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# STONE & TILE design

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# Taking risks with interior design

Despite a struggling economy, architects, designers and homeowners are still seeking innovative looks for interior spaces, and they are willing to take chances with unique tile and stone applications

by Kelly Martin



When it comes to today's interior designs, stone and tile applications continue to be a primary component. But far from the days of standard 12- x 12-inch floor tile, these materials are being used in unique and innovative ways. Additionally, with the green building movement on the rise, many architects, designers — and even homeowners — are seeking products that are environmentally friendly as well as for their aesthetic value.

And even in a down economy, many homeowners are still spending money on their

residences. But when doing so, they want to make their investment worthwhile. To create a one-of-a-kind look, they are using stone and tile products in unique applications in their home. In some cases, they are opting for re-used or re-claimed stone and tile, which brings character to the design as well as helping to preserve the environment.

Husband-and-wife architects German Brun and Lizmarie Esparza of DEN Architecture in Miami, FL, have discovered that their overall green design philosophy is extremely manage-

Located in Miami, FL, an assortment of unique stone and tile products were chosen to transform an old-fashioned apartment into a modern living space. A distinctive focal wall was created in the living room with large-format porcelain tiles from the Maxima Rainbow collection by Italian tile manufacturer Imola.

**Architect:** DEN Architecture, Miami, FL; **Tile Supplier:** Imola Tile, Doral, FL



able and still enables them to create unique designs for any client's request. Focusing mainly on texture and color palettes, they believe that creating a series of "zones" in an interior helps with the selection of materials for each area. "These zones become areas of transition from more public spaces to more private ones," said Brun. "For instance, the entrance foyer should be designed with a rougher texture, and the bedroom area with a more smooth, delicate and intense texture."

Speaking on current trends, the architects said they are seeing increased use of large-format tiles as well as porcelain tile varieties that resemble the look of exotic natural stone. Moreover, they are not only selecting new material types, but they are also presenting them in a different way to develop a signature look.

Another observation that the architects have made is a return to darker tile colors. "At one point not too long ago, par-

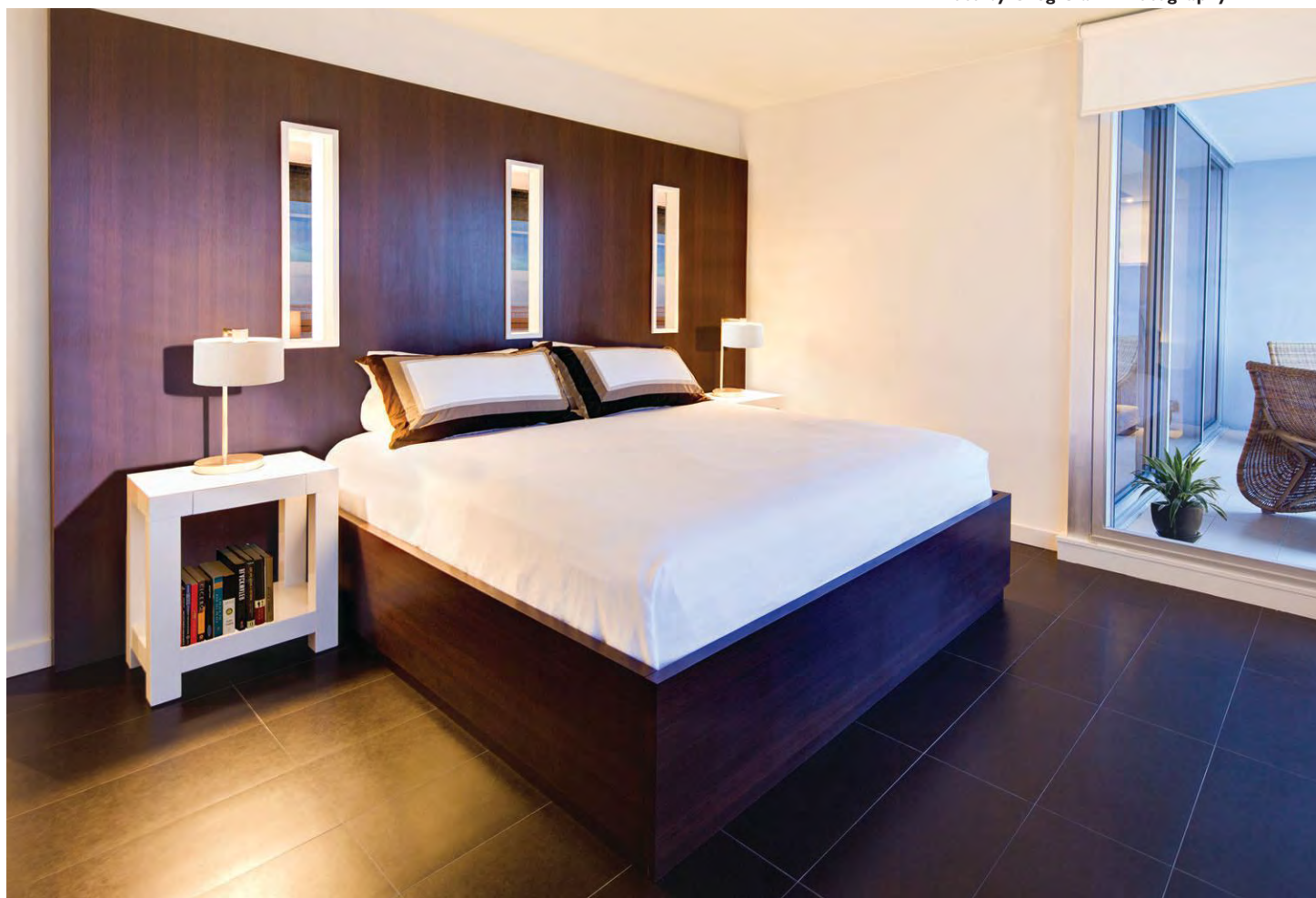
ticularly in South Florida, everything had to be white or beige," said Brun. "Now, with our guidance of course, clients are starting to explore a wider range of options from all kinds of hues and tones. Darker colors are no longer discarded, and some adventurous clients are even asking for stronger colors. As long as it's in balance with the overall design aesthetic, we are delighted to include unconventional colors, textures and tones. It's what makes our projects stand out, and our clients happy."



