Episode 76: All About Tiles - Bathroom Design Essentials

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Welcome to episode seven of the Bathroom Design Essential season of Your Forever Home, the podcast. It's a, a fabulous episode, this one. It's all about tiles, and I had great pleasure in chatting with Richard Earp from Earp Brothers, who are amazing tile specialists who are all over Australia. So in this episode, we actually go through...

Richard's just got such an amazing amount of knowledge and he's so passionate about tiles. So we actually go through the different types of tiles and how you can actually really tell the difference between a poor quality tile and a good quality tile, and also why it's worth spending the money getting a good quality tile.

Now, obviously, as with everything that's on this podcast, we are talking about forever homes, and so it is really important to make sure that the quality of your tiles is meeting the expectation of what you need out of your forever home specifications. And so I think you'll find this episode really helpful.

Richard and I actually were in Spain together at the Porcelanosa factory, and that is one of the core brands that Earp Brothers actually stock. I'm a big believer in those tiles. Not only have I seen the factory, and they're one of the leading manufacturers in the world on quality tiles, but I've actually specified them.

I've got them in my own house, and they are just absolutely outstanding. So you'll hear about those, and it was lovely to touch base with Richard, which you'll no doubt hear in this episode. But just to give you just a- an introduction on Richard, he's been working at Earp Brothers and, his surname is Earp, so he's part of the Earp Brother families.

But he was working in in the factory Or in the in, in the business, I should say since he was 13. He's been working in sampling and packing and merchandising and then sales, and it's been part of his whole life since then. And I have to say that tiles are definitely in his blood.

So he actually started in the business in a full-time capacity in 1987 working in the warehouse, moving into a marketing role shortly thereafter, and he found the business of ceramic tile to be of great interest. He's visited many manufacturing plants all over the world, and as he states in the podcast, he was one of the first to actually visit China in 1998.

One of the first Australians in the industry to actually have a look at the the Asian manufacturing process of tiles. And I think that's what really highlighted for him what some of the differences were in the manufacturing processes. That's when they really decided to focus on the quality and environmental responsible manufacturers, and hence why the strong link with Porcelanosa at the time.

He also talks about the Green Tag certification. As you all know, sustainability and energy efficiency are a big core value of mine. So listening to Richard, as you'll hear in just a moment, and about his passion around sustainability and making really wise choices in terms of the materials that you're choosing for your home is also really enlightening.

So I, with no further ado, I will let you hear and get stuck into this current episode. And I really hope that you enjoy it, and I have absolutely no doubt that you'll walk away from this particular episode really understanding why it's so worth spending the money and getting a good quality tile, and not all porcelain tiles are the same.

With all further ado, All About Tiles is up now. Thank you So Richard, welcome and thank you so much for joining me today in the Your Forever Home podcast on this very special edition of talking about tiles. All about tiles. And for those of you who listened to the intro on Richard he is such a passionate man about tiles.

He's lived and breathed it for so much, a big part of his life, and now he's getting into gin and doing all sorts of different things, but tiles is still something that Richard lives and breathes. So thanks so much for joining me today, Richard. I can't wait to hear what you've got to say. I've heard you speak so many times about tiles, and if you think tiles is boring, once you listen to Richard you'll realize that it's really not a boring topic at all.

So thank you, Richard. Thanks for having us, Frances. It's really exciting. You're welcome. Because this whole podcast edition is all around design essentials for bathrooms, and one of the key components in any bathrooms is this element of tiles. And there are just so many different things with regards to tiles that I know my listeners get really confused about in terms of what the differences are, how do I know what I'm gonna choose, without even thinking about the colors and the shapes and all those sorts of things.

So that's just one, I feel, one minutia, one such a small component of choosing a tile. So the first thing I just wanted to chat to you about, or ask you I should say, is the different types of tiles to consider. There's not just porcelain or ceramic, but can you just run through the different types of tiles that there are, the what sort of materials that they come in?

Yeah, and there's it's a history that goes back thousands of years. And if we go back to the Roman days, we still go back and we can see an enormous amount of history in relation to the way that ceramics have been used throughout our lives. When we actually start to identify what ceramics are they're broken down into parts so that we can actually identify their best purpose.

So if we actually look at ceramics, it's a general term used for firing earth and water, and we come up with a product, and that can be anything from dentures to electrical, material, to cupware, plateware, sanitary ware. But we generally know ceramics or tiles in our homes for wall and floor use, and that can be inside or outside.

And because there are so many diverse uses of ceramic, we need to find the highest and best use for each of the different materials for their best purpose. So if I was to consider to break down ceramics, we look at they're actually classified by water absorption. So if we look at a ceramic, it means that the material has moisture absorption of more than 3%.

Now, we go into gres tiles. Gres tiles have moisture absorption of between 3% and .5%. And then if we look at vitrified, or sorry, fully vitrified tiles, we go into porcelain material. So porcelain tiles are basically very low absorption products, and they are therefore able to be used in inside, outside, wall, and floor.

Where we have a material that has a higher moisture absorption 10%, if we put those on the floor, they're not very dense. So there's lots of air particles between each of the little piece of raw materials that they press together Now those materials, because they have high moisture absorption, it generally means if we drop something on them they'll crack, break or chip.

So ceramics or wall tiles can be used on walls, but porcelain tiles or low-absorption materials can be used on floors. That's, I think that's a really interesting point, Richard, because it's interesting that you're talking about ceramics overall rather than just a ceramic tile versus a porcelain tile.

So the umbrella is the ceramics. But when you're thinking about ... I see sometimes clients will come to me and they've, they're showing me a ceramic tile, as in a ceramic-made tile that they want to use on the floor. So understanding what you're saying now, the water absorption, not only is it going to be brittle and it cracks very easily, but the water absorption is too high to have on the floor.

Yeah. So the f- the, the moisture absorption basically gives us an indication of what type of material the factories are manufacturing. And they make wall tiles specific for walls. And they do that because you can get higher decorative component to it, you can use, more standard adhesives.

