

Moving out of the bathroom

Thanks to manufacturing advances and digital photography, tile is used in more ways throughout the home

By KATHERINE SALANT
Special to The Washington Post

BOLOGNA, Italy — Fifty years from now, historians of the decorative arts will likely describe the current era of tile-making as “The Great Revolution.”

Combining advances in the manufacturing process with the wonders of digital photography, ceramic tile manufacturers today routinely produce tiles that were unimaginable in size, application and appearance only a few years ago.

The 4-inch-square tiles that cover the walls in most American bathrooms have given way to tiles that are now measured in feet. Tiles that are 3-by-8 feet with only a 1/4-inch thickness are widely available. The palette that was once limited to pastels and black and white has exploded to include every hue and shade in the color spectrum. By adding digital photography to the mix, tile-makers have been able to produce tiles that so closely mimic wood, marble and granite that even the experts can be fooled.

With all these developments, tile has migrated from the bathroom and kitchen, where it was valued for its water-resistant properties, to every room in the house.

All these developments were on abundant display at Cersaie, the annual trade fair for the Euro-



Ascot's Game of Fifteen series reproduces images created by American pop artist Keith Haring.

pean tile industry, which was held here this fall. There were many captivating new tiles, but the Italian tile-makers, the group that pioneered most of the advances in the tile-making industry, led the pack.

Among the Italian tile manufacturers' offerings, these were the high points:

■ Upping the ante on size, Florim's new Rex line features tiles that are 5 feet, 6 inches wide by 11 feet long — big enough that one or two sheets can supply all the material needed for work surfaces in a typical American kitchen, including counters, backsplashes and the large islands that are increasingly popular.

At the same time, the huge tiles have all but eliminated the grout lines that have caused tile's use in a kitchen to be a challenging maintenance issue for many homeowners. With tiles that

mimic more than 50 marbles and granites in over 120 colors, there is a Rex tile to suit every homeowner. It will be available in the United States in early 2015.

■ Ascot's new Game of Fifteen series offers tiles that re-create iconic works of art, but not the ones you'd expect of a firm whose cultural heritage includes the likes of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. Instead, the first artist to be featured is the late Keith Haring, an American pop artist.

His simple, animated black-lined figures first appeared as graffiti on the streets of New York in the early 1980s, eventually became feted in museum exhibitions and for the past decade have been favored by skateboarders and youthful T-shirt wearers.

Asked about this choice, Frederic Ades, Ascot's vice president for sales, said: “We started with the idea that the iPhone and iPad are

beautifully designed functional objects that have brought art to everybody and made it a part of everyday life. This led us to think about other kinds of art in everyday life, like pop art and Keith Haring, who made art for everyone.”

The firm had a second reason to debut its Game of Fifteen series with an American. “It's our tribute to America to remember Americans and what you did for Europe in World War II,” Ades said.

■ Some of the Italian tile manufacturers displayed an entirely new tile category, which I dubbed “collaborative design.” The tiles are designed so that a homeowner can create a unique pattern. Although mixing and matching have always been possible with tile, it has never been possible to produce this kind of result. The best examples were Lea's Nest and Bardelli's Arianna.

Lea's Nest is based on a deceptively simple idea. There are only two tile shapes: a Pac-Man-like one that's actually a hexagon with a triangle notched out and the triangle. There are four possible ways to create a pattern: interlocking Pac-Men with no triangle, Pac-Men with three triangles and a pinwheel effect, Pac-Men gobbling up single triangles, and Pac-Men with two triangles that could be chirping bird beaks.

But add the 30 available colors

to the mix — three reds, three blues, three greens and 21 shades on the black to white spectrum — and the number of possibilities is huge. Even more unusual is the way that a homeowner can personalize the ambience; it can range from refined and slightly mysterious monochrome to raucous color that is sassy, brassy and witty. The tiles come in three sizes: 40 inches, 20 inches and 5 inches, and they can be used for walls and floors.

The evolution of the Nest line is as unusual for the tile industry as the tile itself. It was created for Lea by Valerie Greer, Kristyn Borden and Jessica Ticas, three American architects with HOK, the world's largest architecture and engineering firm, with offices in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

Lea invited the designers to experiment and come up with something new. For their part, the HOK designers wanted something that could satisfy the color preferences of their clients, who come from many different countries and cultures. The tiles also had to suit HOK's wide range of projects that runs the gamut from airports to hospitals to housing. The unusual degree of personalization that allows clients and designers “to make it their own,” a feature that will captivate a homeowner, was “an important intention from the beginning,” Greer said.

VEREEN

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Nearly 40 years ago, Ben Vereen was in the thick of it.

The 1977 debut of the ABC miniseries “Roots” was a landmark moment in television history, its prime-time depiction of slavery, which played out over eight consecutive January nights, captured 37 Emmy nominations and nine awards, along with a nation's attention. Its finale still has the third-highest Nielsen ratings for a TV show.

Among the many stars of the series, based on author Alex Haley's 1976 novel, “Roots: The Saga of an American Family,” was Vereen, in the role of Chicken George, a descendant of the slave introduced in the story's opening episode, Kunta Kinte, played by LeVar Burton.

Vereen was already a star when he joined the cast of “Roots,” a Tony Award-winning entertainer acclaimed for his role as Judas in the original 1971 Broadway production of “Jesus Christ Superstar” and his lead turn

in Bob Fosse's “Pippin.” Those skills will be on vivid display when Vereen performs Tuesday and Wednesday at Jazziz Nightlife in Boca Raton, a songs-and-stories show named for his album “Stepping Out Live,” with favorites such as “Defying Gravity,” “My Funny Valentine,” “I Got a Lot of Livin' To Do” and a medley of Frank Sinatra chestnuts.

