



COVERINGS 2023



# COVERINGS 2023

# The complete ceramic experience

Over two decades ago, when Joe Simpson first visited Coverings, it was a very different event. Yet, he says, in many ways, it has hardly changed at all. This is his report from the 2023 event.

The paradox of Coverings lies in the difference between content and curation. It is fair to say that when it comes to organisation, promotion, floor plan, etc, Coverings 2023 was hewn from very much the same tree as the show I first visited more than 25 years ago.

It remains supremely well organised, with a sector-leading website, great signage, and highly efficient PR and marketing support. It still draws deep on the Spanish, Italian, North American/Mexican, and Brazilian trade associations who first gave life to this great event.

Alongside porcelain and ceramic tiles there is heavy processing equipment and a broad array of natural stone from around the world, as well as tiling tools, installation materials, and other related services and materials. And the comprehensive program of seminars, discussion forums, demonstrations, etc, remains just as strong as ever.

What is different, now, is the sheer volume of cutting-edge designs on the show floor. Over 20 years ago, Coverings was a bleached-out Cersaie, a European tile show that had been run through a hot wash cycle. There was precious little colour, few decors, and little avant-garde design.

The one exception – and this is still a great feature of this year's show – was the compact assembly of small stands housing the USA's

awesome artisanal tile studios and niche producers. These artisans continue to wow the crowds, and provide ample eye-candy, to this day.

Now that Coverings features many of Europe's finest tile manufacturers, plus a who's who of great factories from a wide range of less-established tile producing nations, cutting-edge wall tiles – in particular – have made a strong comeback.

Punitive sanctions, and Covid restrictions, continue to hold back Chinese factories, but the slack has been taken up, most notably, by India's tile producers. This was perhaps the biggest take-away from Coverings 2023.

Personally speaking, my enduring impression of Coverings 2023 was the fantastic show put on by the USA's indigenous producers. For years now I have been following the steady stream of stories from Tennessee, both European, Chinese, and Brazilian-owned subsidiaries, alongside new home-grown factories. But I was not prepared for just how far this new American tile hub has progressed in terms of tile design and product innovation over the past few years.

It is fair to say that some of the most impressive stands at the whole show featured 100% American-made products. The stars were not just porcelain floor tiles. There were

Bardelli Cromia Hex. Collection of glazed white body porous single-fired wall tiles for interiors composed of six glossy colours available in two structures – 15x17 cm, 8,5 mm thickness flat and 15x17 cm 12 mm thickness diamond version.



also stylish wall tile collections, bold wallpaper effects, and some stunning gauged porcelain panels and worktop slabs. And, as you might expect, these are supported by world-class marketing campaigns, literature, display options, and PR.

And it was not just the USA manufacturers that shone. Leading American distributors, notably Merola Tile and Florida Tile, featured product portfolios with a beautifully-chosen snapshot of the best that European manufacturers can offer.

These are stylish, elegant ranges produced with rare skill and care. They showcase many of the more advanced manufacturing techniques – notably reactive glazes, sinking inks, and digital glues – that mark out the very best from the rest.

There is a slightly complacent attitude in the established European tile hubs that design leadership is almost a given, a birthright, if you will. Coverings provided eloquent testimony to the contrary. Make no mistake, companies in the USA have now fully embraced ceramic tile's creative potential.

And, of course, America can also leverage sheer size and scope. Mohawk is now the world's dominant force in tiling, with Italian acquisitions like Marazzi, and Emileramica, reinforced by Eliane and Elizabeth in Brazil, Vitromex in Mexico, Kai in Bulgaria, plus Dal Tile and American Olean in the USA. And Mohawk is also very active in the worktop sector with One Quartz, Panoramic, Complete Countertops, Grande, and The Top.

Size may not be everything, but there is no doubt that the American tile market is set to get a whole lot more competitive in the years ahead, and a local manufacturing base is

going to seem like a great investment for more multi-national companies.

