

# Vintage Home renovation tips column *by Marjorie Lewis*



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## Tile Patterns in your Vintage Bathroom

### History of Tile Use in the U.S.

Ceramic tiles have been around for thousands of years. In fact the use of ceramic tile flooring dates back to the fourth millennium B.C. in the Near and Far East. The Roman Empire also introduced tile making in Europe and then the art of tile making was forgotten in Europe until the 12th century when Cistercian monks developed a method of making **Encaustic floor tiles** with inlaid patterns for cathedral and church floors. **Early tile making again vanished until Herbert Minton of England (1843) revived the lost art of Encaustic tile making.** These are made by dust-pressing; their designs are inlaid into the tile body, rather than surface applied, so that the tile design remains on the tile as it is worn down. The pattern or figure on the surface is not a product of the glaze but of different colors of clay. They are usually of two colors but a tile may be composed of as many as six.

### Example of Encaustic Tile



## Win a prize! Details on back

As was typical in the Victorian era, when a new fashion became popular in Europe, the United States soon adopted the same. Hence the use of ceramic floors in the U.S. also became popular in the Victorian era. As with many home fashions dating to this time, the tiles were brought to an American audience largely through Andrew Jackson Downing's 1850 book *The Architecture of Country Homes*.

Thanks to the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, the tile selection in our country greatly expanded. The exposition featured many exhibits of sanitary ware and decorative European floor tiles and the buzz they created convinced their manufacturers that there was a marketplace for decorative tile in the U.S.

One of the reasons the use of tile flooring was exploding in this time period was the Victorian-era discoveries on **germ theory**. All white-tiles became preferred because they were considered best for spotting – and eliminating – dirt and microbes and keeping the home's family healthy.

New machinery soon made manufacturing faster and easier. Innovations in the tile setting process allowed more creative and decorative installations. Pre-mounted sheets of 1 inch ceramic mosaic tiles (in a range of shapes) made intricate designs less time-consuming. By replacing a few individual white tiles with tiles in a contrasting

color, borders and designs were created. These designs soon became as common as an all-white sanitary bathroom.

### A simple design and border



Soon, homeowners who could afford the extra cost were selecting more elaborate designs. Such patterns could include a field of graduated geometric shapes – like diamonds, pinwheels and nautilus shells- that were decorated with flowers, starbursts, and more! These floors were then surrounded by a border, often times in yet another pattern. **The finished floor became, a rich, multi-layered tapestry of mosaic tiles, sometimes resembling a rug on the floor.**

### A more elaborate Mosaic design



### Choosing Tile Patterns for Your Vintage Home

If you are planning to install floor tiles in your formal Victorian entry, Encaustic tiles would be very appropriate. If you are remodeling your bathroom, you might consider using mosaic tiles for the flooring. Choosing the tiles and patterns to suit your bath depends largely on your home's architecture. If your home's style is classic and clean-lined, such as an Arts & Crafts style, stick with something simple such as a basic hex mosaic interspersed with dots or small flowers accompanied by a simple border. If your home is a Victorian style, geometric and encaustic tiles (or a combination of both) could work well because of their popularity during the period and because of their roots in medieval Europe.

The most important thing to remember is to look to your home's history and style when deciding what type of tile to use. The grander the home, the easier it can carry off a more elaborate design. Whatever tile and pattern you choose, you can rest assured knowing that it will look better in a vintage bathroom than the contemporary choices for flooring.

## RESOURCES

[OldHouseOnline.com](http://OldHouseOnline.com)

[National Park Service: Preserving Historic Ceramic Tile Floors](http://NationalParkService.PreservingHistoricCeramicTileFloors)  
([www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov))



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# Old house repair tip newsletter

Newsletter for vintage homeowners

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### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

#### Choosing Bathroom Tile for your Vin-

#### \*Win a Prize!

Call in with the correct address of the Redlands home featured below by Dec. 31, 2010 to be entered into a drawing. There will be two prizes awarded, **1st place is a \$25 gift card** and **2nd place is a \$15 gift card**. Drawing will take place on January 2, 2011. The gift card will be for a local merchant of the winner's choice. **Location Hint:** North of Highland Ave., East of Center, West of Redlands Blvd.



## Good Luck!

### Happy Holidays!



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