They're lesser embodied energy, so we don't need as much energy to actually produce them. And most importantly, they're really easy to drill into. So when we're putting our soap fittings or our towel rails or our vanities or our sanitary ware or our shower rails, they actually go in the drill bits go into them really easily, and we can attach things to the bathrooms very easily.

They, we don't need to have them hard-wearing because we're not walking on them. Yeah, exactly. But does that mean you can't have a porcelain tile on the wall? 'Cause I know someone's gonna ask that question. Yeah, they always do. And, the idea of having the same material on the floor as we do on the wall is a great appeal.

But many of the better manufacturers actually have a matching wall tile that goes with their material. We can use porcelain tiles in the bathroom walls, and people do it all the time. Yeah. In fact, there's a great use for porcelain on walls, and that's outside. When we can't use wall tiles because the moisture absorption, they expand and contract too much.

Yeah. And what we'll generally find with a ceramic is we'll find that the material the glaze is a different thermal expansion and contraction rate than the base. So the biscuit, which we glaze is the absorbent part. The glaze is like a glass, so it's quite rigid. So we put them outside and the bisque gets wet, then it expands, and then we get what we call crazing or cracking in the glaze.

So they're generally not accepted outside. But porcelain we can use on the wall outside all the time, yeah. Yeah. Okay. And then just because it's such a, a- it's a product that's available at the moment, very popular at the moment, terracotta. So how is that produced in a different way? I've actually got a piece right here just by chance.

Oh, there you go. Piece of terracotta. That's a bijou mat. That's a bijou mat. That's what the Moroccans make. Yeah. So terracottas, they can be formed a number of ways. They can be extruded, they can be just molded. So these products here effectively what they are is they've got a wooden mold and it's that shape, and they basically get some clay and they press it into the floor, into the wooden mold, and they lift the wooden mold up and we end up with that shape.

So you can make lots of different shapes. They're also made by extrusion where we actually push it through a squared, a, a rectangular die. So it actually gets pushed through the die and they cut it so you will end up with lots of, square pieces. Yeah. Terracotta's really popular. It is generally, terracotta is a, a very high absorption material.

They generally do get sealed. We do get very hard-wearing terracottas called clinker, and those clinker tiles are what they call stoneware or earthenware. And they're very low absorption, they're very hard. But we don't get those typical beautiful flamed colors that we get in our terracotta that people love.

So terracotta's generally very high absorption and generally require sealing. Yeah. Okay. So that would be then very similar to a cement-type tile. Yeah. Caustic tiles where you need to seal them.

Because I know that- Yeah ... some of those have some really beautiful designs, and then people get turned off by that because they know that they have to seal them.

So are there seal- sealants that you're familiar with on the market that you could suggest that then would not need to be done on such, such a frequent basis? 'Cause I know with marbles, for example, for bench tops, there are now amazing sealants that you can use that are really something that you don't need to do every 12 months.

Is that applicable then also to floors? Is there products available that means you don't have all this m- super maintenance for sealing floors? Yeah, look, our sealers are actually designed to breathe. Stones, terracottas, cements, they all breathe. And the idea is if we put, There's different types of sealers, so there's topical sealers, and a topical sealer will sit on top of the material, like we use a varnish on timber.

Like Scotchgard. And they basically impregnate the surface- Yeah, so you can't get anything inside. Yeah. When we get penetrating sealers, they actually penetrate in the surface, and they actually stain the surface with a clear material. Now, the problem with penetrating sealers is they're not designed, none of them are designed to be a bulletproof sol- silver bullet solution.

The idea of a penetrating sealer is they actually enable moisture transmission to actually come back up through the product, as well as maintaining it and stopping moisture getting into the surface. Yeah. All right? The idea is it makes it a maintainable surface. So if you spill red wine, you still have to remove that red wine from the surface quite quickly, otherwise the stain will penetrate into the surface, whether it be stone, whether it be terracotta, whether it be a cement material.

It just makes it more manageable. Yeah. Okay. So what are the ma- we've talked about this a little bit, but the main differences and how they vary in p- performance. So you've talked about the absorption and the fact that a porcelain is more durable. And I know we've talked in the past, particularly when I was overseas in Spain at the Porcelanosa factory with you.

We're talking about the different types of porcelains and the actual layers on top, and how that can actually wear off. And so just talk, if you can just walk through some of the performance differences, even when you're looking at porcelain and porcelain. I know that this will then cross over into quality as well.

I think that's a really interesting point- there's- And people get really confused that it- it's not all the same. They do. They do. And I think they get confused because there's a couple of terms that people use. The first one is porcelain. Yeah. And the second one is vitrified. So I mentioned earlier ceramic, and then I mentioned vitrified, and I mentioned those water absorption categories.

So a gres tile or a vitrified tile is a material that has moisture absorption of half to s- half a percent to 3%. Now, that is not fully vitrified. When we go to a fully vitreous mass, something that actually fully melts into one- ... singular piece, we're talking about a fully vitrified material, is porcelain.

So vitrified is not porcelain. So if someone says, "I'm gonna use a vitrified tile," that means it's not porcelain. It is actually a gres or a stoneware. It can be another, another material. So when we go into porcelain, it has to have half a percent moisture or less. So porcelain by name is fully is a name given to an ultra-low absorption material.

So we're talking about material with lower than half a percent moisture. When we get to technical porcelain, we start talking about material that has .1% moisture or below. Now, technical porcelain is generally used in, high-performance areas like airports or high-frequency areas, maybe shopping centers Melbourne Exhibition Center, those types of environments.

The- what we like to see is the understanding between the different types of porcelain. So we get to glazed porcelain, we get to a full-body porcelain, we get to double charge porcelain, triple charge porcelain, polished porcelain. There's so many varieties of porcelain, but it means all those materials have an ultra-low absorption, which means we can use them inside and outside.

Yeah. Now, there are different layers or different levels of quality when we go to porcelain as well. So a lot of people go to a shop and they say I want one of those really hard-wearing porcelain tiles," and they'll get, shown some polished porcelain, they'll get shown some glazed porcelain, and they'll get shown a variety of different sort of technologies.

But the one most important thing to understand about porcelain tiles is they all vary in quality. Now, the quality variances really come in their accuracy, in their surface flatness. So when we buy the- these very large tiles today, these 600 by 600 or 600 by 1200, or now we're talking about 2.4 meters by 1.2 square meter tiles.