But if Chicken George obscured the fame he achieved on the stage, Vereen nevertheless treasures his part in a pop-culture phenomenon that started a national con-

“‘Roots’ started a conversation, and that was important.”

Ben Vereen, entertainer

versation about race.

“People were shocked to see what they saw,” Vereen says of “Roots” and its unflinching portrayal of beatings, rape and other forms of degradation endured by generations of descendants

of Kunta Kinte from 1750 to Reconstruction.

“My Jewish friends had Hitler, and he was evil, but he also was a fool, and such an egotist that he made movies of what he was doing in the Holocaust,” Vereen says. “So there was a record of that horror. There was no such record of slavery. ‘Roots’ started a conversation, and that was important.”

Speaking from his home in New York, Vereen, 68, is relentlessly upbeat — “How else can I be? It beats the alternative,” he says,

laughing — even when it comes to the new discussion of race going on around the country after the deaths of Eric Garner, Michael Brown and Tamir Rice.

“I'm happy to see [protesters] out there ... all kinds of people. They need to be heard,” he says. “We need to encourage dialogue.”

Ben Vereen will perform “Steppin' Out Live” 7:30 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday at Jazziz Nightlife, 201 Plaza Real, in Boca Raton. Tickets cost \$35, \$65 and \$85. Call 561-300-0730 or visit Jazziz.com/Nightlife

LATE

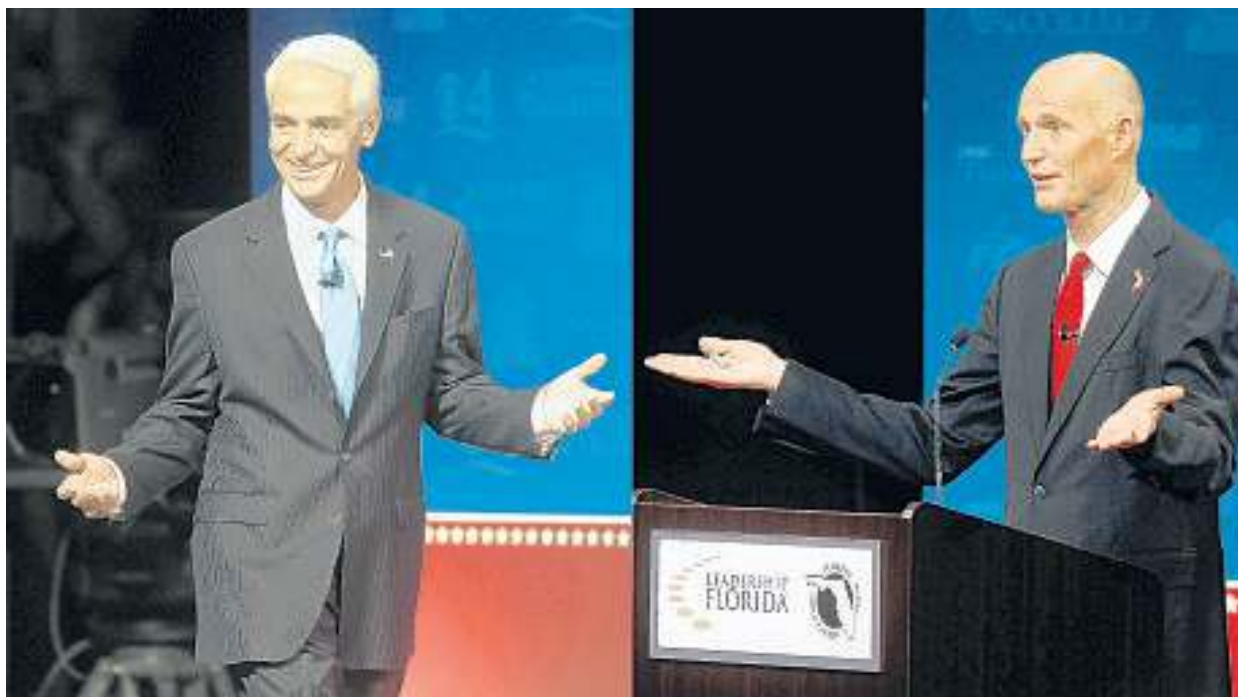
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STAFF PHOTOS

Late count

South Florida is famous for its vote-counting delays. Remember how Palm Beach County was at the epicenter of the disputed 2000 presidential elections? Well, oops, we did it again in the 2012 presidential elections. Thankfully, chads weren't the issue this time. Still, President Obama had given his victory speech, Mitt Romney had officially conceded and still Florida hadn't declared final results.



Late debate

Speaking of politics ... “Fangate” was the popularized term for the awkward seven-minute delay at the start of the televised gubernatorial debate between Gov. Rick Scott and his opponent, Charlie Crist. Scott had objected to Crist having a fan at the base of his podium. This tardiness once again put South Florida in the national spotlight.

Late seating

To accommodate latecomers, both the Broward Center for the Performing Arts in Fort Lauderdale and the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County have installed monitors in the lobbies. When there's a break during the show, the late guests are ushered in. The Florida Grand Opera on occasion will delay a performance by five minutes because of late arrivals.



Late returns

When the Miami Heat play at AmericanAirlines Arena, fans are known for being late to arrive AND late to return from halftime. (You know you're guilty of this!)



REUTERS

Late recognition

Even when we do something good, recognition can take its time coming our way. The 1972 Miami Dolphins team didn't get to visit the White House until last year, 41 years after becoming the only National Football League team to achieve a perfect season. Better late than never, we say!

Late start to the day

Let's face it, whether we're out partying at hot spots like Fort Lauderdale's Revolution Live, dining at late-night eateries like Miami's La Carreta, or just plain stuck in one of frequent traffic jams, there's always a reason to be late in South Florida.

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