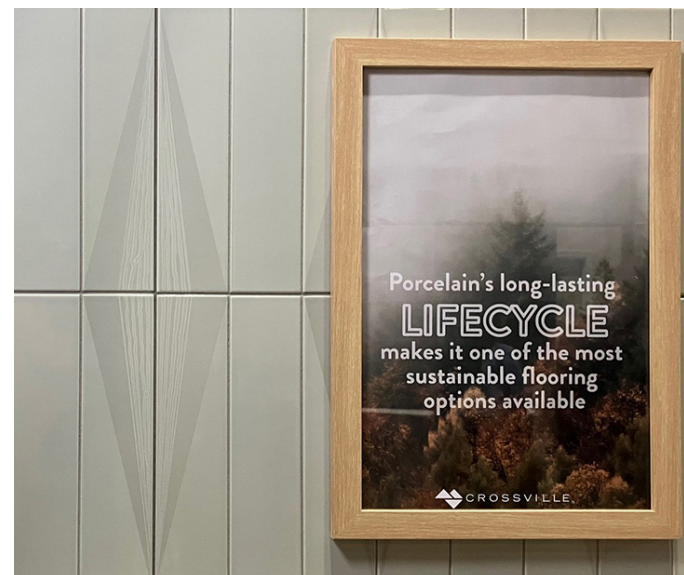
One can only speculate if this kind of thinking will start to take hold in Australia? Yes, it's a much smaller market, but with transport costs having been under the spotlight in the past year, and given the country's abundant natural resources, it may not be too long before a large corporate group seriously considers the competitive benefits of manufacturing tiles Down Under.

## Sustainability statements

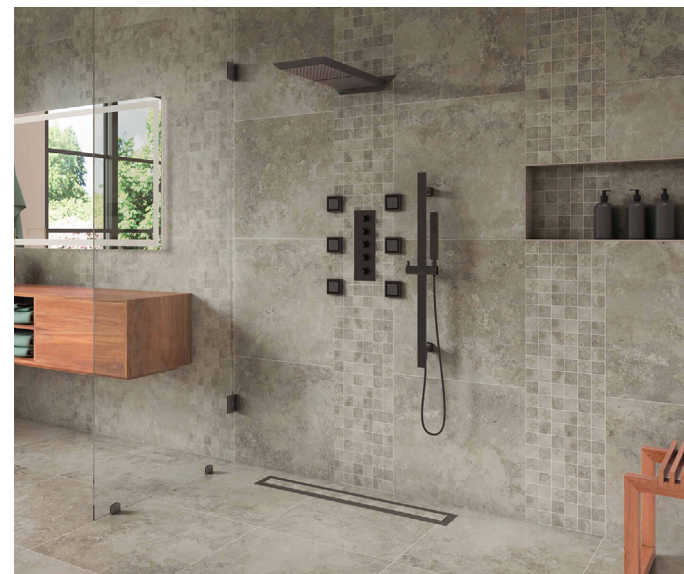
One topic, however, was front and centre at Coverings: sustainability. The exhibition's booths abounded with stories and products with an environmental angle, be that energy saving, water conservation, waste recycling, greener packaging, plant optimisation, and more. Many factories drew attention to the durable life cycle of tile, as LCA (life cycle assessment) becomes an increasingly common specification tool.

Crossville, for instance, has announced aggressive carbon reduction goals affecting its tiles' global warming potential with a goal of achieving a 30% reduction in manufacturing embodied carbon by 2030. The company's short-term goal is to achieve an additional 10% reduction by 2024 as compared to its 2019 measurements. Lindsey Waldrep, Crossville's vice president of marketing, said:

We are exploring all the ways internally that we can drive energy reduction strategies with changes to product and process, including investigating all new evolving technologies that improve energy efficiency while maintaining a commitment not to compromise quality.



Crossville's eco-messaging at Coverings.



Crossville Travertine Stone tiles



The company's ongoing commitment is to alter and reduce manufacturing's carbon impact through changes to product and manufacturing processes. However, Crossville products are still influenced by the energy needed to produce them. For this reason, the company can further reduce its tiles' carbon footprint by purchasing verified emissions reductions, or carbon offsets. By taking into account the carbon footprint of tiles from inception through demolition and destruction, the company's "cradle to grave" carbon credits do more for the environment.

European producers, such as Gruppo Romani, also chose Coverings to put an environmentally sustainable lifestyle on display. The group's brands – Serenissima, Cercom, Cir Manifatture Ceramiche, and Cerasarda – delivered a synthesis of aesthetic and eco-sustainable research that respects the evolution of contemporary design.

