

# Tile Takes a Flying Leap

*Innovations like 3-D printing, unique shapes, and large format are bringing tile to the forefront of home design*

By Jeff Zagoudis, Associate Editor

When you ask tile manufacturers to take a step back and look at how things have changed over the last several years, they themselves are floored.

“It has been exciting to observe the trend changes in the tile industry in recent years, especially in terms of product innovation,” says Lori Kirk-Rolley, vice president of brand marketing for Daltile.

“It’s an exciting time in the tile industry,” adds Mikeal Jensen, director of residential design for Crossville. “Advancements in technology—such as digital printing—keep leading us to new capabilities that are resulting in new trends.”

In other words, technology has rapidly accelerated the evolution of the tile industry—almost as fast as manufacturers can dream new ideas—which has ultimately opened up a new world for remodelers. “Remodelers now have more options than ever before in terms of colors, thicknesses, and fabrication styles,” says Daniel Sanchez, sales director for TheSize.

## Better Than Real

One of the most popular current trends across the remodeling industry is the desire for composite materials that have the look and/or feel of natural elements. Decking is a prime example, where homeowners want to maintain the appearance of using real wood while reaping the low-maintenance benefits of composite boards. Tile is no different, and offers an even wider array of textures and aesthetics that it can mimic, whether the base is porcelain or ceramic.

As Jensen puts it, “Unlike ever before, we’re able to effectively recreate the nuanced details of materials such as wood, marble, volcanic rock, concrete, even textiles.”

Those nuanced details are the product of inkjet printing and other high-tech techniques, which Kirk-Rolley says “have allowed designers to create visuals never before imagined, even by Mother Nature.

“Images can be combined, overlaid, and altered, opening up a whole new world of design possibilities.”

Combining images or textures like that can lead to a completely different look, like with the Fontanella collection from Marazzi, a Daltile brand, where wood and stone are brought together to act as one. By the same token, Crossville’s Reclamation collection integrates wood and concrete designs to achieve an industrial feel.

“You’ll have to look more than twice to know whether [they] are the real thing or not,” says Jensen.

And according to Kirk-Rolley, homeowners are less and less concerned with making the distinction.

“Consumers are recognizing these inherent benefits, coupled with the most innovative decorating technology, as superior to the ‘real’ thing,” she admits.

*Combining tile with different textures—like Marazzi’s Fontanella collection, which features wood- and stone-like panels—creates a distinctive look.*



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