

A-Z OF TILING

Every week as part of our “Stay Positive, Back Stronger” campaign we will be providing you with our A-Z of Tiling Terms. Get in-depth description of many of the common tiling terms, plus some expert insight or top tips from our team.

N

NATURAL STONE

A wide variety of natural stone types is commercially available, in sizes ranging from mosaics to large format tiles. Popular stones include basalt, granite, limestone, marble, sandstone, slate and travertine. Each has differing characteristics and requires care when fixing. In particular, thought should be given to adhesives. With limestone or other light coloured stone, especially marble or travertine, a white cement-based adhesive is essential to avoid any discolouration. A rapid-setting adhesive would also be recommended to reduce the risk of staining. For such ‘green’ stones as green marble, which can become dimensionally unstable when wet, a resin-based adhesive, such as an epoxide resin (type R1 or R2 to BS EN 12004: 2001), is essential. If the look of natural stone is spoiled, it typically occurs during grouting. A grout colour which matches the stone’s own colouring is advised, especially with porous stone. A suitable sealer will reduce a ‘picture frame’ effect around the edges of very porous stone and the risk is further reduced if a rapid-setting grout or a cement-based grout containing a water-retaining agent is used. For white or light-coloured stone, grouts containing grey Portland cement should be avoided. A neutral curing silicone or similar should always be used to seal movement joints in stone tiling.

BAL INSIGHT

As has been mentioned throughout this A – Z, Natural Stone can provide a timeless look. However extra consideration is paramount. Always be aware that, even if the same type of stone, from the very same quarry, each and every tile/slab produced may have differing characteristics. Best practice solutions should always be employed to minimise risk of staining and damage to the aesthetic of the tile. Substrate preparation and the use of systems to limit stresses on tile that may be inherently weaker such as Travertine, must be considered. The adhesive system, with products that are sensitive to the colour of the stone and its porosity must be considered. Generally speaking, White, Rapid Setting and products with a low water volume are required and again when sealing perimeters always use neutral curing silicones to avoid “picture framing” of the stone.

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NARROW JOINT

Any joint between tiles of for example 3 mm or less, where grouts containing finer fillers are required.

BAL INSIGHT

With the influx of large format tiling, you should always be aware that with preferred “narrow joints” an installation will undergo heightened stress levels. Effectively, the grout joint (when using flexible grouts) is the point at which stress is relived in the tile installation. You may need to consider stress reliving systems such as an Uncoupling Membrane and always check the minimum permissible grout joint for an installation. For example for floor tiling a grout joint should not be any less than 3mm.

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NATURAL CLAY TILE

A tile manufactured from clays using either the wet (plastic) method or the dry-pressed method, resulting in a tile with a dense body and a distinctive, slightly textured appearance.

BAL INSIGHT

Natural clay tiles can be very porous. In days gone by, pre-soaking the tiles in water to prevent quick absorption of the adhesives was and still may be required prior to installing. Applying grout can also be an issue for the same reason, sealing the tiles fully (prior to installation) or even temporarily for the grouting process is something that should be considered, to prevent staining of the tile itself and subsequent over washing of the grout.

N

NON-VITREOUS

Wall and floor tiles are considered non-vitreous when water absorption exceeds 7%.

BAL INSIGHT

It is difficult for any tile installer to fully know the absorption rate of any tile and on occasion even know what type of tile is being installed. A simple on-site test of immersing a tile in water and observe the water i.e. does the body of the tile absorb the water and darken? Or does the water “bead” and simply roll off the surface? Ultimately a tile should not be installed in any area unless fit for purpose and suitable for the installation, to avoid damage to the tiles, people and of course costly repairs.

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NOGGINS

Short timber struts, used between joists to strengthen or stiffen a timber base before tiling.

BAL INSIGHT

Generally speaking when under-taking a tile installation on a timber floor, the very first thing that fixers consider is to over board the floor with extra layers of Ply Wood or preferably Backer Boards. Be very aware that the information from the industry refers to “Minimum” requirements such as a minimum of a 15mm WBP Plywood overlay for existing floors. On many occasions these minimum requirements are not sufficient and work to the structure of the subfloor may be required, i.e. repairs to the joists and the addition of extra supports in “noggins”. Noggings ensure that the joints are not acting independently, but as a one structure and one that will significantly improve the stability of a subfloor and increase the success of any tile installation on a suspended floor.

N

NOTCHED TROWEL

A trowel of either serrated or toothed design, with square, trapezoidal or round notches available in various sizes. It is used for the consistent application of a gauged amount of adhesive in ridges of a specific thickness and cross-section. The right tooth size and depth must be used to ensure the correct thickness of adhesive, as specified by the manufacturer. Notched trowels are used in applying all types of tiling adhesive.

BAL INSIGHT

The notches on a trowel, serve to give regular bed depth to the adhesive being applied to the given substrate. This bed depth is appropriate to the tile and substrate conditions, not the type of substrate i.e. wall trowel or floor trowel.

The notched perform a function in allowing air to be expelled once the tile depressed the adhesive, which creates a natural vacuum. This means it is paramount that when applying adhesive, it is done so in the same direction, consistently, so as to avoid air lock and difficulty installing and bedding the tile.

Chose the trowel with consideration of the tile and always check frequently as to the bedding on the tile. If the required coverage is not achieved, then using a trowel with a different profile e.g. round notched or square notched or use a larger notches if required. Like wise when installing smaller formats such as mosaic sheets, consider using smaller trowels such a 4mm trowel, this will avoid unnecessary mess in the joints and improve on the finish of the tile.

N

NVQ

National Vocational Qualifications recognise competence in a variety of work-related skills, with more than 1,300 occupations covered. An NVQ demonstrates that the holder has the ability to do a particular job. By 2010, a fixer wanting to work on a construction site will need to hold a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card, which will require the achievement of NVQ Level 2 in Wall and Floor Tiling.

There are no formal entry requirements to NVQs, which are earned through assessment and, where necessary, training. A qualified assessor will test a fixer's knowledge and ability across a number of areas, ranging from general workplace safety, through materials handling and surface preparation, to tile fixing. The fastest route to a Level 2 tiling NVQ is through Experienced Worker Practical Assessment (EWPA), in which fixers with at least five years of checkable experience can be assessed on-site during two to three days. Others could qualify through the On-Site Assessment and Training (OSAT) route, probably involving either refresher training or short courses in particular areas. Even the most experienced of fixers could be in need of training to meet NVQ standards if they have specialised in a particular area. A fixer who has mainly or entirely worked on floors, for example, would probably benefit from reviewing wall fixing skills.

For both the EWPA and OSAT routes to qualification, government help with the costs is available through grants from the Construction Industry Training Board. Less experienced fixers will certainly need some degree of training before reaching NVQ levels of ability. Before undertaking any tiling training, a fixer should check the credentials of the prospective trainer. The best training centres will be those which are also accredited to carry out NVQ assessments.

BAL INSIGHT

BAL has supported the industry for many, many years in terms of providing industry links to the colleges that train tilers and also by providing training for those who would wish to gain "formal" qualifications at our Head Quarters in Stoke on Trent. As well as NVQ's you can also train on specific industry techniques such as installing tiles to Anhydrite Screeds. Not always are specific installations catered for within the NVQ qualifications, but with regular courses available and our Training & Technical Team on hand, you can always stay on top of your trade.