Examples included Serenissima's porcelain stoneware collections Concreta, an original cement effect that evokes natural textures, and Eclettica, a minimalist interpretation of stone. Archistone by Cercom Ceram-

iche treads a similar path, resulting in a versatile range ideal for public spaces.

Cir Manifatture Ceramiche's distinctive style revealed itself in Tadelakt and Heritage. The Tadelakt range is particularly on trend, a collection inspired by the hand-crafted look of Moroccan plasters. More mainstream, Heritage interprets the ancient charm of Rapolano travertine in porcelain stoneware.

First seen at Cersaie, Cerasarda shone a light on its new Sughero collection, in porcelain stoneware, dedicated to the beauty of a natural material – cork – that is particularly precious to Sardinia. This collection has an eco-chic style capable of giving environments a welcoming feel.

## Colour and greenlife

Another design trend that really caught the eye at Coverings was a carry over from Cersaie and Cevisama: bright colours and botanicals. Allison Eden Studios took that concept and really ran with it this year. Her collections fuse Pop Art, fashion and bright colours.

When it comes to colour, however, the dominant trend is that green has emerged as the current accent colour of choice. Green has appeared on tile in a great many variants this year, but the most popular appear to be rich, deep, and restful hues such as moss, sage, calke, olive, and avocado. These hold sway over sharper, bolder and brighter tones such as lime, celadon, neon, or chartreuse.

Unusually, this green colour trend was across a wide range of slabs and tile types. It could be seen in small rectangular field tiles with gloss, satin, or matte glazes, notably thin pencil styles, Zellige imitations, and hexagons. These greens grace both smooth and bumpy biscuit, or come to the fore as a textured relief tile. Green was also seen in stone-effect tiles, from the veins in marble, through to glamorous onyx effects. It was one of the emerging pace-setters in the porcelain worktop sector, something that really shone in Orlando.

Perhaps the most beautiful tile range at Coverings was The Log by Peronda's Harmony brand. This comes in six colours – white, sand, taupe, silver, anthracite,

Cerasarda Sughero. Cerasarda makes cork an original design surface, capturing and enhancing its decorative potential.



Cercom Archistone. An elegant stone effect surface that owes its charm to an infinity of small graphic details



Cir Ceramiche Heritage. The stone-effect tiles from the Heritage collection by Cir Ceramiche bring to mind historic European architecture, large buildings and refined homes characterized by floors with a lived-in look.



Serenissima ShoWall is described as "The material fineness of the third firing paired with a refined and spectacular design. ShoWall ignites your desire to decorate."



and green – but it is the green option that really captures the designer's imagination. Created by Alt Design, Log was inspired by woodworking techniques. The overall effect is wonderfully tactile and, like many great designs, simple, versatile, and utterly original.

Compact formats, notably bricks and small elongated rectangles, were everywhere at the show, alongside thin glazed stubby pencil forms. These classic small tiles come in plain and bumpy biscuit; single or multi colours; gloss, satin, and matte finishes; and natural or polished effects.

The appeal is that they can be used as a module for creating different compositions. They can be stacked horizontally or vertically; or used in monochromatic or mixed colour patterns. They work as a stripe, chevron, heringbone, and other patterns.

They also speak to the value homeowners and designers currently place on heritage and authenticity. Many of these small tiles are carefully manufactured to simulate an artisanal look. Embodying the wabi sabi vibe, they feature craquelé glazes, surface imperfections, and multiple faces to create a hand-wrought feel.

Coverings also featured many tiles that were created to maximise tactile appeal. This spanned concrete-effects, softer stucco and plaster inspired ranges, or riven natural stone effects.

The point is that the texture is fundamental to both the visual design and the surface feel. With digital decoration allowing sophisticated glaze effects to be applied to 3D surfaces, this is a design direction with more miles/kilometres to travel.

