



## YOUR NEW TILES... A Handbook for Cleaning and Maintenance

### Contents

Welcome and thank you!	p. 1
Cleaning your newly laid tiles	p. 2
Sealing tiles & grout	p. 2
Natural stone, marble etc	p. 2
Regular maintenance	p. 3
Tips for particular problems	p. 3
Some useful definitions	p. 5
Designa's® 10 Year Warranty	p. 7

### Welcome and Thank You!

Thank you for choosing tiles supplied by Designa Ceramic Tiles Limited®. We are passionate about the tiles we import and we are delighted that you have chosen to use our products. Designa® imports only quality Italian tiles from a carefully selected range of that country's very best manufacturers. Italian tiles are made to the highest European and international standards using only the finest raw materials and the most modern, technically-advanced production equipment. All tiles imported by Designa® are certified to meet or exceed European standards regarding sustainable production and environmental friendliness and many are made using a high proportion of recycled materials. Of course, all tiles imported by Designa® are guaranteed for 10 years.

The following document will provide you with some tips that should enable you to keep your tiles looking good for many years to come.

## Cleaning Your Newly Laid Tiles

When tiles are first laid the environment can often be quite dusty and gritty. Your tiler should have ensured that there has been no tile adhesive left on the surface of tiles and should also have removed most of the grout 'haze' that can tend to stick to the tile surface after the grouting process. Any remaining grout haze can be cleaned-off using a dry, or slightly damp towel. Do not allow the grout haze to remain on the tile surface for too long as the longer it remains, the harder it is to remove.

Unless you have specifically asked your tiler to seal your grout it is unlikely to have been done. Designa® recommends sealing in most situations. If you wish to seal your grout it is a simple DIY process and is best done soon after the tiles have been laid. Use a reputable grout sealing product and simply follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Sand and grit are the enemies of floor tiles. Some softer ceramic tiles and tile glazes can be scratched and damaged by grit on the bottoms of shoes and footwear. So in the period immediately after new tiles are laid it is important to frequently sweep (and if possible vacuum) tile floors to eliminate as much grit as possible. Using good quality door mats and encouraging guests to thoroughly wipe their feet before entering is also a good idea.

For the first week or so, and longer if the environment is particularly dusty, we would recommend daily mopping of floors using a damp mop or a micro-fibre cloth. If the floor is particularly dirty you may add a couple of drops of any mild household detergent to the wash water. Alternatively there are a lot of suitable proprietary tile cleaning products available. Check with Designa® if you would like us to recommend something appropriate. Don't use too much detergent! A couple of drops is plenty and will avoid streaking and excess suds. Also, harsh chemicals and bleaches should be avoided. These are very unlikely to harm your tiles, but could stain or remove the colour from grout.

## Sealing Tiles & Grout

The only tiles that are likely to always need sealing are unglazed terra cotta or quarry tiles and the like. Glazed ceramic tiles only require sealing in instances when they have a 'crackle' glaze finish (an antique effect). Porcelain tiles should never normally need to be sealed. However it should be noted that some low-end polished porcelain can be subject to staining and frequently does, in fact, need to be sealed. Top quality Italian polished porcelain does not need to be sealed, but you should be careful about some of the cheaper options found in the market. Check with Designa® if you are unsure.

Designa® recommends that grout be routinely sealed on floors and on walls in wet areas such as showers. You can ask your tiler to do this for you, or it is a simple job to do yourself. Ask Designa® if you would like us to recommend a suitable product. Remember that all sealers wear off over time. Your grout sealer will need to be re-done every 5 years or so.

Epoxy grouts do not need to be sealed.

## Natural Stone, Marble etc.

A lot of commonly used natural stone is quite soft and special care needs to be taken with its treatment and maintenance. Marble, limestone and other metamorphic rock, for example, is very susceptible to etching by relatively weak domestic acids such as lemon juice or vinegar. They are also exposed to staining by things such as red wine or grease and oil etc. These natural stones need to be sealed prior to laying and then must be resealed on a regular on-going basis. The colours in some marbles are also quite delicate and special 'natural cure' silicone must be used.

Seek expert advice before cleaning. Never use harsh chemicals such as alkalis (e.g., caustic soda), bleaches or acids around natural stone.

## Regular Maintenance

Porcelain and ceramic tile floors are really easy to keep looking good. Unless they are very dirty they should not need to be scrubbed. Simply sweeping up dust and grit and mopping using a damp micro-fibre cloth is all that is required. There is no need to apply polish or use harsh chemicals.

The frequency of cleaning will depend on how dusty the environment is and how much foot traffic is using the floor.

Wall tiles should be regularly wiped down using a damp micro-fibre cloth. If wall tiles are dirty add a couple of drops of a mild household detergent.