Putting those on the floor, you need to make sure they're exceptionally accurate in their surface flatness. So when you join them together, you don't end up with large lips between one tile and the other. Now, the other big important factor to consider when we talk about porcelain material and quality is the design and the surface.

So the design of a lot of really good quality porcelain materials, these guys know how to use the equipment better than others. They've got computers that actually generate messages that are applied in design, inkjet design to the surface of the material in a more articular way, representing its purest form in a much better way.

So it replicates its purest design as... in better ways than a cheaper one would. So we can spend a lot of money doing a renovation of a house, and then we find that we've got something you look at and you go that's not quite as white or as... not quite as w- doesn't replicate timber as well as I would've liked."

So some people, they can interpret the material and the design much better than others, and that's the big difference in the, the quality difference between most of the porcelains. One of the other ma- It almost reminds me, sorry for interjecting. No. It almost reminds me of when you're looking at images, a poor quality image and a really good quality image, that- Yeah

You might think, oh, they're like for but it's only when you... it's the detail that really gets missed out on a really poor quality image versus high. So it's the resolution is just not as great. Sure. The fineness, and I suppose, yeah, if you're looking at- Oh, yeah.

That's about right. But it's only when you do it en masse that you think, "Yeah, that's just not cutting it anymore." Yeah, I think the, when you talk about the resolution of the print, it's very important. But the other important point for these guys to make a good quality material is they have got color separation rooms for their glazes.

So a well-made porcelain will use up to 100 different color separations, whereas a standard type of material you buy at a t- typical tile shop might have five. Yeah. And when you get that tile that's only got five color separations, and you take it to the Dulux color wall at Bunnings, you'll find there's only a couple of colors on the paint wall that work with it.

Yeah. Whereas you get these tiles, they look almost monochromatic in color. But when you go to a Dulux color wall, you'll actually find hundreds of colors that actually work with that material. So that is really important in the end job because you've got furniture, and you've got linen wear. You've got kitchens- Yeah

and competing items in design in those rooms, and they still need to work with it. So a really well-designed porcelain material will also have a really good layers of color in it. It's interesting that you say that in regards to the resolution or the the color separation. You know that I'm a massive fan of timber tiles, and I never go anywhere else but Porcelain Anosa.

But it's just so interesting to have watched the evolution and, I've got it in my house, and mine's the poor cousin now compared to what they're doing now, and it still looks incredible. But I... it's probably one of the most frequent questions I get asked is, "Oh why would I spend more on the timber tile than, going and getting, a cheaper version?"

And it... If you're looking at it, the resolution is so good, and the digital imagery is so intense that you have to touch it to understand that it's not real. And also the number of impressions, and I know that's what I'm talking to my clients about. Instead of having 36 different tiles, you're gonna have six.

And over a massive span of, a large house, you're going to see that same tile time and time again. But also the knots and everything else, it's just so lifelike. It's just incredible, the third generation of the the timber tile that's come out. So I suppose that's where what you're talking about with regards to the number of colors being used is gonna make such a big difference to those, particularly the timber tiles where you're mimicking another product.

Yeah. The Starwood collection of timber tile is a completely different level. Yeah. It's a n- it's a, it's another playing field of manufacturing. What they've done is they've actually created a mold where they've etched into the mold all the knots- ... and all the grains. So it's not one-dimensional.

So in a light reflection, you actually see the knots, and you see the grain. Now- Yeah ... to actually get... Then when it goes down a production line, to be able to print on top of the knot- In different colours. The exact replica of what goes on the timber. It's just outstanding. Yeah, it is. It is just se- a- as soon as I show people, though, they can really see the difference.

Yeah. So I remember you also mentioning, Yeah ... about, you were talking about glazes before. But that with the cheaper version of porcelain tiles, we're talking about colour, we're talking about the production, we're talking about just how they're producing the tile. But in the more cost-effective tiles, not the higher-end quality- Right

isn't it that the glaze ends up wearing off? So you think, "Oh, yeah I've really want to... i've ticked a few boxes here. I've got a cheaper tile. It almost looks the same as this other one." But actually, that image is going to effectively wear off over time. Is that right? Yeah, so the big problem with cheaper porcelains is they cut corners.

Yeah. You just can't make a tile for $30 or $40- Yeah ... and expect it to do what tiles do in high-performance areas. So we went to porcelain tile because it was a harder material. We went away from gres tiles or tiles from previous generations. Because when people drop things on them, they could see underneath the glaze.

They could see the red bisque or the white bisque. Porcelain tiles today can be made very, very cheaply, and they make them very cheaply by running them through the kilns very quickly. There's less processing of the raw materials. What we find is the cheaper porcelains, they use a lot of glass. So the stuff that we find in our glass, this stuff, is used as a fluxing agent to actually incorporate with the ball clays, and the porcelain clays, and the kaolins.

And the more fluxing agents they use, what they're doing is they're binding all the molecules together with a material that actually fires very low. So it binds. It becomes fully vitreous. It becomes porcelain. But what happens to glass when you put it on the floor? It chips, it breaks, it cracks, it snaps.

So a high quality material, we find that we don't use many fluxing agents, and we can bounce pool balls off them all day, and it won't affect them. Yeah. And some of these porcelain tiles we're talking about today, we're happy for you to put in your pool room, play pool on. Let the kids throw the pool balls at each other.

They actually do not affect the tiles because the raw material metrics and the firing cycle life is a lot longer. The press is a lot higher technology, and the raw materials they use are extracted and they're a performance material when you put them all together, and they last the test of time.

Not just in performance as in how we wear, but in the design. Yeah. And I think, because we're talking, the people out there listening to this are all... they're interested in their forever home, this house that they're gonna be in for 10-plus years. It's not a house to flip. So these sorts of things are really important because replacing and redoing all the tiling, it's not a cheap exercise in terms of

having to retrofit it. It's painful. It's something that really needs to be looked at to make sure that you don't have to go through that tiresome process- just because you've got a, a, a tile that's really not performing as well as it should. If we consider the cost of all those things- Correct ... that we've just taken into account. We've got builders and tilers and glues and- Yeah ... and we've deliveries, and we get all this material there, and we go and install it.

