

1. What is the difference between ceramic tile and natural stone?

Ceramic and porcelain tiles are man-made, while natural stones are quarried from the earth.

Most man-made tiles are fired and glazed. This process produces a finish on the tile that won't absorb water or stains, and is very durable and requires no special maintenance. In general, man-made tiles are much more consistent in appearance and thickness than natural stones. However, if a glazed surface becomes chipped or cracked, it may take some creativity to repair it—because the finish cannot be duplicated once it has been fired.

Stones (travertine, limestone, slate, quartzite, granite, marble, onyx) have natural variations in color that are inherent to the product. They are not glazed, but are porous by nature, and need to be sealed to avoid staining and etching. A benefit of natural stone is that it has color throughout the material. Hence, if the stone tile chips or cracks, it is barely noticeable. Also, you do not need to purchase finished trim pieces for installation, as with glazed tile.

We never discourage people from buying natural stone, but a common saying in the business is: *If you want consistency and uniformity, then select porcelain tile.*

2. What is the difference between ceramic and porcelain tile?

Porcelain is ceramic tile made with much denser clay, and then it is fired at much higher temperatures. Porcelain tile is harder, will take a lot of abuse, will not scratch or chip easily, and will not stain as easily as most other tiles. In addition, it will endure high/low temperature variations. All of this makes porcelain tile a great choice.

3. How do I seal natural stone? Is there any additional maintenance required?

All natural stones require at least a penetrating sealer. This type of sealer blocks the pores of the stone so that water and stains will not get in. Sealing the stone prior to grouting acts as a grout release and make clean-up much easier. Some stones only require a penetrating sealer (marble, granite, onyx, limestone) while others can be further sealed with a topcoat sealer (slate, travertine, quartzite, tumbled stones.) A topcoat sealer can act as a color enhancer as well as an additional layer of protection over your stone, since it does not soak in as much as the penetrating sealer. Top coat sealers will leave your stone with either a matte or glossy finish, depending on the type used and your desired effect.

Sealers should be reapplied every year or so—depending on the amount of use your stone incurs. Our staff can help you with the requirements of the specific stone you choose.

With natural stone, you want to use a mild soap for cleaning. Tile Art carries stone specific soaps, but you can also pick these up at many retailers. Do not use abrasive cleaners, or those that contain bleach or ammonia. Harsh or acidic cleaners will break down your sealer faster, and can etch or scratch softer stones (marble, limestone, onyx).

4. Can I have tile or natural stone outdoors?

Yes, but you need to choose a material that is rated for your climate. Water absorption is the main concern, as water expands and contracts as it freezes and thaws. There are granites and several slates that are rated for outdoor use, however, the majority of natural stones (travertine, limestone, marble) are not suitable in freeze/thaw conditions. Many porcelain tiles have a very low water absorption rating, so they can be used outdoors. However, ceramic tiles are not generally rated for outdoor use in many climates.

5. Do I need to seal my grout?

There are a lot of contractors who will tell you yes, and still others who will tell you no. The reason for sealing is to make cleaning and maintenance easier. There has been a trend in recent years to use light colored grouts in the main floors of the home in order to match lighter colored tiles and then a sealer is used to prevent "wear paths"—darkening of the grout joints in areas of main traffic in the home. Unfortunately, sealers will not prevent this. You're much better off using either a medium or darker colored grout. As for using sealer in the bathroom, sealer WILL help, but again, over time, grout will discolor or "age" somewhat, and cleaners will be just as effective, with or without sealer.

6. Do you provide installation services?

At this time, we do not. However, we do have a list of "recommended installers" that we will gladly provide to you for your installation needs. There are many qualified installers in the Four Corners area. Our list is not a comprehensive list of every local installer, but it names those who we are very familiar with. We have personally seen their work and know that it meets Tile Art's high standards.

7. Are your materials in stock? If not, how long does it take to order?

We keep a limited amount of slates in stock as well as most setting materials. However, due to the large selection that we offer, most materials are ordered on an "as needed" basis. The general time frame for ordering is 1-2 weeks, but we can usually expedite materials for additional shipping costs. Some of our manufacturers make orders as they are received, and these companies can sometimes take up to 6-8 weeks. Therefore, it is helpful to know what your time requirements are to ensure that we can get your chosen materials within your time frame.

8. Can I return unused tile?

Please be advised that all orders are custom, meaning that we order materials on an "as needed" basis for our customers.

If materials can be returned (and not all materials can be—returns are taken at the discretion of our distributors), they must be returned within 30 days of point of sale, in full cartons, with freight and restocking charges associated.

Since our distributors have implemented these return policies, please understand that we can only accept returns that our distributors accept. Because of this, it is very important that you CONFIRM your tile amounts prior to ordering. We are emphasizing this for your protection. Please understand that even on materials that can be returned, you will not receive your full price for returns due to the restocking and return freight charges that are applied.

Any stock items purchased can be returned for a full refund.