

BUYERS' GUIDE ENCAUSTIC TILES

Hard-wearing and decorative, these traditional, handmade tiles are popular in households all over the world. Here's what you need to know before investing in this style for your home

Words: **Yvette Murrell**

Examples of encaustic tiles can be found as far back as the Middle Ages. Growing in popularity during the Victorian era, they still are one of the most prominent choices for walls and floors today. Traditionally, they are made from at least two layers of clay compressed together in a hydraulic press. The process starts with a solid sand-and-cement base, followed by another layer made from a blend of cement and ground marble mixed with natural dyes which is poured into patterned moulds. The results are striking, intricate, decorative tiles that don't lose their pattern as they are worn down over time.

Buying tips

Browse online and you will come across 'encaustic-style' or 'encaustic-effect' tiles almost straight away. On first glance, these will have the authentic look, but they likely have not been made using traditional methods and therefore the patterns and makeup may not be as durable. Keep an eye out if you want the real deal and ask the manufacturers or closely look at the material composition if in doubt. Encaustic tiles are highly durable, work well with underfloor heating, and can retain heat in winter and stay cool in summer. As they are thicker than porcelain or ceramic, allow a few millimetres of extra floor depth. They also work equally well on walls and, if properly glazed, even behind cookers as a decorative splashback.

Design decisions

It's useful to work out the amount of space you want to tile and keep a budget of what you want to spend in mind before shopping. Many different shapes, sizes, and patterns are available, which all affect the total price as encaustics are often sold per tile. While traditional designs have distinctly Moroccan or Spanish patterns, you can now also pick from more contemporary geometric styles. As they are handmade, each tile will be slightly different in its finish and colour, but this only adds to the overall look – great for creating a modern patchwork effect.

Need to know

Encaustic tiles must be installed correctly to ensure longevity. It's not an easy process, so use a qualified stonemason. Before they start, make sure to let them know which pattern the tiles should be laid in and make sure there's a good foundation as they must be laid onto a solid base level to prevent cracking. If you plan to put them in a bathroom, kitchen, or hallway, where traffic is high, the tiles must be properly sealed since they are naturally porous. This can take several days to dry completely, so bear in mind you won't be able to use the area until it is fully sealed.

Pricing

The cost per tile varies depending on the size, thickness, and pattern, but expect to pay an average of £2-£10, or anywhere between £50 and £300 per sq m. Underlay, sealant, and installation would be at an additional cost, depending on the style you choose.



↑ Terrazzo Tiles's encaustic cement designs are all handmade in Morocco. Prices for standard tiles range from £82 to £105 per sq m, with bespoke options also available in store – or design them online using the Cement Tile Virtual Simulator. Shown here are (from top) Algiers, Concentric Black, Estrellita Marine Blue, and Marrakech Red.



↑ Interiors blogger Alex Stedman, better known as The Frugality, chose Ca'Pietra's Lily Pad tiles in Denim from Ripples Bathrooms for her space. Sold in boxes of 12, each 20 x 23cm tile costs £3.96, or £118.80 per sq m. Also available in Marine and Clay.



Ten different designs make up Claybrook Studio's Old Havana range. Paired together, they create larger patterns, or mix and match different styles for a more eclectic look. All tiles are priced £2.80 each, or £69.90 per sq m.

Expert advice *

"A great deal of care must be taken with encaustic tiles. If you are purchasing in advance, as part of a larger renovation project, and need to store them, make sure they are not exposed to sunlight or rain."

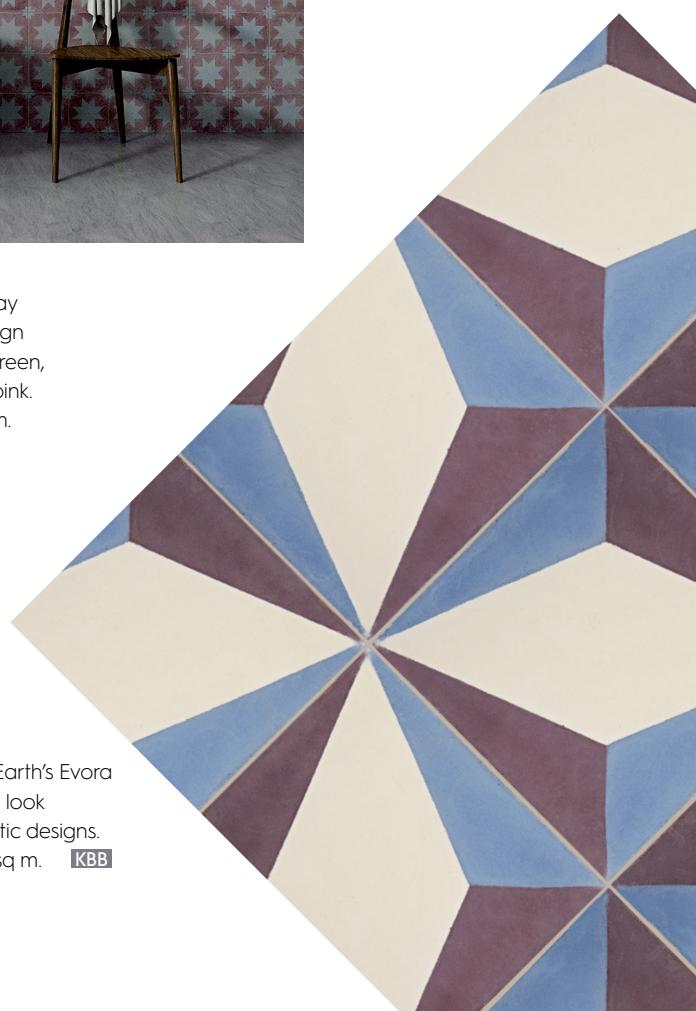
**Yvette Murrell,
features writer**



Ca'Pietra's Patchwork tiles come in the shown multicolour as well as a grey option. Sold in a box of 12 random tiles, they're ideal for creating a feature wall or floor. Priced £3.84 per tile, or £96 per sq m.



↑ The Pradena tile from Bert & May has a traditional star-shaped design and comes in five colourways – green, blue, grey, black, and the shown pink. Priced £6 per tile, or £125 per sq m.



→ Handmade in Portugal, Fired Earth's Evora tile has a distinctly Mediterranean look in keeping with traditional encaustic designs. Priced £8.99 per tile, or £224 per sq m. **KBB**

↑ The likes of Tom Dixon, Paola Novone, and Jaime Hayon have helped design exclusive collections within Domus Tiles' Cementiles range. Priced from £169.20 per sq m, shown is the bold Dot, designed by India Mahdavi who also created the interiors for (among others) London's famed Sketch restaurant.