Yeah. And okay, even if we're flipping a home, the person that is actually gonna be looking at the home, they'll see it. It's pretty obvious Oh, it i- it is very obvious. Yeah. Yes, it's very obvious. Yeah. Then so- size of tiles. I know we were talking about this offline in terms of they are an important consideration when choosing tiles.

And as you were saying before, we're now getting tiles, big format tiles are becoming more and more popular, not just your 9 by 600s, as in, I should stop saying 9 by 6, 900 millimeters by 600 millimeters. But you, like you were talking about before, porcelain sheets. And then you go down to intricate little mosaic- mosaics that are on sheets as well, but they're 30 centimeters by 30 centimeters.

So total ends of the spectrum. So can you walk through how the size of tile impacts your selection i- in, yeah, how it impacts your selections and what you need to consider? Yeah, look, I think it it's a great point because if we actually look at some of these big tiles, 1200 by 1200, I've been in the showroom the last couple of weeks, and people are just really loving the idea of these big 1200 by 1200 tiles.

I've actually been to a job just lately where they used 1200 by 1200 floor tiles in their bathrooms, and the bathroom looks amazing. It's just, the job the tiler did was fabulous. But when you, spatial awareness, when we look at a room, sometimes 1200 by 1200 tiles may not work. Yeah, okay.

Sometimes 800 by 800 may be a better fit. Yeah. But 600 by 600 tiles, 20 years ago- Yeah ... were very avant-garde. They were the latest thing. But now we're talking about, I think that 800 by 800 tiles we start talking about cost increases to install. They are certainly more expensive to buy.

It's not a, it's not a, it's not a very large premium 10, 20, 30% depending on the material. But when we go to install it, there is a large cost difference to lay those 1,200 by 1,200 or 800 by 800 tile materials on the floor. You mentioned slabs. The biggest mover and shaker that we're seeing is people using sheets of porcelain on their walls.

Some people, on the floors. So not just 2.4, but we're talking about 2.7 3.2-meter sheets, 1.2 meters wide. So they love the idea of doing their bathrooms in these materials. But buy beware, they are a very specialist material to have installed. So we need very specialist people to do it, and those people will charge a lot more than just that 20, 30% premium.

My understanding is a sheet is about $800 to $900 to install. Wow, okay. Like a... It's about 100 grand. And the look is, it's so seamless, and it looks spectacular. You don't have the grout on it.

Grout seems to be this, this biggest fear with consumers- ... is saying God, I don't want too much grout."

And we'll talk about that separately. But the sheets do create a spectacular, sophisticated look. But there's also the handling in terms of getting it delivered. Yeah. When they're very thin, your three six mil sheets of porcelain, do they cut that on site? My understanding is it needs to be cut off site, brought to site.

So there's a lot more handling, which is obviously increasing, like you're saying, the costs of actually getting that installed. It's not just the tiler there on the day. There's all this other stuff that needs to be done, too. Yeah, there are a number of points there. First one being the delivery of these materials is a bit more specific.

It's not a pallet. It's a really long pallet. Yeah. Not the sort of thing you can just rip down the driveway. So we need to be mindful and patient, and we need to work around- And the engineering of how to get that into the home and get those deliveries done. Generally, when we're talking about wall and floor tiling, yes, those big sheets are perfectly able to be delivered at home and cut on site.

When we talk about bench tops so a kitchen bench top in 12 mil material it does have to be fabricated off site. We do need to get that done by machines in specialist factories. But when we g- actually take the tiles onto site, they're cut on site. And I think you'll find that the vast majority of tilers today who lay these large tiles, they know the intricacies around installing them.

We've moved away a lot from the three mil. Most of the wall tiling we're doing with these sheets is in six mil. Yeah. And if we're going to floors, a lot of people are actually using nine mil. And a reason being six mil material are really good quality material you can use on the floor. But it just gives us that little bit of comfort knowing that it's nine mil thick.

So it's really strong. Yeah. They don't put it on bench tops for nothing. It's gotta be strong. Oh, it's fantastic. I mean- Yeah ... it's gonna get some heavy beating, like it will be on a floor. But, Yeah. I think the, the one, one thing about the sheet is when you get a 2.4-meter sheet of the material and you install it on a wall, it enables the pattern or the design to flow all the way through.

So you'll see the marble over a whole wall just come down from wall, from ceiling to floor, and it just it makes the stone look so much more real- Yeah ... than just a typical tile. Most of these tiles that we're buying today are rectified, so we don't need a lot of grout jointing.

I think it's still people are a bit scared of not putting grout joints in. But if we look at a standard bathroom wall, we actually don't need a lot of a lot of jointing. No. We don't have walls that break or crack in the middle. What we need to make sure we do is at all perimeter junctions, that we're siliconing around the edge.

So our roof line- The drops in the corner and along the floor. As long as we use silicon in those joints, we can close the joints right up. We only need maybe a millimeter. So we're finding less and less

people allowing for three mil or four mil grout joints. They're actually using 1.5 mil grout joints or one mil joints.

And when it comes to sheets and other materials, we're actually finding a lot of people are actually laying it right next to each other not having any joint at all. Oh, that's fan- yeah, that's amazing. And that, that really is that seamless look. And I know, you're talking about the stone. I know that I've seen the big sheets in a tutulak finish, which is the Moroccan Venetian style plaster, which is one of my favorite finishes.

But that's incredibly specialized to actually get done, so these sheets that mimic it just look amazing, particularly when you have such a minimal join. But just to clarify then rectify, because I know I get asked this a lot. So for the listeners, rectified is when the tile is it's perfectly straight rather than...

And that's when you can afford to have a grout line that is 1.5, two mil. I would never specify anything over two mil. Three and four it's just starting to look- It is ... messy. It just doesn't look right. It doesn't look very professional. But you need to have a rectified tile to be able to get away with one and a half, and that's why they have the bigger grout three or four mil when the tiles are not rectified, 'cause they've got to allow for the imperfection in the tile that it n- it may not necessarily be straight.