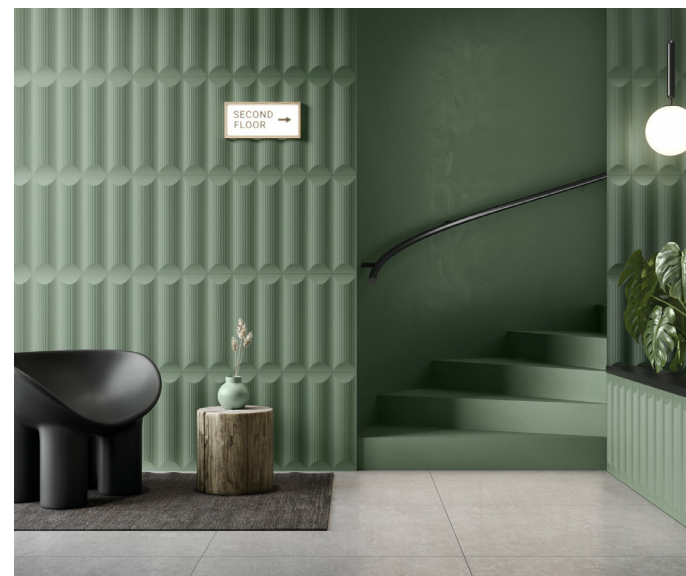
## Textural tendencies

Our need for calm has led to design solutions that create welcoming spaces based on neutral colours and earth tones, as well as textures that shift attention from sight to touch. At Coverings there were examples such as tiles with granular relief or ribbed finishes. By combining nature-inspired colours with tactile surfaces, these tile designs stimulate tactile sensations and fascinating plays of light, enhancing the design appeal of neutral colours and set sizes.

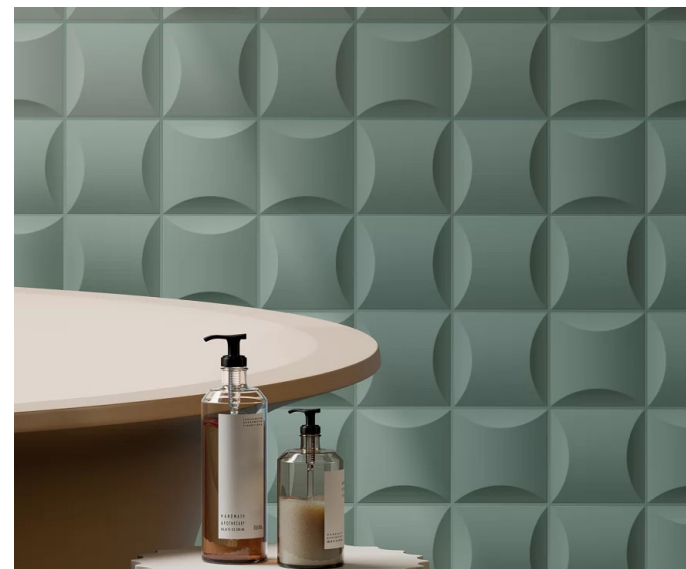
Coverings also provided further evidence that the 1970s design revival is in full swing. Get ready for more two-tone brown tiles, funky curves, and groovy patterns. The '70s revival sees flashy prints and metallic accessories, sitting alongside Pop Art florals and naturalistic earth tones. Most importantly, this trend is all about having fun with tiles. It challenges designers and homeowners to be bolder in their tile choices. And the exhibitors at Coverings seemed to have taken this to heart.

Coverings also showed that gauged porcelain panels and worktops are going to be a big trend in the coming decade. Powered by technology like continuous pressing, digital decoration, sinking inks, and digital glues, some of the latest marble-effects are out of this world. From book-match designs, to co-ordinated worktops and tiles, there is really no design direction that the modern slab factory cannot explore.

And as processing machinery and fabricator expertise develops, this will be a truly exciting market sector. The potential for impactful hotel receptions, corporate offices, or even domestic bedrooms is now almost limitless; and that is before you consider the additional



LOG by ALT DESIGN collection is inspired by woodworking techniques, particularly, the construction of mountain chalets whose walls are assembled from logs.



UP by La Fabbrica. Through refined plays of projections and recesses, light and shadow, its raised surface gives it an unexpected sculptural plasticity.



impact of ceramic wallpaper, porcelain furniture facings, curved tunnel linings, and ventilated ceramic façades. This is not a design trend. It is better seen as a related set of completely new markets.

As noted earlier, this year's Coverings showed the emerging strength of the Indian ceramic tile sector. This country has been investing heavily in the latest ceramic tile production technology of late, and Morbi is emerging as a ceramic production hub to rival Castellon or Sassuolo.

