

Vintage Home renovation tips column *by Marjorie Lewis*



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Creation, Use & restoration of tile w/in the Arts and Crafts Movement

The Arts and Crafts movement, officially began in America in 1895 with the founding of the "Chalk and Chisel Club", America's first Arts and Crafts society in Minneapolis. House Beautiful began their first publication in December 1896 and it became the quintessential Arts and Crafts periodical featuring craftsmen who designed A&C furniture, tile, pottery, fabric and accessories. This A&C movement was a response to the dehumanizing effects of the Industrial Revolution and the excesses of the Victorian Age. The A&C movement embraced simplicity of line, good, durable materials and the human touch. Objects designed were to be interconnected to the environment. The English poet and artist William Morris, widely



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considered the movement's founder, articulated its philosophy, stressing the importance of the dignity and humanity of the work of craftsmen. Guilds were formed dedicated to these ideals.

BATCHELDER TILES

Ernest Allan Batchelder (1875 – 1957), although a writer and potter, he is best known as one of the foremost tile designers in the A&C movement. Prior to designing tiles, he was the Director of the Department of Arts and Crafts at Throop Polytechnic Institute in Pasadena and had written widely on the subject of design. The Batchelder Tile Company was founded in 1909 when he set up his first kiln in the studio of a home he purchased at 626 Arroyo Drive, Pasadena. (The home still stands today and is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places). His early designs owe to another A&C designer, Henry Mercer, but his technique in the handling of clay resulted in tiles with a individual style. His most popular motifs include Mayan designs, birds, foliage, leaping hares, deer, and Japanese trees and landscaping. In the early years, he designed all the tiles himself. They were hand molded and fired in a kiln with the muted colors well suited to the Arts and Crafts movement. When production increased,

they were sun dried in a yard where cats and chickens walked over them giving a pleasing variation of texture. Even when conveyor belts took the sand pressed tiles into vast kilns, Batchelder's motto was no two tiles the same." At first he worked almost entirely in brown, with blue glaze rubbed in the indentions within the symbols on the tile. **Quote from the Batchelder Describe- O-Log catalog:** Certainly the way a Batchelder fireplace harmonizes with it's surroundings is unique . . . No clashing of color, no vivid "spots", only soft, delicate tones that blend into the ensemble.

FIREPLACE SURROUNDS

Literally thousands of homes had Batchelder fireplace surrounds in Southern California, predominately in Pasadena, but they also can be found in Redlands! The following quote of Batchelder was in the Fireplace Title Catalog of 1927 : **"The fireplace is a permanent built-in feature of a room. Rugs, wall coverings, draperies and furniture may be changed.. . but the fireplace remains a source of perennial satisfaction. . . ."**

The tile fireplace Batchelder built in 1912 for his wife, Alice Coleman, as a wedding present in the Arroyo Drive home is 15 feet, floor to ceiling, and has two figures of lions, one holding a shield with a harp and the other a shield with a hare. Apparently the symbol that Batchelder used for himself



Is often a rabbit, possibly because he was shy. The harp was for his wife to credit her success as a musi-

cian. These poetic symbols remind us how soulful images can be incorporated into household structures.

Like many of the arts and crafts enterprises, the firm was put out of business by the Depression. All of it's assets were sold in 1932. Batchelder then continued to make pottery in a small shop in Pasadena until the 1950's.

ARTS AND CRAFTS TILE-CLEANING & RESTORING

If you have a arts and crafts fireplace surround that has not been painted over, count your blessings! A company in Seattle, Washington, called Tile Restoration Center restores tile fireplaces and makes recreations of Arts and Crafts tiles. They give the following tips on removing paint:

Commercial paint stripper will remove much of the paint, but they need to be used with EXTREME CARE. **NEVER USE AN ACIDIC PRODUCT - ONLY USE ALKALINE.** Test on a small area first. **Never sandblast vintage tile.** If the tile ends up being dull, use a coat of paste wax, lightly applied and hand rubbed. This may not restore the color, however, and a restoration specialist may be needed. To keep it in good shape, avoid abrasive cleaning techniques or metal bristle brushes.



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Old house repair tip newsletter

Newsletter for vintage homeowners

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Arts and Crafts Tiles
and Victorian Christ-
mas Traditions

Architectural Salvage Headliner!

TILE RICH There is a
man in Texas that found, not
oil on his property, but 7
TONS OF UNUSED VINTAGE
TILE! Apparently when the
depression hit, some tile
showrooms and distributors
buried the tile. The lucky
property owner says they
have cleaned and inventoried
the tile and it is for sale. I
believe it is not just
Batchelder tiles, but other tiles
from that period. Their web
site is:
<http://www.batcheldertile.com/index.htm>

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