In the kitchen, tile from the Maxima Rainbow collection were employed for the backsplash — adding a contrast to the white cabinets, stainless appliances and quartz countertops. **Quartz Manufacturer:** Compac, Doral, FL



The original coral stone floor tiles in the apartment were refinished and kept as flooring in the updated design.



*For the bedroom, large-format porcelain tile from Imola's Nappa collection contribute to the sleek look.*

## Spatial experiences

For a recent project, the architects at DEN Architecture transformed a compartmentalized old-fashioned apartment in Miami, FL, into a modern collage of spatial experiences. The living area, kitchen and master and guest bathrooms were all redesigned with an assortment of stone and tile products. With the goal of designing and building a contemporary remodel of a 1970s apartment in record time — along with a low budget — Esparza stated that this redesign was completed with “surgical precision.”

According to the architects, Italian porcelain tile from Imola's Maxima Rainbow collection was used in the living room and kitchen to bring together the accent colors of the overall design. “We needed a [material] that incorporated reds, browns, a bit of white and grays,” said Esparza. “Imola's tile was the only product we could find that featured that

exact specification.” Although this tile was used in both the living room and the kitchen area, it served a different purpose in each space.

“In the living room, we needed a large focal point to serve as the entrance backdrop, and balance the oversized television console,” said the architect. “However, in the kitchen we needed a textured color background to contrast the white upper cabinets.” Because of its beautiful exotic pattern, the tile allowed the architects to bring the entire design together and incorporate the color palette the client requested.

A distinctive feature wall was created in the living room with the large-format Imola tiles. With waves of vibrant colors, the tile pieces appear as a work of art on the wall — contributing to the overall clean contemporary feel of the space. The wall was complemented by the orig-

inal coral stone floor tiles, which were restored and refinished. “We decided to reclaim this stone because it is beautiful material, and stone is much easier to re-finish and repair than porcelain or ceramic tile,” explained the architect, adding that the coral stone brought warmth and a rustic tropical atmosphere to the living room. “[But], matching the existing stone color, finish and pattern did prove to be challenging for us.”

In the kitchen, Imola's Maxima Rainbow tile forms the backsplash and is a nice contrast to the stainless appliances and white cabinets. Additionally, quartz countertops from Compac was selected for the countertops and center island. While “Plomo” was featured on the perimeter countertops, “Chocolat” was employed for the top of the island.

“Since this material is considerably expensive, we decided to re-use the excess