



Cement Tile Backsplashes

7 Things You Need to Know Before You Buy

Here's what you need to know before you go with a cement tile backsplash.

1. **Use a very narrow grout line when installing cement tiles.** Place cement tiles as close together as possible to create a very thin grout line. Minimizing the grout line will make the design look seamless and your space look larger. We recommend a 1/16" grout joint. Non-sanded (or unsanded) grout is required for grout joints less than 1/8" wide.
2. **Pick the right grout color.** You may use colored or white grout. If you decide to use colored grout, then we recommend it be a color that is the same or lighter than the lightest color used in the pattern. You can't use black grout with white or black and white pattern tiles because the dark grout will permanently stain the white parts of the tile.
3. **Expect to spend about \$1,000-\$1,500 for the tiles and freight,** assuming a backsplash area of about 40-50 sq. ft. The cost, which will vary, ultimately depends on the size, pattern, color and finish of the tile.
4. **Expect the cost of freight to be about 30% to 45% of the total order.** The cost of freight for even small cement tile orders can exceed the cost of the material. This is common for small projects when using cement tiles for a fireplace, backsplash or small bathroom. The cost of freight increases even more when you aren't near a large city or major shipping lane. Cement tile are heavy and usually need to be shipped as "freight" via common carrier.
5. **Add 20% overage/waste to the required tile quantity.** We recommend ordering an additional 10%-15% of tile to cover overage/waste. Overage or waste accounts for uncertainty in dimensions, tile variations, damage during installation, and damage that may occur during shipping.



- 6. Purchase polished tile, if available.** Most factories only manufacture unpolished or raw cement tiles. Currently, only one manufacturer provides the option to receive factory-polished tiles. Polished tiles have a satin sheen that simulates the finish all cement floor tiles achieve over time with care and use. The sheen develops from the abrasive forces acting on the tile from use. Raw tiles can be polished with a floor buffer and green pad after installation. But, the sheen won't develop immediately. Buffing will remove any surface color bleed on cement tile; but, you won't be able to use a floor buffer on a vertical backsplash installation.

Color bleed is common on high contrast tiles, such as patterns that use black and white. Color bleed occurs when cement tiles, placed in racks, are removed from a water bath that is necessary to strengthen the tiles. The water picks up trace amounts of pigment and drains down the tile. The dark pigments wash over the lighter areas of the tile, leaving a faint discoloration. This is normal and part of the manufacturing process; but not desirable for backsplash tiles that are in the lime light.

Finally, polished tile are usually easier to install because grout doesn't stick to the slightly smoother surface.

- 7. Seal the tile with a penetrating sealer.** Cement tile must be sealed with a high quality penetrating sealer. Like natural stones, cement tiles are porous in nature and a penetrating sealer provides a barrier by coating the cement particles in the tile — making it less likely they will retain stains or water.

Our blog post, [Sealing Cement Tile](#), will familiarize you with the different types of sealers and how they work. I generally recommend a water-based sealer; but, many installers prefer solvent-based. For vertical applications, use Stonelok™ "MLT-Plus" water-bourne sealer for concrete in a matte finish available from Richard James Specialty Chemicals Corp. in New York. You may call them at (914) 478-7500 to directly order the product. Always get a sample of the sealer and test on a spare tile or in an inconspicuous place to make sure the desired effect is achieved. On vertical applications the sealer needs to be applied lightly, often with a sponge, to avoid streaking.



Case Studies

Example #1

Here’s a recent order that supports the points we made about what to expect for total cost and freight. This order was for a project we shipped to Brooklyn, NY. The customer needed 40 sq. ft. or 92 8”x8” tiles. With waste or overage at 20%, we ordered 110 tiles.

Item	Quantity	Price Each	Total
Trad. Neiba Cement Tile 8"x8" Polished	110	\$6.36	\$699.60
Handling	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
LTL Freight ¹ (450# FCA 33178)	1	\$340.00	\$340.00
¹ Residential. Lift Gate Required.			
Total			\$1,045.60

The freight cost is about 33% of the total order cost. The tile costs are in the range we predicted. In this case, there was no damage to the tiles during freight; but, the customer was glad to they purchased extra for testing their sealer and cuts that were required.

Example #2

In this example, the order was for a project we shipped to San Francisco, CA. The customer needed 52 sq. ft. or 120 8”x8” tiles. With waste or overage at 10%, we needed at least 132 tiles and the customer decided to get a few extra.

Item	Quantity	Price Each	Total
Trad. Bayahibe Cement Tile 8"x8" Polished	135	\$6.95	\$938.25
Handling	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
LTL Freight ¹ (500# FCA 33178)	1	\$480.00	\$480.00
¹ Residential. Lift Gate Required.			
Total			\$1,424.25

The freight cost is about 35% of the total order cost. The tile costs are in the range we predicted. In this case, there was damage to one box caused by the carrier hitting the pallet with a fork-lift. Fortunately, the customer had purchased a few extra tiles and was able to complete the project without delay.

We’re Here to Help

If you need further assistance or have any questions about cement tile, then please feel free to call our offices at 888.739.4972, or email us at info@AventeTile.com.