

Decore Score: Ceramic tiles stand strong in bathrooms

by Rose Bennett Gilbert

Q: We are finally in a position to add the master bedroom-bath extension we've been wanting, but we find ourselves overwhelmed by the options.

Our home is fairly contemporary. I say "fairly" because we have a mix of antiques and modern furniture; we have a lot of different materials throughout the house. For example, the main room floor is slate, the kitchen is hardwood and the rest has been carpeted in sisal with area rugs. In this master suite, we want a bath that is open and uncluttered. Maybe with the toilet hidden, but everything else free-flowing.

RIPPLE EFFECT - A hanging divider sets off the tub area of a contemporary bath from the sparkling glass-tile walk-thru shower. CNS Photo courtesy of Gordon Beall/Gensler Architects. Are ceramic tiles our best choice here?

A: Ceramic tiles are a great choice for any bath, thanks to their durability and impermeability. But that doesn't mean they're the same ceramic tiles that have been around since humankind first mastered the mix of earth, water and fire.

Proof positive are the shimmering glass tiles that cause all the excitement in the sleek, sophisticated, contemporary bath we show here. Not that glass tiles are really new either - the Egyptians discovered them in the B.C. days - but new technologies have turned today's glass tile into "the new material of choice," wrote designer Patricia Hart McMillan, co-author with Katharine Kay McMillan, Ph.D., in a new book all about them.

"Not only durable and practical, glass is au courant," she said in "Glass Tile Inspirations for Kitchens and Baths" (Schiffer, \$20). Borrowed from their book, the bath pictured here is open and free flowing, divided only in the mind's eye by changes in surfacing materials. The designer, architect Jordan Goldstein of Gensler in Washington, D.C., said he planned it as "one part bathroom, one part living room."

Working in a "contemporary palette of materials," Goldstein has woven glass tiles in with makore wood and lacquer panels; it highlights the floor with high-gloss ceramic tiles. Only a translucent ripple divides the shower from the tub. The toilet is closeted out-of-sight, but otherwise the space remains "fluid to the eye, warm to the touch and functional for the body," just as the architect wanted it.

For more information about ceramic and glass tiles, check out a major manufacturer like Bisazza (www.bisazzausa.com).

Q: I recently purchased an antique washstand that has a thick top of old marble. It is deeply stained - very dark in places.

What is the best method to clean old marble?

A: Because I like to see old things revived and cherished, I delved into the sometimes scary depths of housekeeping secrets and came up with - surprisingly little reliable information about de-staining old marble.

One source recommends that you apply a poultice of a stone-care product called AquaMix. There's a question/answer service on their Web site: www.aquamix.com.

Two other sources I will venture to recommend: the American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Historic Artistic Works, which runs a referral system (www.aic.stanford.edu). The other is a savant named Dennis Blaine, who handles specialized cleaning products, like Vulpex liquid soap, from Picreator Enterprises, London (www.restorationproduct.com).

Conservators at the White House and Smithsonian Institution often call Dennis to discuss a particular maintenance or cleaning problem. Dennis said you can, too, at 772-219-0436.

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