And I think then that would come to another reason why you're buying the higher quality tile, Richard, because they are rectified. And so you'll get a premium product that allows you to have a premium finish because the grout is not going to be as thick. Yeah. I think when you get those really good quality tiles, it's not just rectified.

They ease the edge. Yeah. So on the very edge of that tile, they just chamfer off just a little bit of the right angle. So- Yeah ... when they join, it's just, it's a beautiful soft- ... joint when the material comes together. Yeah. A lot of the cheaper materials, they don't do that, and what you'll find is that there's, it's very hard to get those, those bumps and lumps between the tiles out of the tiling job.

Yeah. So we find a lot of people buy cheaper porcelain or rectified materials. They go and install it on their walls, and they turn to the tiler and say, "Hey, that doesn't look like the brochure I looked at." And the reason it doesn't look like the brochure they looked at is because they're buying materials that are still within international standards, that when we talk about international standards, they were written 50, 60 years ago, and we're talking about anything up to half a millimeter variance from corner to corner.

And if we're talking about a 1.2 meter sheet- We can be talking 12, 13, 14 millimeters out- ... and it can still be within our international tolerances. So very important point. Firstly, good quality tiles will be more accurate and easier to install. Most important to get the installation instructions from the provider.

Do not offset 50/50 rectified tiles where possible, because where we go and actually we stagger the materials so they're offset- Yeah ... and when we do this, tiles are actually designed to be bowed.

They actually are bowed from the center back to each of the edges. So they're actually convex. And the idea being all the edges will then align.

If they don't design it to be convex, it's exceptionally difficult to get it dead flat. But otherwise we end up with concave, and that's where we end up with a problem. So- And therefore you run your hands down a wall that's been tiled, and it just, not only when the sun hits it, it looks terrible.

You can see every- Every bit ... bit of the tile that's not meeting. But, and that looks terrible, but just when you run your hand down it's just awful. And I do it a lot, and you can just say, "Yep, it's just a shocking job." A- and more often than not. So there's another thing they use in tiling today, which has been an innovation over the last 10 years, which is clips.

Yeah. So tilers, rather than using spacers, should be using clips. And if they use clips, then what it does is it removes most of the interpretation of what's a good job and a bad job. Rather than a tiler saying, "Oh, I tried my best and they look really good. They're really shit tiles." Sorry.

They're not such great tiles. The point is, when we use clips, we're actually taking that interpretation out, and we end up- Yeah ... with really accurately laid tiles. And the clips don't cost anymore. But you still get that though, because with a clip, can you still get that flush surface with a a really cheap tile?

'Cause I think you'd really struggle, especially when you're saying they're convex, I think you'd really struggle even with a clip which is designed to make the tiles flush at any point. I think that would still be quite challenging. It'd be very interesting to ask the supplier for a data sheet- ... or an installation guide on how to lay those tiles.

Yeah. Because ultimately, if they don't provide one of those, it makes for a very difficult recourse of action to go back to the supplier and say, "Hey, these tiles aren't, what I wanted. They're not great." So if you actually ask for an installation guide all suppliers should be able to provide you something that actually accurately represents how the tile should be installed from the manufacturing process.

Yeah. Otherwise, you'll find everyone taking their own idea of how it's installed, and you'll always end up with a problem. And I think that's something else too, that if it's coming from a really good manufacturer, they would just have that as part of their normal procedure, where if you're, getting a tile that e- it doesn't have any installation procedures, that would be a red flag for me that, oh, hang on a minute, do they really care enough- It's-

the product that they've got. So I think that's a really good, ask for that, and if they don't have it, it's probably a dodgy product. Yeah it's a standard document that should be in inserted in every job, as should be a sealing guide if materials need to be sealed. Yeah. So whether it be terrazzo, whether it be concrete, whether it be terracotta, whether it be stone, marble, whatever it is, we need to make sure that all the guides are in place.

And that also includes things such as cleaning guides. So when we talk about a lot of these materials that need to be sealed, what we find is some people may not clean their own bathroom. Some people may have someone help them and assist them in their home. How does that person know what to do? Yeah. And sometimes the message doesn't get fed down the road, and that person may have cleaned something similar in another home before, to find they get a very different result.

So it's really important we give everyone a fair chance in the process, and everyone has the same information to ens- ensure that the whole job goes according to plan. That's a really good point about the cleaning. It wasn't even on our on our notes to talk about, but it is, because, even with timber floors, you can use products on there that just totally strips what should be.

That's the same with tiles. So the product, particularly if it, yeah, the product can, the cleaning product can actually really damage that surface. So that's a really good point. And again, if you're buying a good quality tile, it'll automatically come with that sort of information. Absolutely. Now I really wanted, 'cause this is obviously very close to my heart, is all the sustainability choices that are available, and I know that Earp has been so passionate about this and you've been passionate about this for a long time as well from a sustainability perspective.

So in terms of sustainability choices, and if someone is, and I have a lot of clients that are very passionate about choosing sustainable materials for their home, what should they be looking for in a tile that is going to give them a really good sustainable choice? Frances, it's music to my ears to think that people are finally coming round.

Oh, it's taken a long time. No matter what your, no matter what your political persuasion- Yes ... this is not anything to do with politics. This is the exact story when we're sitting in front of 60 Minutes and we're watching all the orangutans getting kicked out of the forest. The, the whole point here is all we're doing is minimizing the use of raw materials on our planet.

Yeah. All we're doing is making sure we understand what's in the raw materials that come home. I was one of the first Australians to go through China and look at materials for procurement to bring into Australia. It didn't align with our mentality. We were one of the few companies that didn't go in and buy masses of material from lower Asia, not just China.

There were other countries we're manufacturing that we didn't think that was a great idea. It wasn't... It didn't look right. It wasn't sustainable. So Earp Brothers in 2004 joined the Green Building Council when it first established, and we were the first company to go through product certification.

