually or together to form geometric layouts for interiors or exteriors.

The resulting masonry screens combine privacy, airflow, and create dramatic shadow. Installed alone, each block creates a bold, graphic pattern; paired together, they generate more-complex compositions that shift depending on orientation and layout.



Schluter-Systems

The DESIGN-NICHE line is now available in more TRENDLINE colors: Cream, Pewter, Bronze, and Stone Grey. Available in three sizes—12" x 12", 12" x 24", and

12" x 48"—DESIGN-NICHE offers practical storage while serving as a visual feature on shower walls, in bathroom spaces, and across all wall types throughout the home.



Anatolia

The new Lustra porcelain collection features innovative Colorsync technology, which creates seamless

visual harmony between surface design and body composition. A precisely curated blend of base tones ensures a refined, cohesive aesthetic that aligns effortlessly with the surface graphic. Onyx-inspired Lustra is characterized by diffused light, layered veining, and delicate textures that converge to create an atmosphere of refined calm.

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Tile Club

The new Pictoria waterjet marble mosaic tile collection is a Pop Art-inspired Italian marble tile line that embodies texture and geometric play, blending historic opulence and modern minimalism. Each mosaic sheet features a geometric pattern that

combines rare colored marbles sourced from various countries, each with its own natural variation in color and veining.



New Ravenna

The new Saguaro porcelain/ceramic collection evokes the rugged beauty of the American West, featuring suede-washed

adobe hues and drawing on textures of the high plains,

canyon landscapes, and distant mountain ranges, with references to leather, heritage textile, and indigenous artistry. Saguaro offers a diverse range of patterns to suit a variety of interiors. Shown is the Agave Pattern.



IMAGIO

IMAGIO Glass Design's custom-printed glass can elevate even the simplest kitchen with maintenance-free tile-inspired glass panels. Glass panels bring the look of tile without staining, sealing, or grout

maintenance. From crisp whites and whisper-soft neutrals to full-height glass surfaces with dramatic marble looks and artistic prints, IMAGIO brings the "wow" without an entire renovation.

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Spotlight



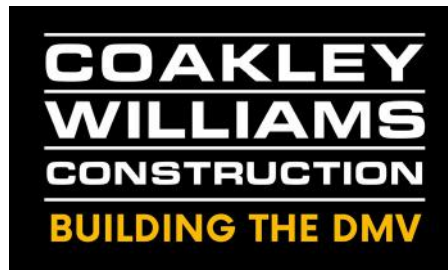
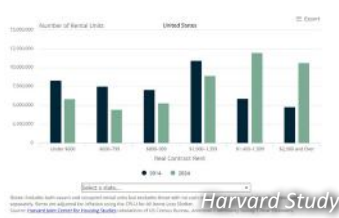
Thank you LATICRETE!



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NEWS TICKER

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Neolith Group appointed Nieves Contreras as Chief Brand Officer...**Uzin Utz North America** announced the departure of Brian Preuss, Vice President of Sales USA for the Uzin and Wolff Brands, and welcomed Michael Drechsel as Vice President of Distribution Sales USA...The **Flooring Sustainability Summit** announced the 2026 Architecture & Design Awards program honoring leadership and innovation in sustainable flooring and surface design...Home renovation activity held steady in 2025, with a slight decline in plans expected for 2026, a **Houzz** study found...**ABC** honored the best construction projects, leaders in jobsite safety, and named Coakley & Williams Construction (CWC) as 2026 Contractor of the Year...The Joint Center for Housing Studies of **Harvard University** released "America's Rental Housing 2026," a new study detailing affordability challenges and the status of the U.S. rental market...The **National Association of Home Builders (NAHB)** and **International Code Council (ICC)** released the 2025 edition of the National Green Building Standard®, the fifth edition of the nation's premier residential green building standard, approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI)...The **U.S. Department of Labor** celebrated 2026 National Apprenticeship Week April 27-May 2 with 2,700 planned apprenticeship events and proclamations nationwide under the theme "America at Work: Making America Skilled Again through Registered Apprenticeship"...The grand opening of **Louisville Tile's** new Kentwood facility in West Michigan debuted to a record turnout...**AHF** committed to plant over 100,000 trees with the Arbor Day Foundation™ to advance forest restoration.

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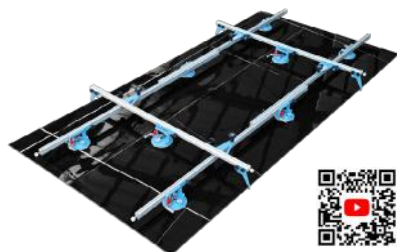


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Sigma Kera-Lift Panel Handling System



Watch the video

The most dynamic handling system in its class is available in multiple sizes. Achieve full support of the material in virtually any configuration needed. It now has more affordable and stronger locking suction cups that work great, even on rough material.



Sigma Kera-Cut Slab Cutting System



Watch the video

Constructed of aluminum and stainless steel, making it extremely lightweight, very durable, while providing pinpoint accuracy. Shown with optional Kera-Flex accessory for plunge & L cuts.



Sigma Worktable Adjustable Width & Height



Watch the video

A necessity when installing Gauged Porcelain Tile Panels. Its aluminum construction offers great support, while being lightweight and easy to transport. Connect two sections for an amazing 37"-64" wide x 142" of work surface! The slats can be placed at any position to accommodate unique situations.



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