In Orlando, several top Indian brands were displaying their very sophisticated wares. These included Exxaro Tiles, Varmora Granito, Italica Tiles, Sunheart Ceramix, Simpolo Vitrified, Sparten Granito, Nexion International, and Bluezone Vitrified. Today India is providing strong competition for Spain, Italy, and Mexico – currently the three largest tile exporters to the USA – and will increasingly effect the market dynamics in the years ahead.

## Company highlights

Sobe by Vallelunga & Co evokes the beauty of onyx in an assortment of subtle, warm tones that creates surfaces with real soul. The colour options are sublime, blending purity with contemporary design to create an intense, natural mood. Produced in vitrified stoneware, this collection is available in large thin slabs, emphasising its stunning colours and shade variations. A range of finely inlaid mosaics and decors provides a beautiful finishing touch. Variations in texture and finish, plus a sumptuous satin finish, emphasises the Sobe collection's natural beauty. Digital printing produces different graphic patterns and shade variations while maintaining the same colour tones,

achieving aesthetic effects that surpass the natural marble that inspires the collection.

Up – a new collection from La Fabbrica – is characterised by its 3D shapes and striking matte and gloss finishes. It brings a decorative, architectural quality to walls, creating intriguing plays of light and shadow throughout a space. The single-fired tiles are available in five different structures and a selection of seven distinct colours.

3D Wall Plaster expands upon the 3D Wall Design series from Atlas Concorde, adding natural motifs and unique relief structures that recall artisanal plaster-making techniques. The ceramic wall tiles are available in five delicate 3D patterns and one large rectangular format. The white-hued tiles and textures from this collection are an ideal choice for designing serene interiors.

Cromia Hexa, an extension of Ceramica Bardelli's Cromia line, was inspired by the dramatic impact colour can have on a space and its inhabitants. These highly saturated hexagonal wall tiles have a glossy, almost iridescent, finish that reflects light differently throughout the day, casting an ethereal glow around the room. Cromia Hexa features six bold, eye-popping hues, which can be combined or installed uniformly to create a striking composition.

Bold is the new collection from Naxos, inspired by the look of colourful, faded frescos. This modern porcelain tile collection is available in a variety of warm and cool shades, and a selection of striking decors, with a luxurious, shimmering metal effect. The collection also offers a selection of Art Deco-inspired decors, one of many at the show.

Developed in collaboration with Italian design studio Marcante-Testa, Ceramica Vogue's

Atlas Concorde 3D Wall Carve expands the 3D white body wall tile project of the 3D Wall Design series with a selection of three-dimensional surfaces with somber tones and minimal microtextures. Inspired by the material suggestions of hand-worked stone, the collection brings the decoration of indoor walls into a new dimension of contemporary interior design.



Flauti is the brand's porcelain stoneware collection designed specifically for cladding. Characterized by its unique 3D shape and rich colours, with the choice of a satin or glossy finish, the range has been expanded with a new strip format and an addition of six colourways.

These porcelain tiles are an excellent cladding solution for those who wish to play with bold colours to create a unique, show-stopping outdoor or indoor designs.

Astrum Porcelain Tiles by Ceramiche Supergres was inspired by one of architecture's favourite materials: travertine. Astrum offers a modern reinterpretation of this timeless natural stone that is aligned to needs of contemporary design.

Vidrepur's Nature Collection is manufactured using recycled glass. It is mosaic suitable for wet, indoor-outdoor areas, providing innovative solutions for pools, bathrooms, and kitchen projects.

Habana by Cevica is a range of square porcelain tiles that are suitable for walls and floors because of the range's anti-slip properties. Habana comes in a

variety of colours and geometric patterns that can transform any space with a very personal touch.

Kenzo by Bestile delivers elegance and versatility across eight different wall decors in combination with white and black matte finishes, and various sizes in chevron and hexagonal shapes.

Matisse Moonstone by Anthology Tile was inspired by old-world traditional hand painting, yet was created by digital decoration. The beautiful soft hues of these tiles are perfectly on-trend and have a unique satin finish.

Millennium Porcelain by Wonder Porcelain combines the appearance of Byzantine mosaics with the trendy terrazzo look. The collection features a chic style with a lappato finish, and is offered in some particularly cool grey tones.

Pastelli by Appiani is a collection that features small format stoneware tiles designed for unique, intricate mosaic designs for outdoor walls and floors. The stone-effect tiles are available in select colours and small mosaic sizes to present endless design possibilities for indoor and outdoor settings.