There are two certification systems that we use. We use Global Green Tag through EcoSpecifier, and we also use Product Declare, which comes from the Living Building Challenge. Now, both these certifications are the most trustworthy and robust- processes to actually go through auditing not just the factory, where the quarries come, where the quarries come into play- what oils they use in the quarry machinery. Where does the oil go at end of life? What happens to the quarry at end of life? Where does the cardboard come from? What sort of ink goes on the cardboard? Materials

minimalization when it comes to packaging. Cogeneration power, so we actually take all the heat out of the kiln and we turn it into energy to fire the lighting and the strapping machines.

We talk about water reticulation. We don't actually use any of the natural water f- forms. We capture it all on site and it's all recycled. When we talk about the Paris Agreement, which will be one of the most forthright issues when it comes to the next election, we're willing to vote governments in and out on this process- on this topic. But when it actually comes to buying materials and living the walk, we don't even consider it. The boxes come with 300 by 100 gloss white written on the side of the box, and we go and get our bargain, and we go and install it on the job with no consideration of the manufacturing processes, which is just...

It doesn't make any sense. Now what's transpired through the declare label and that green tag certification process is how many products... Sorry, are you still there? I'm here. How many of the products ... how many of the products actually have VOCs in them? We're living in our home environment in toxic air.

And it's... if we actually have people come in and do some, Actually analyze the materials that we've chosen over the last 20 years, and actually look at what's in them, it's terrifying. No one ever went and went into these cheaper manufacturing countries and said, "Oh, what are you making these raw materials with?

What's in that vinyl? What's in that PVC?" Formaldehyde. "What's in that fabric? What's in that sealer?" Formaldehyde. "What's in that..." And it's horrendous. Yeah. So the brickwork site that Fraser Properties did down in Burwood, we were involved with Fraser Properties, and we had all our certifications done.

It took them 18 months to actually have enough materials to build that center. And although it being a world first, the point was that there was almost no auditing done on manufactured goods in construction in Australia. People were buying things with no idea what was in it. It was just madness. So through this process- What-

what it's done is it's enabled us to give people trusted, good advice- ... that's transparent, that we now know is now what we consider to be world's best practice. We've already been through the audits. Everything in those audits makes it one of the most trusted brands in the world. So that's when you're referring to Porcelanosa?

Yes. Yeah. So if you Google porcelanosa.com.,dot O- .com there are some videos there- Yeah ... and they actually talk people through what they do. Now- ... Porcelanosa is regarded as one of the 30 most respected companies on the planet, audited by PricewaterhouseCoopers And as a tile manufacturer in Spain, people turn around and go, "How could that be when there's really big organizations?"

It's about what they do as a corporation. Yeah. It's the trust in the brand. And that trust you get in that brand, it's worth multiples of whatever you do. So when you build a house, everything in that

house, you're looking for people that you can trust to make sure that house lasts and things don't fall off and break and chip and have disrepair.

You wanna be able to know that you put things in and you can live in that house for 20, 30, 40, 50 years, and know those materials will perform over that time without any any any contaminations or underperformance, let's say. So if we're looking at, Green Tag is the one that I go to.

Not only is it internationally accredited, I know that there's a lot of sort of Australian accreditations. But there's, it's like organic food. There's just so many different accreditations, and this is the... And Green Tag is really a very well-established international accreditation. So it's certainly when I go to different manufacturers, not for tiles, but all sorts of different other materials I ask about Green Tag.

It's the first thing I ask for. And often they just don't even know what it is- Yeah ... and then I know they're not serious about the sustainability story. That's exactly right. They're not serious. Your suppliers have to, they have to be fair dinkum. They're looking after your best interests.

Yeah. You as a professional are guiding people around the the design world- ... and materials world. And the only way you can do that, Global Green Tag is a holistic- Yeah ... robust system that can be trusted. Yeah. The auditing that they've gone through in their materials review is just it's outstanding.

Yeah. It it's not just the actual manufacturing like you were saying, but it's how they deal with waste. It's a complete full circle. It's the transportation. It's absolutely everything. But if someone's looking for, a high a, a product that is, has got really good sustainable credentials, are they looking at, does it change the type of product they're choosing, i.e.,

changing whether they're choosing porcelain or terracotta? Or does it change do they have to look for Green Tag accredited? What are some of the things, okay, if we can't get a, a Green Tag accreditation, what are some of the things that people can look out for when they're choosing their product, when they're choosing their tiles, that can make them feel a little bit more reassured that they're making a good sustainable decision?

Unless we measure things, we can't manage it. And it's the same in everything we do. Most of our clients are successful people in in, in their own fields. But, measurement is able to be managed. You gotta- That makes sense ... measure to manage. And the whole idea of these verification systems are w- firstly, we can't keep up with all the codes that are going on.

No. The changes that are taking place are phenomenal. Even architects and designers struggle to keep up with all of them. You know that's all been addressed through this certification process. All right. So basically- So- ... if you want sustainable, you go Greentag it's not just a sustainability platform.

We're actually talking about materials that actually w- we're talking about materials that have a life cycle assessment. Yeah. So when we talk about, manufacturing is one thing. How do we know how

long that material is gonna last- ... for what we paid? So these life cycle assessment processes, w- the extra measurement that we've gone to actually understand the performance of the material in its service life- Yeah

is pretty important. So if someone hasn't done that measurement, how do you know what they're selling you? How do you know what you're buying? This is all about getting transparency so you can make an informed decision. Yeah. And if they say, "Oh..." The amount of greenwash out there is just terrifying.

You walk into a shop and, "Oh, yeah, we're green, and we're this, and we're sustainable." Oh, look, I completely- And, it's sustainable and- that's, but that's what I mean ... it's just- it's like the organic phenomena. Everything's organic, but actually it's not organic at all, and it's only unless you get it properly accredited that you know it is.

It's like free-range eggs. Yeah, anyway, I- we're gonna go off on a tangent. Yeah. Look, I'm all very pro Greentag for the reasons that we've talked about. Yeah. So in terms of, and I will ask I don't follow trends. I don't encourage my clients to follow trends, but I will ask you something about that in just a moment.

But firstly, what other tips have you got for the listeners out there in terms of deciding on your tiles or getting a good result at the end? I know I'm really fanatical with my clients that they've got mitered edges. They don't use the tile angles. I think it's a shocking finish on a really beautiful job with beautiful tiles.