Wall tiles in showers and wet areas require special attention. To avoid the build-up of soap residues Designa® recommends the use, where possible, of liquid body wash. Bars of soap contain waxy polymers that can stick to tiles and grout and which are difficult to remove once they have dried. Ideally, shower walls should be cleaned daily using a squeegee or wiped down using a towel. To remove soap residues built up over a prolonged period we recommend the use of a 'soft' nylon scouring pad (the white kind, made for bathrooms). Gently rub in a circular motion and rinse the pad out regularly.

## Tips for Particular Problems

Here are some suggested remedies for commonly encountered problems:

- **Stubborn Grout Haze** - If grout haze is allowed to remain on the tile surface too long it can become too difficult to remove simply by rubbing it with a towel. Stubborn grout haze can be removed by using a proprietary 'grout haze remover' or a mild acid such as a dilution of Phosphoric acid. If used strictly according to the manufacturer's directions, these products will successfully remove the grout haze without any damage to the tile surface or grout.

- **Efflorescence** - This appears as a white powder that forms along the lines of grout joints and sometimes extends onto the tile surface. Efflorescence is caused by calcium salts dissolving out of the tile adhesive or grout in water. When the water evaporates on the tile the salts are left behind. Treat by vigorously scrubbing the salts with a stiff nylon brush and washing off with plenty of clean water. If efflorescence reappears use Phosphoric acid as directed.
- **Mold in Grout** - Modern grouts usually contain mold inhibitors, but unsealed grout is porous and provides a perfect environment for mold spores to thrive where it's warm and wet. Help to avoid mold growth by sealing grout in wet areas. Existing mold outbreaks can be treated with proprietary anti-mold sprays or with a mild bleach dilution. Ensure to rinse with plenty of clean water. Never use undiluted bleach.
- **Stained Grout** - Grout is naturally porous and if it is badly stained it can be almost impossible to get clean. Grout sealer can improve things, but if sealer has not been used then the only real option is to rake the grout out of the joints and re-grout them, or to use a grout colourant. Check with Designa® if you need advice.
- **Spare Tiles** - Porcelain tiles are very tough but occasionally one could be broken or cracked and need replacement. For this reason it's important to keep sufficient spares (either whole tiles or large off-cuts) after the tiling job is complete. This will make replacement easier to manage. Tiles tend to go in and out of fashion and they are also prone to batch variation. This means that subsequent production batches of the same tile can tend to look quite different in colour (and sometimes also in size) and cannot simply be mixed with other batches. It is important, therefore, that the spare tiles you keep are from the same batch as is laid.
- **Cracked Tiles** - Because modern porcelain tiles are inherently so dense and strong it is quite unusual for them to break or crack unless treated very harshly. Sometimes breakage can occur to an individual tile after a particularly heavy object has been dropped on it. In this instance, a tiler can usually chip out the tile and replace it with one of the spares you have kept for this purpose (see above). Occasionally, however, you may find a crack that extends through several tiles in a more-or-less continuous line. This is almost always an indication of a fault with the substrate (the 'base' the tiles have been laid on). It is not a fault with the tiles themselves.
- **Substrate Issues** - Tiles need to be laid on a stiff, inflexible surface. A concrete substrate is ideal, but it needs to be smooth and flat and appropriately 'cured'. New concrete slabs are subject to considerable shrinkage and movement. It is not recommended to tile over concrete less than 30 days old. Tiling over timber is possible but the floor needs to be reinforced with fibrous cement board (usually called tile & slate underlay) to eliminate flexing.

## Some Useful Definitions

All tiles AREN'T the same, so it's important to take a little time to get a quick understanding of some basic definitions.

