

the A-Z of tile terms

The lexicon of the ceramic tile sector grows larger as new products, technologies and colloquial expressions add to traditional terminology that is often centuries old. We have selected 50 terms and their meanings that users may encounter during the selection process. Relevant Australian Standard (AS) or International Standard (ISO) numbers are mentioned where applicable. The majority of the descriptions are taken from The Italian Ceramic Tile Dictionary, published by EDI-CER, the publishing arm of Assopiastrelle, the Italian Association representing the Italian tile sector.

Abrasion resistance The degree to which a floor tile's surface will withstand friction (the wear of foot traffic). Resistance is determined by abrasion tests. (AS 4459-7) classifies tiles from Group I (suitable for light residential traffic) to Group V (suitable for commercial traffic).

Bicottura Literally 'two firings', referring to the separate firing of the clay body and the glaze. Bicottura glazes are not as scratch resistant and are now only used on walls.

Body(of tile) The structural portion of a ceramic article such as the clay material or mixture, as distinct from the glaze.

Bullnose tiles Tiles featuring a rounded edge used to finish wall installations, turn outside corners or applied to the leading edge for some steps.

Chemical resistance The ability of a tile surface to withstand damage from chemical, acids, alkalis and swimming pool salts.

Clinker tiles (also Klinker) Natural clay tile, generally extruded and unglazed, vitrified or impervious to moisture and therefore suitable for indoor and outdoor use.

Coefficient of friction A measurement of slip resistance. Different standards apply to dry areas or those exposed to water or grease. Talk with your retailer about appropriate slip resistance for each area.

Colourway(s) Simply describes the colour or colours in which certain products are available.

Cove tiles Cove trim tiles with rounded top edge, used to finish tile installation as baseboard, backsplash, etc.

Crazing A fine, hair-line cracking which sometimes appears on the glazed face of a tile.

Usually caused by tensile stress between tile body and glaze. May be intentionally produced for artistic effect.



Crystalline finish Extra thick glaze usually applied to small tiles for artistic effect.

Decorated tile Ceramic tiles that have been embellished by means of hand painting, silk screening, decals or other techniques.

Dust-pressed tile Tiles formed by the compaction of finely milled raw materials in moulds before firing. The majority of indoor tiles are produced this way.

Efflorescence Crystalline deposit that sometimes appears on the surface of grout joints or unglazed tiles as a whitish powder or crust, caused by moisture reacting with impurities in the mortar.

Epoxy Resin material used in mortars and grouts for thin-set tile installations.

Expansion Joint Separation provided between adjoining parts of a structure to allow movement at stress points to prevent uncontrolled cracking.

Extruded tiles Tiles formed by the extrusion process wherein the still malleable or plastic raw clay is forced through a mould and then cut into shape before firing.



Finishes Textural or visual characteristics of a tile surface. For glazed tile this may be high gloss, satin or matt. Generally for porcelain tiles, finish can be natural, polished, semi-polished, honed, lapped. Other finishes mimicking stone such as bush hammered are also available. Other effects include raised, embossed, dimpled, etched, scored, ribbed, etc.

Fire resistance Ability to withstand burning by flame. Ceramic tiles are fireproof at any temperature and will not release toxic emissions.

Firing Final step of tile manufacturing process when raw material is 'baked' at high temperature (up to 1250 degrees C for porcelain tiles) to harden the tile body and glaze (if present).

Format The size of ceramic tiles may vary from 10x10cm to 60x120cm. Format is a modern term that simply refers to size.

Frost resistance Ability of certain ceramic tiles to withstand freeze/thaw conditions with minimal effect. Frost resistance of ceramic tile is dependent on the tile's porosity and water absorption levels.



Glass mosaic Mosaic tiles composed entirely of glass, rather than ceramic material.

Glaze Glassy opaque or transparent coating fired or fused on to the ceramic tile body, creating a smooth, impermeable surface.

Glazed porcelain Now the most popular type of indoor floor tile. The tile is made from porcelain clays but glazed for aesthetic

effect. They are dense, strong and best cut with a wet saw.

