

ON THE SURFACE

WRITTEN BY PAMELA LERNER JACCARINO AND ELISE MINTON

TODAY'S LUXURY HIGH-END SURFACES ARE AS EXTRAVAGANT AS THEY ARE VARIED. Trends in glass, stone, exotic woods and mosaics run the gamut from elegant to edgy, sexy to sophisticated, contemporary to classy. An endless array of patterns, colors and textures for floors and walls (and even fireplaces, shelves, and stair risers), means the design possibilities are endless, with imaginative and unexpected ideas.



GLASS WALL BY MELTDOWN GLASS



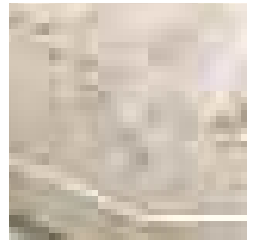
STONE + TILE

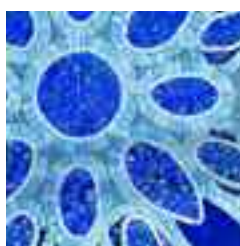
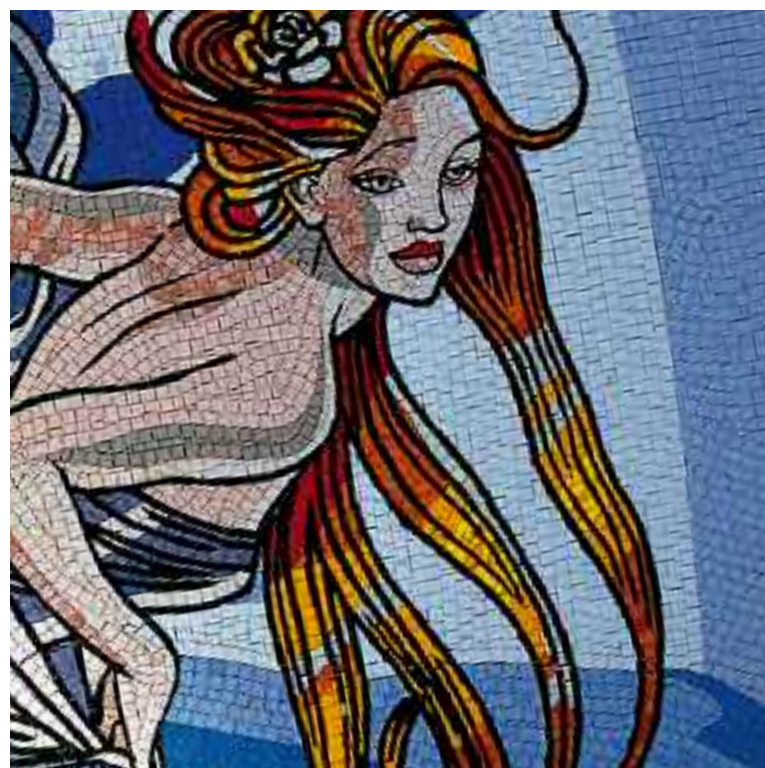
When it comes to stone and marble, oversize and sleek is in. “Formats are larger and looks are more refined,” says Margot Hampleman, owner of Decorative Materials, a distributor of luxury tile and stone with showrooms in Denver, Aspen and Vail. “Years ago, we had big chunky tiles with distressed edges. Today customers are requesting a more elegant look.” For a formal appearance, marble or limestone is the way to go. Limestone in particular is becoming a popular stone choice among homeowners who are seeking a smooth, glossy look. “We are seeing a big surge in limestone not only for floors but also for walls and countertops,” says Dave Little, president of business development for The Gallegos Corporation, a specialty stone company with locations throughout Colorado.

The pattern of stone surfaces is also progressing, going from square to rectangular. Currently in vogue is the subway-style pattern, in which rectangular tile is installed in an offset brick pattern. “It’s a natural evolution,” says Marty Fahey, marketing director for Materials Marketing, a fabricator of high-end custom architectural stone and tile, with showrooms in Denver, Dallas and Chicago. “Once something becomes popular, designers look for ways to make it different.”

One of the newest shapes is the stick tile, according to tile expert Nancy Epstein, founder and president of Artistic Tile, a national luxury stone and tile manufacturer. “Sticks of various widths and finishes are very hot right now. It’s a move toward a more linear aesthetic.” Stick tiles are at least three times as long as they are wide, and the patterns and textures of these tiles play prominently. “Tiles in sticks, planks and strips are not just a passing trend,” says Epstein. “They’re absolutely here to stay and I believe will become part of timeless luxury design.”

Carved stone moldings are also happening in a big way, as is inseting stone with artistic glass and metal tile. “Trimming out details with stone helps punctuate the architecture,” explains Fahey. Allison Betty, Denver manager for Decorative Materials, agrees. “Our clients are doing more natural stone feature walls and mosaic tiles on the floor for visual punch,” she says.





GLASS + METAL

"Glass as a flooring and wall treatment has now become all the rage," says Marty Fahey of Materials Marketing. While glass started out as a fairly pedestrian material offered in small square formats, the know-how that was acquired in the world of marble and mosaics is now being applied to glass. "The degree of artwork that can be created with glass right now is amazing," he adds.

Cleaner designs mean that translucent glass is becoming as important as colored, although there's still an array of rich hues and interesting designs. "Glass is serene looking yet vibrant. It's a very attractive option," says Nancy Epstein of Artistic Tile.

Metal tile lends another look entirely. When used solo, some metal tiles can infuse a very modern feeling into a space. Used as accents with stone, antiqued bronzed metal tiles, for example, can yield an earthy quality. The type of materials chosen and how they are combined can set the stage for how a room presents itself.

Small glass and metal mosaics offer a very creative approach and can be used for floors and walls, as well as on fireplaces and other surfaces that are in need of an accent. "Glass is a wonderful material to combine with other mediums," Margot Hampleman of Decorative Materials points out. "Mixing metal, glass, stone and ceramic on a floor or wall is something we're doing more and more." For example, a large-format porcelain or stone can be bordered or inset with glass and metal. "I think the trend of mixing materials is going to continue, especially when it's done in a subtle, sophisticated manner," she adds.



GLASS MURAL DESIGN AND FLOOR MOSAIC BY SICIS