- **Ceramic Tiles** - These tiles have been around for over 3000 years. They typically consist of a clay backing (or 'biscuit') and this is often glazed by the application of a liquid glass layer before the tile is fired. Ceramic tiles are relatively 'soft'. These days they are found mainly as wall tiles and are used as floor tiles only in low-traffic residential situations.
- **Unglazed Ceramic Tiles** - Examples include unglazed terra cotta, saltillos, quarry tiles etc. These tiles are not frost resistant. They are absorbent and are subject to staining. They need to be sealed (usually prior to laying & grouting), and they need to be resealed on a regular basis.
- **Porcelain Tiles** - These tiles are 'dry pressed' using finely powdered kaolin and other natural minerals. Porcelain tiles are fired with kiln temperatures over 1200 degrees Celsius and the resulting product is extremely hard and dense. As a result, porcelain tiles can be made in very big sizes. These days most modern floor tiles are made of porcelain. Porcelain tiles come in 3 basic types; Full-body Porcelain (unglazed solid porcelain where the colour and pattern extends all the way through the tiles), Coloured-Body Porcelain (glazed with a pattern on the top surface and a body, or 'biscuit' made of a porcelain colour that roughly matches the glaze colour), and Glazed Porcelain (at the less expensive end of the market where a generic grey or beige porcelain biscuit is used with a glazed surface. Full-bodied porcelain tiles often come with 3 different kinds of surface finish; Natural (this is the factory finish straight out of the kiln), Polished (the 'natural' tiles are polished to a high gloss - note that this process can open the pores of some porcelain tiles and make them subject to staining) & Structured (this is a textured finish that provides 'grip' and helps make the tiles suitable for exterior use. Porcelain tiles are rated to absorb less than 0.5% water and they are therefore frost-proof and chemical resistant etc.
- **Tile & Glaze Hardness** - Tiles are rated for different degrees of hardness. Harder tiles are more suitable for high-traffic areas and commercial installations. Tile hardness (resistance to deep abrasion) is usually measured on the 9 point Mohs scale. The higher the number, the harder the tile. Glaze and surface hardness is usually rated on the 5 point PEI scale. Again, the higher the number, the harder the tile. Bathroom floor tiles, for example, are usually at least a PEI 3 (or Mohs 4), but a commercial grade tile should be at least PEI 4 or Mohs 7 or 8. All Italian tiles imported by Designa are rated for abrasion resistance. Please enquire if you need this technical information.

- **Grout and Grout Sealing** - Grout is basically just coloured cement (plus additives to improve flexibility and inhibit mold) that is inserted by the tiler into the joints between the tiles. These joints help protect the tiles from damage due to expansion / contraction and abrasion. Standard grouts are not waterproof. They can be made water resistant by the application of an approved grout sealer. Grout sealers will help resist staining and keep the grout looking good for longer. However the sealer will need to be redone every 5 years or so to remain effective. Grout is also available in epoxy formulations, but these are generally only used in harsh chemical environments such as swimming pools, factories or workshops, or in situations where a non-porous grout is useful such as hospitals or food preparation areas.
- **Rectified Tiles and Joint Width** - All ceramic tiles, and 'natural' porcelain tiles usually have 'natural' or 'pressed' edges. These are formed when the tile is pressed into its mold and result in a slight natural bevel. Natural tiles are usually laid with a grout joint width of 3-5 mm. Tiles with an irregular or wavy edge (in the rustic style) often have grout joints up to 10 mm wide. Rectified tiles have had their edges cut square after manufacturing. The square edges mean that the tiles can be laid with very tight grout joints of around 2 mm. However it should be noted that rectified tiles need to be laid onto a flat and level substrate. Your tiler will struggle to get a good look from rectified tiles if the walls are bowed or are not straight. Discuss this with your tiler.



## WARRANTY POLICY

### OUR EXPRESS WARRANTY

DESIGNA Ceramic Tiles Limited® is proud to supply quality products, and we stand by that quality. Subject to the exclusions listed below, Designa® will, at its sole discretion, replace or refund the purchase price of any products that are found to be defective for a period of ten (10) years from the date of purchase.

### OTHER LEGISLATION

This Warranty should be read in conjunction with the New Zealand Fair Trading Act 1986 and the Consumer Guarantees Act 1993. In the event of a conflict between the provisions of this Warranty and either of the above Acts, the provisions of the Acts will prevail.

### LIMITATIONS & EXCLUSIONS

This Warranty does not cover:

- Improper or inadequate fixing of products - including, but not limited to; inappropriate substrate preparation, adhesive selection and layout and design.
- Natural 'batch variation' in colour or calibre at the time of manufacture that could result in the product supplied not being exactly the same as any samples supplied.
- Improper use or abuse of the products either before or after fixing.
- Any damage to goods whilst in the care and control of freight companies or third parties.
- Consequential loss of any kind after the product has been installed.
- Goods bought at auction or by tender.
- Inappropriate uses of which we were not made fully aware at the time we may have recommended a product as being fit for a particular purpose.
- Products that were not imported by Designa® - in which case only the mandatory provisions of relevant consumer legislation will apply.
- Any legal jurisdiction except New Zealand.

### REMEDIES

In the first instance, please bring any concerns you may have regarding products or services supplied by Designa® directly to our attention. Our contact details are as follows: Phone: 09 579 0714, Fax: 09 579 0739, Email: [info@designa.co.nz](mailto:info@designa.co.nz), Postal Address: Designa Ceramic Tiles Limited, PO Box 17-475, Greenlane, Auckland, Physical Address: 15 Kalmia Street, Ellerslie, Auckland, New Zealand.

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