

TILE INSTALLATION

IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS



The true beauty of handmade tile is that no two are identical. Each tile has its own character and there are some very important steps to ensure a timely installation with a breathtaking outcome.

There are significant differences between installing handmade tile and machine made tile. If you are an experienced handmade tile setter, these guidelines will be a refresher course. If you are new to handmade tile setting, consider this: Handmade Tile Installation 101.

TIME

These steps are necessary when installing handmade tile. They take time, but they save time. Allow for the extra time so you don't feel rushed or tempted to skip any of these steps.

INSPECTION

Inspect all tiles before installation. Tile installation constitutes final acceptance of the product.

SORTING (FOR SUBWAY/FIELD TILE)

All tile boxes should be opened and sorted before beginning installation. Make stacks of 5-10 tiles. Irregularly shaped tiles will stand out when stacked. Some arching and/or cupping is normal with handmade tile, but tiles with too much bend can be pulled and used for cut pieces. Watch for funky corners. Use these for cuts or where they will blend in. When tiling around electrical boxes, use the flattest tiles to ensure that the cover plate will lie smoothly on the wall.

Use stacks to sort tiles according to size. Each tile is hand cut from clay so sizes will vary. Turn each stack on edge and sort by narrow, medium, and wider sizes. After sorting into these groups, check the length by turning them on end and sorting accordingly. (e.g. "narrow-short", "narrow-long", "med. short", "med. long", etc.). This will help later with vertical grout line alignment.

Use similar height tiles in each row so that your horizontal grout lines between rows will be relatively uniform. The narrowest ones go in one row, medium widths in another row, and the widest/tallest ones in other rows. Don't mix sizes in the same row.

When installing numerous rows of subway tile, be aware of the varied tile lengths, too, so that your staggered vertical grout lines will stay reasonably aligned as you progress up the wall. For grid style layouts, you will want to match tile dimensions horizontally, and then vertically on the next row up, too, so that grout lines in both directions are relatively even. (See "dry layout".)

Sorting takes time, but GREATLY speeds up the installation and dramatically impacts the outcome. An hour of prep saves 3 hours of install. When sorting is completed, do a dry layout.

DRY LAYOUT

Lay all tile out on the ground or countertop in the exact way that you are going to install it.

(See example on our website: www.mercurymosaics.com, under “How to install” in our “Frequently Asked Questions” section.) Besides maintaining even grout lines per above, evenly distribute the color variances throughout the field of tiles. Installation is a breeze after a dry layout!

Always, ALWAYS pre-sort and do a dry layout before installing handmade tile. This is crucial because of size and color variations. The time spent on the sorting and dry layout will greatly reduce the time of the entire installation. Seriously... you'll be glad you did it.

SINGLE ROW INSTALLATION

When installing a single row of handmade tile, dry lay them out end-to-end, making sure that each end matches the dimension of the ones it touches. Never put a wide one next to a narrow one. If you have to use an asymmetric tile because of limited supply, (not likely), use it at the end of the tile run, or carefully shave down the edge on the tile saw and smooth it out with a stone.

ADHESIVE

Choose an adhesive that is specifically recommended for use on the surface you will be tiling.

Premixed adhesive is easier than thinset because it dries more slowly, allowing more time for minor adjustments. Follow package guidelines for application, clean-up, and dry time. Use sufficient adhesive behind each tile. When tile is slightly cupped, use extra adhesive behind the high spots (corners or center) so there isn't a void space behind the tile. Voids can lead to breaks during grouting, or can weaken the tile's bond to the wall, causing it to loosen or fall off later.

USE OF WET SAW

Use a sharp blade on your wet saw for precise cuts and to prevent chipping of tile or glaze. If a cut edge will be visible, use a stone to smooth the edge prior to installation.

GROUT

Use SANDED grout with Mercury Mosaics Handmade tile. We recommend 1/8" grout joints as a guideline, but the grout line widths may vary slightly due to the irregular shapes of the tiles. Grout will be darker when wet, and will lighten up as it dries.

Read all package instructions regarding mixing, slake time, application, and clean-up prior to use. Slaking (allowing the grout to sit 5-10 minutes and remixing before use) gives the liquid time to thoroughly penetrate the dry material, and allows the grout to form strong chemical bonds that increase durability. Do not add more liquid to grout that is becoming too dry to use. Discard and make another batch. Only make enough to last 20-30 minutes.