I always will specify mitered edges. And the quality's also then down to how good it's been installed by a really good tiler. What other things would you suggest? Oh, we've got internet down again. Yeah. Look, I think the first thing is they've gotta become comfortable, they've gotta be really comfortable and understand who they are, in a way.

Some people drive cars much like myself. I don't really care for cars too much. If it's got a scratch on it, oh, I should look after it a lot better, but I'm probably the last person that should go and have materials that need a lot of maintenance. So I think it's we need to look at ourselves as creatures of habit.

Some people like the idea of stone or terrazzo or concrete or cement or, polished concrete, whatever it is, that the, the point is, if we don't like main- maintaining things- ... and we don't like the idea of actually having to go down that road, then look for materials that don't need those sorts of performances.

You know what I mean? Let's go and find things that are low-maintenance. I think when it comes to homes some people are very comfortable in choosing finishes. And for those who are, it's always a good idea to get a Pinterest board together and go and see and work with your designer or when you're out there doing things.

It's really important to visualize what you want before you start your journey. Oh. Be very accurate in understanding what your budgets are. Yeah. We just find that so many people come in and they really want something. It's okay to stretch the budget and push yourself down to s- push yourself into something that you really want.

But it's really important to keep those budgets realistic. Sometimes we can afford, sometimes we can't. There's always a solution there. Yeah, of course. There's professional help around that can help us get across that, that, that bridge. But it's I think the, the, the two or three most important points for me Make sure we get a Pinterest board.

Be comfortable in understanding the materials that we're choosing and how they may perform. And I think surround yourself with professionals. Because there's a lot of people out there that know someone who owns a tile shop, and there's lots of people that, you know, "Oh, I went to this bloke." You need to find trustworthy companies.

And you need to be guided all the way through the professionals that you use, whether it be design or whether it be tiles. "Oh, I used this tiler, had great success." That's good. But, let's do a little bit of background checking on these people because, it's a very expensive process to go through design or building a home or renovating or using tiles.

Let's do that, that little bit of homework because it'll pay you back in spades. No, I... And that, that is music to my ears because it... your first point is really about, understanding yourself, and that gets down to the functionality and the durability of the product. I don't know how many people I see, they're so focused on the colors and the shapes, they're so focused on the aesthetic, that they really forget about how are they gonna be able to live with this product, what's the impact of living with this product.

And it's, just even today I was talking to a lady, and it was just so focused on aesthetic. And we look at things first from a functionality, durability perspective, and then we look at the sp- the aesthetic. 'Cause it's not gonna work for you. It's bad design anyway, no matter how pretty it looks. That's my view.

Yeah. Yeah. No, it's, So it's just, it's hard work ... I think it's... Yeah it's great to look at the aesthetic only. But a lot of people, they go and put timber or timber floors down. And then they've got three dogs and cats that run across the floor. Yeah. They're just not designed for that.

No, they're not. And the timber tiles they're designed to deal with that. That's why they've been made. I mean- Yeah. That's right. That's why I love them. Give it... Give it a- They won't scratch everything across the floor. It doesn't scratch, so it's awesome. So- ... just after I was, effectively saying, "Oh, it's not all about aesthetics," because of course it is.

What are some of the things that you're seeing? I know what I'm seeing coming through, but, this is a bit of the fun part, what are some of the things that you're seeing as really popular, people are

gravitating to? You talked about big format tiles before. But what are some of the really popular things going on at the moment?

And also what you're seeing, I know you probably didn't go to Spain last year because we're in COVID times, but what are you seeing coming out of Europe now? 'Cause they're the things that excite me the most. I know that we're mi- years behind here. But if I know that it's in Europe now, I know it'll come here in the next three or four years.

Yeah. So what can we look forward to, Richard? What are we gonna see? I think the, the large format material is exceptionally exciting, and the way that we're getting a better quality product, better bang for our buck. Yeah. It's definitely coming through. I think if we look at the des- design, we're looking at the interaction of, there's a lot of drama coming into our spaces.

If we look at natural materials, the Zellige tile is just... It really has been quite a phenomenon the way that people have moved towards the Zellige tile. I think, you know- The Moroccan tiles for the listeners out there- Yeah, the Moroccan, ... I'm fanatical about Moroccan, so I know what the Zellige tile is.

But yeah, it's those beautiful handmade, they've got lots of texture and beautiful glazes. Yeah, it's we wanna go back to the butcher. We wanna go back to the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker, we wanna go back to those origins, the streetscape, the corner store and the bloke that, you know.

There's a lo- there's a lot of resonation about that because there's a lot of distrust that's going on around the world, and I think people wanna they wanna bind onto something. And we've just released the Moroccan tile in an Australian palette and, because the Moroccan tile's great, but when you get a lot of these really strong colors and design- Yeah

they, they don't work in Australia sometimes. They don't. No, they don't. So we've had a bit of fun No, that's really exciting. We're really excited. I've s- Yeah ... i'm crazy about the, the new Moroccan range. But- ... I think that this whole transition to, and I've spoken a lot about it on the podcast in a lot of different aspects, this transition and embracing the organic, and embracing the imperfect, and embracing things that are a lot more natural and organic is really been going on for quite some time.

And I think that it ties in really well with this sustainable story as well, that people are not necess- they're upcycling and they're using things that have got a bit of character to them rather than everything being so perfect. And so the Zellig tiles, and even the handmade British tiles, and the handmade Spanish tiles are all, embracing that.

But then they're in muted tones, so it's not too glaring. In Morocco they are bright blues that we just couldn't cope with here. Yeah. So I think that it's just coming more and more to the fore. I don't actually see this, I'll call it a trend. I don't actually s- I think it, it's evolving more and more as time goes on- I remember what was it?

About 15 years ago when the first subway tiles came through. We introduced subway about 15 years ago, and we saw it as a bit of a coming trend, and it went mad. It went crazy. Yeah. And, the subway then formed into something that was a bit more irregular, and we went to wavy and broken edge Devon-type tile.