Grout joint Space left between tiles to be filled with grout. This space may be extremely narrow or wider depending on the required installation and/ or its aesthetics.

Impact resistance Ability of ceramic tile to resist breakage – either throughout the body or as surface chipping – as the result of a heavy blow. In general, ceramic tile is not a resilient material, and care should be taken to avoid dropping heavy or sharp objects on its surface. Glazed tiles are more susceptible to surface chipping than unglazed tiles.

Insets Small, sometimes decorative tiles used in combination with larger or plain tiles to create patterns. Small square inserts are also known as a taco or tozzetto.

Jolly tiles Trim tiles mitred along one or two edges, used in corner and countertop installations. Also called angled (45°) tiles.

Lippage In finished installations, lippage refers to the condition where one edge of a tile is higher than an adjacent tile. Excessive lippage can cause trips and falls.

Listello Narrow decorative border tile, often designed to compliment a range of field tiles.

Modular format Combining different tile sizes is a popular trend which may be described as 'modular'. Generally a mixture of sizes from the same tile series are laid together to create a more interesting pattern in the installed tiles.

Mohs' scale Scale used to express the measure of a material's hardness from Mohs' 1 (hardness of talc) to 10 (diamond).

Monocottura Tiles produced with only one high temperature firing, generally with harder glaze and denser body than wall tiles with moisture absorption below 3 percent.

Monoporosa Single-fired tiles with higher porosity and water absorption levels than 'monocottura' tiles.

Mosaic tiles Ceramic mosaic tiles are defined by their size, generally less than 15cm square. Their composition is the same as ceramic tiles. They may be glazed or unglazed and mounted on mesh backing. Also available in glass and metal.

Nominal size The approximate size of tile face or thickness used for general purposes. Tile sizes can vary by up to plus or minus 3mm over a nominal 333mm long tile, depending on the batch supplied.

Pencil tiles Narrow rectangular tiles (e.g. 2x20cm) sometimes with rounded surface, used on walls as accent pieces.



Porcelain stoneware Dust-pressed ceramic tiles with water absorption levels less than 0.5% and high mechanical and chemical characteristics. The surface of these tiles may be glazed or unglazed. Often specified for exterior installations, they are also referred to as fully vitrified.

Porosity Volume of pores relative to volume of tile body and capable of absorbing moisture (and therefore stains).

Quarry tiles Traditional term for single extruded natural clay tiles with a water absorption level not exceeding 6%. Can be glazed or unglazed.

Rectified Cutting or grinding the edges off a tile allows the dimensions and squareness to be precisely controlled. Typically exhibiting a very square edge, rectified tiles are generally suited for installing without spaces or obvious grout lines between the tiles.

Sealers Clear coating sometimes applied to unglazed floor tiles to protect the surface from grease spills or staining materials (also known as sealants).

Slip resistant tiles Tiles treated to prevent slipping either by adding an abrasive

grit to the glaze or a texture to the design of the tile surface structure such as ribs, studs etc.

Terracotta

Traditional clay used to produce unglazed, cream to red body tiles, generally extruded and 12 mm thick or more. Surface may be rustic, smooth, polished, or waxed.



Thermal shock resistance

Ceramic tile's ability to resist alteration when subjected to rapidly fluctuating extreme temperatures.

Unglazed tiles Unglazed tiles derive their colour and texture from their raw materials or may be coloured by means of oxides dispersed throughout the body. They are generally fully vitrified.

Vitrified tiles Vitreous tiles absorb less than 3 percent moisture whereas Fully Vitrified tiles are made from fine particles and fired to high temperatures (1250 degrees) which results in a denser tile with extremely low porosity (moisture absorption of less than 0.5 percent). Porcelain stoneware tiles are fully vitrified making a layer of glaze unnecessary for the tile to be impervious to water.

Wastage Generally add 10 percent to the amount required for wastage due to cutting etc. If the installation is complicated or a lot of cutting is involved, the amount for wastage may need to be increased to 15 percent.

Water absorption The quantity of water a tile can absorb expressed as a percent of the dry tile weight. High water absorption corresponds to a porous structure, while compact, vitrified structures feature low water absorption. ♦