



# Laying It Down

HOW MIRA MESA-BASED LIVDEN IS CHANGING THE WAY WE VIEW SUSTAINABILITY WITH COOL, CALIFORNIA-MADE TILES

by Erica Nichols

**I**t's got to be bold and it's got to be green. These are the two design rules of Livden, the eco-friendly tile brand started by stepsisters Hilary Gibbs and Georgie Smith in Mira Mesa.

Blending their eye for fun, eclectic design with their passion for sustainability, the duo produces cool, of-the-time decorative tiles made from upcycled materials, which have been used in projects by Jasmine Roth (HGTV), LL Design, and Michelle Boudreau, who first used two Livden patterns during Modernism Week 2020, shortly before the brand launched.

Since then, Gibbs and Smith have identified several

key niche differentiators. For an industry riddled with delays, Livden is all about brevity, offering speedy turnaround time (8–10 days, plus shipping). And customization is key: The company's color-matching services align its tile with paint swatches, which is essential for the marriage of sustainable materials and mainstream colorways.

These steps, both small and big, are how the sisters have carved out their corner of the design world. Where you don't have to choose between innovative design and thoughtful eco-manufacturing—you can have both. Gibbs says, “We saw the importance of the need for cultivating community with others who share our passion for design and sustainability.”



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Gibbs and Smith identified this need five years ago, while they were working for their family's business, StoneImpressions.

Smith, who oversaw sales and marketing for the stone-printing company, witnessed the limited options available for tile with eco-cred. "There weren't a lot of high-focused sustainable options that were also decorative," she says. "A lot of it was just black and white, black and gray, and a little stale."

Gibbs, whose background in painting and design drives the creative side of the business, became bored by the echo chamber of mainstream tile design. Plus: Social marketplaces like Pinterest can rapidly expire industry trends. "I started noticing that the same pattern was reused in so many projects and I thought about how we could make something totally unique," she says.

Today, over 20 collections later, the creative process starts the same way—with a piece of paper and a pen. Gibbs and Smith point to desert retreats like Joshua Tree and Palm Springs as inspiration for their latest collection, Painted Sands. There are some nods to traditional Spanish tile, some modern geometric shapes, muted earth-tone colors—it's fluid and fresh and Californian in a way that doesn't feel cliché.

Once the designs are locked in, the next step is to find the materials and partners to make it happen—which the duo admits still comes with a few hoops. "There aren't a lot of resources out there on sustainable materials," Smith says. "It requires a lot of research—especially when we were first starting out. You really have to dig deeper to find businesses and manufacturers that are truly dedicated to sustainability and not just greenwashing."

Livden's tiles are most often



**FROM LIVDEN'S TILE COLLECTIONS—OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP:** Luna in Medallion, tile bodies Chunky Terrazzo and Ivory Porcelain **THIS PAGE, FROM TOP:** Acacia, Tiger Stripes, Puzzle Piece, Luna, Honeysuckle

made from porcelain, which is naturally environmentally friendly; and Terrazzo, made with a combination of 65-66 percent recycled glass, granite, or quartz that's bonded with cement or epoxy. All of the tiles are sourced from suppliers solely from the US (and some may even qualify for LEED points, for clients interested in that certification). The rest of the production—art fabrication, printmaking, and final

tile assembly—all takes place at their Mira Mesa headquarters.

Moving forward, Gibbs and Smith are putting their focus more on expanding their tile body selections,

hunting for more upcycled materials to work with, and leading the charge of stylish sustainability.

"The shift is definitely happening," says Gibbs. "It's amazing to see, just even over the last five years, how much manufacturers are prioritizing sustainability. It's a movement we're really glad to be a part of and want to see continue to catch on like wildfire."

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**OFF THE WALL**

**Designer we love:**

Kelly Wearstler—she's so unique and doesn't stick to any design trend. Instead, she creates her own.

**Out with:** Subway tile

**In with:** Hexagonal tile (it's been around, but still cool!)

**Trends we won't miss:** Neutral farmhouse aesthetic and all-white kitchens

**Trends we love:** Bold color and pattern mixing

**Colors we're digging:** Oranges and yellows like marigold and mustard

**Top-selling Livden collections:** Popsicles, Luna, and Puzzle Piece

**Three words to describe the new collection, Painted Sands:** Playful, innovative, colorful