And then we and then we moved into the zellige of the Moroccan and the handmade and the Vietnamese and, that organic. And even mixing it with some dramatic stone, now some of these- ... quite bold stones that are being used. So we're seeing, I th- I think we're starting to see the white stones disappear a bit, and we're starting to see some onices and some of these bright sort of dramatic old bank vault stones that used to be around in the '30s and the '40s.

I think s- I think the idea of patterns and sheets of design like big florals and patterns and what have you are certainly coming through. We're starting to see a lot of it, wallpapers and things. But I f- I think that you nailed it, and that is that we'll continue to see trends, but we'll continue right down the middle using- Yeah

the simplest form of those- Yeah ... that don't necessarily date as quickly, and work around that, and use- ... a bit of soft paints and fabrics and what have you, and we end up with a fabulous room. And I just love the way that that the stone design is being used with these soft, really muted white and sort of eucalyptus colors on the walls.

And, then people are using some of these brass tapwares and, almost gun metal type, you know- Yeah ... fixtures and what have you. So it's an exciting space. It's a really exciting space. It is exciting, and I think it's an area, the tiles, w- when people are doing their bathrooms, and obviously that's the focus for today they do get really excited.

But I think that there is a real lack of information about, and hopefully we've really gone through that today or with your awesome knowledge- Really, there is such a difference than just getting the $30 tiles. They feel that it's the same, and it's just so not. And when I'm working really with people that are dealing with forever homes, they're not doing a flip.

Yeah. It's not all just about cosmetic. It really is something that has to last. I think giving them an understanding about what the, the core differences means that they can really go out more confidently and choose something, and go to a really well-known supplier to get good quality products.

Yeah. 'Cause it's not something that's easy to retrofit, is tiling your bathroom. It's easy to change taps. It might be easy to change a shower screen, but to change your tiling is such a pain. Yeah ... so I think it's really good what you've shared today. I was just looking at the showroom floor today actually, and it was 15 years ago.

And the clients were asking, "What's the floor tile?" And I said, "Oh, that's a tile we put down a fair while ago." And they said, "Oh, can you still get it?" And I was like, "There you go. 15 years later-

Yeah ... and people still want to buy it. And I think that really interprets, that really defines what good design is.

And- Agree ... someone who actually manufactures the material, and they articulate it, but they interpret it in a way- ... that has a professionalism- Yeah ... that we don't necessarily need to do ourselves. We can go out there and buy them, and we can look at 10 different products that look very similar.

The, the ones that are interpreted the best are the ones that w- will give us the greatest value. I think it's exactly the same across design, across the entire industry and everything. It's e- that's the absolute definition of good design, I think. Not just in tiles, just design per se.

So that's been great. Richard, was there anything else you wanted to share? Anything else that we've missed that you think, "Oh my goodness me, they need to know about this, they need to know about that"? Anything else? I think just maybe just a little bit on the grout. I think there was just, if I can just quickly touch on grout.

else that we've missed? Yeah I think that if we're to overview the whole session Frances, I think the idea of sampling it's really worthwhile asking your suppliers to take samples home and put them in the environment of which they you intend to use them. Just the lights change so much in different environments.

With the sampling, happy to give it all to you to take home and play with it, but we don't want you just to see a picture in a book and say, "Yeah, that looks great" and go and install it, and it's not what you want. Totally agree ... we're on this journey too, and we wanna make it really good.

So ask your suppliers for samples. Take them home. Spend the time. Yeah, I agree. And the other thing is you can't all have it on a flat surface. If the tile's gonna be on the wall, don't look at it horizontally. You must look at it vertically because the light will hit it differently. Yeah. Don't know how

You can look at a flat lay. That's great. That's right. You've got to have a look at the material in the way it's going to actually be represented in the house. So vertical surfaces, you need to look at them vertically. Interesting. It looks so different. But that's great. O- obviously about, So I like it.

It's so true. You could put the same floor tile on the wall and it'll look different. Totally different. The light reflection is quite different, yeah. Yeah. Which is- Yeah ... possibly why the porcelanosa tiles have got the floor version and the wall version of exactly the same tile, and they are ever so slightly different in color way, and I'm talking about Ocero.

Okay. I don't want to talk about shop too much, but- Yeah. And if the Prada Ocero on the floor and the wall is ever- Yeah ... so slightly different. Yeah. They're probably allowing for the fact that the light's gonna hit it differently. So that's a, a case in point. Yeah. That's right. Thank you so much for your time today, Richard.

That's been absolutely fabulous. I hope everyone out there has got lots of information now to go and really research confidently, with confidence, how you can really differentiate between a poor quality tile and a really good quality tile, and why it's really worth investing, with all the money you're gonna be spending on this project anyway, really worth investing in very good quality tiles for all the reasons that Richard has outlined today.

So Richard, thank you so much for your time. I know that you're a very busy man, and I really appreciate your time today. Thank you. Oh, Frances, it's such a pleasure, and we love sharing information. We're education-based and look at the web pages. Lots of stuff there for you to dig out and take and, it's all about sharing.

So thanks very much for having us. Oh, no it's been an absolute pleasure. I will actually put the link to Earp Brothers in the show notes. It's earpbrothers.com.au. Now you have got a sh- showrooms all over Australia, Richard. Do you wanna just rattle them off? You're in Melbourne, Sydney... newcastle and Brisbane, and we're on our way to Adelaide.

But yeah, we've... the, the showroom spaces are fabulous. And Sydney showroom space has been peer-reviewed as the finest architectural showroom in Australia of any finish. So that was really nice. Wow. 1,400-meter showroom, 14-meter ceilings with tiles that go all the way up. It's just spectacular.

But when's Adelaide coming? ... we're looking at our showroom. We're hoping the second half of this year, like later- Okay ... in the second half of this year. And any spots on Tasmania? We're just doing some work on that. Not quite yet for Tasmania? No, Tassie is, Tasmania. So we're getting- Yeah

a showroom Earp to Tasmania at the moment, so not quite yet. We would like to have one there. Our gin is fabulous, but we like the idea of whiskey. So we might have to- Oh okay ... get our little showroom down in Tasmania as fast as we can. Buy some nice whiskeys. All right. Thanks so much, Richard.

Bye-bye.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

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