When using dark grout with light-colored tiles, light grout on dark tiles, or with any color tiles with a “crackled” glaze, apply a penetrating clear sealer to the tiles prior to grouting to avoid staining any slight tile or glaze imperfections, and to prevent the grout color from penetrating any natural crackles in the glaze, creating a spider web effect. The web effect can be beautiful, but not if the client doesn’t want it. We strongly recommend that you test the grout on a scrap of tile to show you and the client what to expect. When in doubt, use the sealer prior to grouting. We recommend Aqua Mix Grout Release, or a similar clear penetrating sealer.

When sponging off the excess grout, watch for humps and furrows along the grout lines, especially where tiles cup inward or outward. Fill and shape the grout lines as needed to make them appear smooth and even. Be sure to rinse/wring out your sponge frequently, and change your rinse water often. After final “clean water” sponge wipe, allow area to dry. Then buff with a DRY cloth to remove any remaining haze. Use a screwdriver or tool to remove excess grout in corners. Use matching caulk where tile meets any other material, like counter tops, cabinets, wood trim, sheetrock, etc. Proper grouting is always important, but it’s crucial with handmade tile.

FLOOR TILE

If Mercury Mosaics tiles are being installed onto the floor, verify what material is underneath the tile. Choose an adhesive specifically recommended for that sub-floor type. The adhesive container/thinset bag will list what surfaces it is appropriate for. Floors contract and expand with changes in humidity and temperature. It is crucial to use the correct bonding material for your sub-floor type to prevent grout cracking, tile loosening, and to ensure long life of your tile floor.

Using extra adhesive under any cupped tiles is especially important when installing floor tiles because there will be weight pressing on them. If this is not done, tile corners may crack off or centers may break anywhere there isn’t sufficient adhesive/thinset to support them. If stools, chairs, or tables will be used on the floor, make sure they have rubber protectors or felt pads on all legs to avoid scratching or chipping tile. Replace these protectors as they begin to wear

****SLIP:** If you plan to use this on a floor, especially in high traffic areas, we recommend using an anti-slip sealant that meets or exceeds co-efficient of friction requirements for ASTM, OSHA, ADA, Canadian and U.S. Government industrial safety standards. CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) compliant for use in the food industry. Our recommendation is: <http://www.noskidsafety.com/industrial-anti-slip-floor-treatment.aspx>

TUB/SHOWER TILE

When installing handmade tile in showers or in tub surrounds, be sure to seal the tile with a coat of penetrating sealer. After grouting, another coat of penetrating sealer over entire area.

Note: if you use an “enhancer” sealer, the grout will permanently darken, as if wet.

TILE INSTALLED OUTSIDE/OTHER

If Mercury Mosaics tile will be outside, or anywhere subject to extreme heat or cold, make sure to use the appropriate flexible adhesive. For installations where tile will be exposed to water (rain, snow, waterfall stream, etc.), an enhancer sealer will prevent the water from penetrating the tile, where freeze/thaw or perpetual dampness can eventually damage the glaze.

TILE INSTALLERS

If you have multiple installers working on your project, make sure that everyone is on the same page, using the same spacing, and following the above recommendations. Less experienced handmade tile setters should be observed frequently. Every hour, take a moment to step back and view “the big picture”. This makes it much easier to spot and correct issues with color distribution, out-of-level tiles or rows, wavy grout lines, etc. before the adhesive dries. You will be surprised by what you can see from 10 feet away that you can’t see from 3 feet away.

FINAL NOTES

Close attention to detail is crucial when installing handmade tile. The process can be really fun, and the results will be beautiful if you use our recommendations to guide the installation.

Handmade tiles are loved and cherished because they aren’t cookie-cutter symmetric. Their unique shapes and colors add a charm and beauty that you simply cannot achieve with machine made tiles. These unique qualities make installing handmade tile quite different from installing machine-made tile. Following these guidelines is crucial, and will take the hassle and challenges out of the installation process, so you can have fun creating handmade tile “artwork”.

1) Pre-sort tile, 2) dry layout, 3) follow directions on all packaging, 4) step back for frequent reviews during installation, and above all: 4) HAVE FUN throughout the artistic process!

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS: CALL MERCURY MOSAICS

612-940-7704 and ask for RANDI or email her at randi@mercurymosaics.com

Randi and our team of experienced handmade tile installers are eager to assist you with any questions you may have. We consider everyone who installs our tile as part of our handmade tile family. And when your installation is completed, PLEASE, send us photos!