Pigmenti by Lea Ceramiche is a range rich in formats and decorative inspiration. It provides 12 contemporary nuances in ultra-thin slabs to deliver a ceramic skin that can even be curved. This high tech collection is capable of covering internal and external walls, as well as furniture and dramatic architectural forms.

Pluriball by Iris US is inspired by bubble wrap, bringing a striking, eclectic dimension to tiling with an irresistible appeal. The contemporary spirit of Pluriball is embodied to perfection in various shades and a texture that channels a bold, vibrant style.

Tycoon-Wave Mosaic by MILEstone combines elegant surfaces with precious mosaics, creating eye-catching appeal due to its luxuriously rich details. This natural stone-based collection delivers style and opulence in abundance.

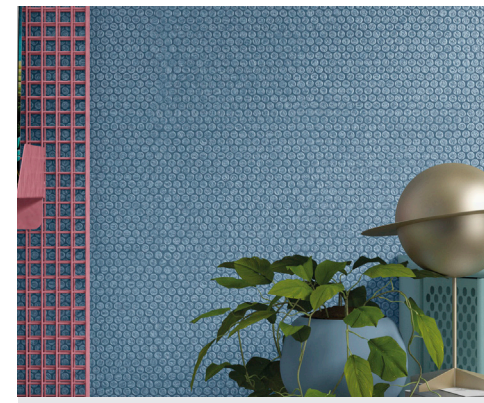
Vulcano by Azteca was inspired by the liquid movement of incandescent lava. Powerfully expressive, it is produced by hand to achieve the desired effects. The most intriguing part of the range is the use of gloss-matte and double gloss glaze contrasts.

Astrum porcelain tiles by Ceramiche Supergres are stone effect tiles for paving terraces, porches, stairs, pedestrian and driveways.

Habana by Cevica. This collection is inspired by the traditional colours and designs of cement tiles.

Kenzo by BESTILE offers eight different wall decors in combination with white and black matte finishes and a variety of sizes in chevron and hexagonal shapes

Pluriball by Iris. Inspired by bubble wrap, Pluriball brings a striking, eclectic dimension to tiling. Playing on the irresistible appeal of this plastic packaging, it offers a unique new ceramic style choice.





Likely to prove very popular in Australia, Namur from Tagina was inspired by Pierre Bleu, a Belgian sedimentary rock with hallmark shades of greyish-blue. In Tagina's version, the stone is imbued with shades of colour ranging from black to beige to grey, to ensure colour continuity. It can be used in even the most challenging external setting due to its hardness and exceptional resistance to frost.

Marazzi's Inyo Collection takes a rustic approach to porcelain tile with its moody crackle design. The handsome leather look, available in five rich colours, creates a warm and luxe aesthetic, and offers a lifetime of antimicrobial surface protection.

The dreamy colour palette includes a creamy white, smoky greys, and a saturated blue, all available in an array of large format sizes, plus two statement colour blend mosaics.

Milestone, the distributed brand of Florim USA, debuted three porcelain tile collections at Coverings 2023. The first of the collections was an inaugural launch for Milestone's Stories concept. Created in partnership with Jennifer Farris of Bandura Design, the Bestow collection pays tribute to homespun artist's weaving, braiding, and macrame knotting which inspire the tile's colour, texture, and pattern.

EcoStone is Milestone's first XLL format carbon neutral offering. It pays homage to the timeless beauty of travertine, with two distinctive finishes, inspired by different cutting techniques: cross-cut and vein-cut.

Farmhouse Living features floor and wall in large sizes, outdoor 20mm pavers, mosaics, and large decors. The range highlights biophilic design, emulating the natural beauty of stone.

## Distribution debut

Distributor Louisville Tile announced a new tile design partnership with interior designers Jennifer Farrell and Jamie Beckwith. Jennifer Farrell is a familiar face to American TV audiences, who know her from hosting the long-running series Find & Design. She currently hosts Million Dollar House Hunters, Find Me a Beach House, and Most Amazing Homes. She also created the Surfaces Show Home. Jeff Starr is a long-time product designer who has led sales and design teams at Virginia Tile Company and Dwyer Marble and Stone Supply.

