



CERAMIC TILES OF ITALY 2009 SPRING PREVIEW *Trends Designed to Last*

(May 16, 2009) While some trends come and go, there are those quality products and flawless designs that truly stand the test of time. This standard of excellence is what drives the Italian tile industry and gives it a strong competitive advantage. While the Italians do push the envelope – both aesthetically and technologically - it is the dependability, reliability and creativity of the products that make them a sure thing in both bullish or bearish markets. This is the message that Ceramic Tiles of Italy will emphasize to the thousands of architects, designers, distributors, contractors and tile specifiers that attend Coverings 2009. In terms of products, the focus will be on sustainability, sure-to-please design/manufacture ventures, soothing shapes, timeless textures and cost-cutting technical advances.

Designed and Produced Responsibly

Consideration for the environment is becoming an ever-increasing priority for today's American architects, designers, engineers and consumers as demand for eco-friendly products continues to rise. However, for the Italians, sustainability is nothing new. In the tile industry, Ceramic Tiles of Italy was first on the scene with their state-of-the-art facilities, sustainable production and certifications including the prestigious European Eco-label, EMAS and ISO 14001. To meet the needs of the US marketplace, Italian manufacturers have developed a number of LEED-compliant tile collections that are made using recycled content. Tile specifiers can expect this trend to continue to grow. In fact, in addition to new product launches, Ceramic Tiles of Italy will debut its new 2.0 version of S_Tiles (www.s-tiles.it). The site will offer a continually updated reference gallery with catalogs and information on Eco-Label and LEED-compliant tiles from Italy.

A Natural Beauty

In keeping with the environmental theme, many Italian tile producers continue to take advantage of the beauty of the outdoors. Faux wood is a prime example of this trend. It combines the eternal charm, down to the texture and grain, of natural timber with the outstanding technical qualities of porcelain. Tiles are available in all shapes and sizes including elongated planks, squares and chevrons. The classic stone look will come into play at Coverings. Manufacturers will showcase their own interpretations of everything from marble to travertine to slate to limestone. Finally, florals and foliage will be blooming throughout the Italian pavilion. These cheerful and optimistic designs never go out of style and may be just what people need to get through the current market conditions.

Creative Collaborations

From specifying to designing, Ceramic Tiles of Italy understands the importance of interacting with the rich architecture and design community both here and abroad. For that reason, many companies are getting contemporary artists and architects involved at the ground floor of tile design. Over the years, manufacturers have worked with such heavyweights as Gio Ponti,

Piero Fornasetti, Tord Boontje, Ruben Toledo, Nigel Coates and Massimiliano Fuksas to create unique and avant-garde collections. The most recent introductions include new lines from domestic and international standouts such as: Karim Rashid, Patricia Urquiola, Diego Grandi, Andréé Putnam, Jean Marie Massaud, Carlo Dal Bianco, Fabio Bortolani, Claudia Raimondo and Marcello Perenza. Stamped with the made in Italy symbol, these stunning products help to bring a touch of Italian luxury into any setting.

Innovation Abounds

Just like celebrities, tile can never be too rich or too thin. To that end, factory research and development teams are inventing sophisticated digital techniques and advanced production processes. These methods are catapulting tile to new levels, in terms of size, weight, strength and surface imaging. Oversized and extra-thin formats are particularly noteworthy since their use will dramatically cut costs in simplifying the installation process. The emphasis on durability has resulted in new products, both residential and commercial, which will also positively influence the bottom line. State-of-the-art digital imaging and techniques extend the option of murals and non-repetitive patterns to a whole new market of buyers.

Modern Shapes & Surfaces

The legendary Italian fascination with “la figura” has tile manufacturers exploring uncharted polygonal territory in an effort to reach beyond the more familiar nuances of shape. The sky’s the limit with striking new optical effects and textural dimensions. Italian hospitality is inclusive, so there is something for everyone. Featured applications range from suitably contemporary to appropriately traditional and everything in between. Metallic mania is alive and well, and as in the ancient world, the current focus is on gold. Surely this will be seen as one way to enhance a project elegantly and practically.

This April, while the stock market may be down, these enduring trends are designed to keep buyer confidence up.

For more information on Ceramic Tiles of Italy, visit their gateway www.italiantiles.com - with links to four key industry sites: www.italiatiles.com (the official website of Confindustria Ceramica), www.italytile.com (the official website for the Ceramic Tile Department of the Italian Trade Commission), www.s-tiles.it (a tool that tracks the Italian tile industry’s commitment to sustainable design) and www.tilecompetition.com (a digital guide to the Ceramic Tiles of Italy Design Competition).

#

Media Contacts: Novità Communications 718.857.4806 chris@novitapr.com or danielle@novitapr.com