Lunada Bay Tile introduced New Vesuvio, a mixed media mosaic series that combines glimmering glass with natural white marble. Elegant yet durable, the natural stone creates a beauty only achieved after millions of years of nature working her magic. The glass is evocative of semi-precious stone found in volcanic formations. In concert, the simple geometric patterns become the timeless foundation for many interior styles.

Potter and designer Jonathan Adler's also delivered his debut tile series for Lunada Bay Tile called Shelter Island which was previously profiled in Tile Today. Feras Irikat, director of design and marketing at Lunada Bay Tile, said:

Tile is like jewelry for your home. An expanded range of colours, textures, and patterns, plus the ability to complement any décor, have made tile appropriate for areas anywhere in the home, both inside and outside. Interesting formats, colours and materials allow for true customisation.

He may have been speaking about Lunada Bay Tile specifically, but his words ring true for so much of Coverings 2023.



Vulcano by Azteca, inspired by the liquid movement of incandescent lava.



Namur by Tagina, inspired by Pierre Bleu, a Belgian sedimentary rock.



Milestone's Bestow collection pays tribute to homespun artist's weaving.



Lunada Bay Tile partnered with Tommy Bahama.



Thankfully, a decent audience turned up at Orlando to experience everything at Coverings 2023 had to offer. After the last COVID-affected event, 2023 saw a 50% year-over-year increase in attendance, with 27,000 visiting the Orange County Convention Center between 18th and 21st April.

Buoyed by global pavillions from the USA, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Turkey, Portugal, India, and China; international exhibitors made up 74% of the around 1,000 exhibitors.

It proved to be a joyous celebration of ceramic's creative potential. Roll on the next 25 years!



Iris Ceramica Group has won the Tile Council of North America (TCNA) "Best in Show" for its exhibition hall booth.



The team at Iris Ceramica Group

### Joe Simpson is Tile

Today's international correspondent, and has been writing expertly on the tile industry for 30 years. He created the Diary of a Tile Addict blog to highlight artists, architects and designers, as well as sharing the work of talented and inspiring individuals who help make the tile world so creatively diverse,

technically advanced, and fascinating. He was the founding editor of Tile UK in 1996, has edited Tile & Stone Journal and The Specifier's Guide to Ceramic Tile & Calibrated Natural Stone.



The Best in Show booth award in the Tile of Spain Pavilion went to WOW Design



The Best in Show honor in the Ceramics of Italy pavilion was presented to EDIMAX ASTOR CERAMICHE





## Rockstar Sealing launches in the US market

Australian company Rockstar Sealing has entered the North American market in search of stone experts looking to elevate their line of offerings.

From its Melbourne base, Rockstar Sealing manufactures high-performance stone sealers and cleaners.

With a new branch office based in Las Vegas, Nevada the team is led by stone and supply experts with a combined 100 years of experience. It includes Lelia and Frank Friedlander (known for TuffSkin Surface Protection), Michele and John Aloe (Walker Zanger LV), and Gabrielle and Blake Dowe (Rockstar Sealing Australia). The dedicated team has plans to expand in the US market with strategic partners of stone suppliers, tradespeople, and distributors of Rockstar Sealing.

Skip Jankoski, owner of a stone restoration business in Southern California, has been an expert in the stone industry for over 30 years.

He said:

We have run into projects that require a variety of stone applications. Through testing and trial of a variety of stone sealers, we realised that Rockstar Sealing is the best because of its variety, efficacy, and price point compared to other top-tier luxury sealers.

Rockstar Sealing allows stone professionals to approach any project with confidence in all facets of Cleaning and Sealing. They manufacture a comprehensive range of high-performance Sealers and Cleaners for natural stone and all unglazed surfaces.

Rockstar Sealing has been manufacturing specialty Cleaning and Sealing products in Australia for more than 25 years and is very excited about entering the American market with our new partners.

To view all of our products, please visit our website: [Rockstarsealing.com](http://Rockstarsealing.com)

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**RockstarSealing.com aims to become the one-stop shop for all sealer needs in the North American market. Interested in stocking Rockstar Sealers? Click the link below to find out more!**

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Use code **TileToday23** for 10% off your order

As part of its promotional activities, Rockstar Sealing recently hosted a quarry tour near Las Vegas. The middle picture shows Rockstar Sealing (USA) owners Michele Aloe (2nd from left) and Lelia Friedlander (4th from left) with Las Vegas designers.





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