

NOTE: Colour and shade variation are inherent qualities in all ceramic products.

What are Terracotta tiles?

Unglazed fired clay tiles are often called Terracotta tiles, which literally mean, "baked clay" or "burnt earth." Terracotta may also refer to brownish-orange colors.

What is the history of Terracotta tiles?

Fired clay or Terracotta tiles are a material, which has been in use for thousands of years and offers a functional and highly practical form of wall and floor coverings. They had their origin as many as 4,000 years ago in ancient Egypt. They exploded into the Western world during the Middle Ages – rust-colored tiles were quite popular in the ancient monasteries in England, while artisans in Spain and Portugal added a colorful touch by hand-painting the tiles in bright colors to suit their sunny climate.

Is there a difference between Quarry and Terracotta tiles?

Quarry tiles and Terracotta tiles are basically the same thing (quarry meaning "square" from the French term *quarre*).

How are Terracotta tiles manufactured?

The clay used for making Middle Earth tiles is extracted from open sites in Warkworth and Matakana. After being removed and aged the clays are combined and water added to become a paste. The clay paste is then passed through a vacuum chamber (to eliminate the air, which can be responsible for breakage during the firing) and extruded through a die.

The clay is cut into tiles which are dried in drier before being fired in a gas kiln. The kiln firing creates the metamorphosis where sticky clay becomes a beautiful floor that is so long lasting. After kiln firing the tiles are Factory Treated by dipping the tiles in a special silicone solution and then kiln dried.

Some Terracotta tiles are called Natural Terracotta, why?

In the production of Middle Earth Terracotta tiles, clay is fired in kilns, with nothing added but water. The different hues of the tiles come naturally from the colours of the clay and firing temperatures and techniques, not from chemical additives. These are natural terracotta tiles and the colour is all through the tile.

This Terracotta colour is ageless and often replicated in pressed glazed tiles where the colour is painted onto the tiles. These imitation colours are not Natural Terracotta tiles.

How are Middle Earth Terracotta tiles coloured?

The colour of Middle Earth Terracotta tiles is created in three ways:

1. Colour of the clay
2. Firing temperature, tile placement in the kiln and flashing
3. Adding a colouring oxide to the clay mix

Colour of the Clay - Middle Earth tiles are made from two clay colours. These are buff coloured clay and a red clay. The yellow/ochre colour is due mainly to the blend of clays which are combined in various proportions to create the unique Middle Earth colours.

Firing temperature, Tile placement in the Kiln and Reduction Firing - Firing temperature is critical in the developing of the tile colours. As a rule of thumb, the darker the colour the higher temperature the tile is fired. The characteristic flash or flame marks occur if two tiles touch, are fired close together or by reducing the air intake to the gas burners in the kiln, this lets the flame "burn" the tiles to create the unique flashing colours.

Adding a Colouring Oxide to the Clay Mix - The colour of Middle Earth Gunmetal and Doeskin coloured tiles, is created by adding an oxide to the clay in the mixing process. The oxide is thoroughly mixed into the clay creating a homogenous colour all through the tile.

Are Middle Earth Terracotta tiles slippery to walk on?

Generally, glazed tiles are suitable for indoors but can be slippery when wet. However, Middle Earth Terracotta Tiles are ideal for wet areas, outdoors, indoor formal / informal areas, steps etc. or where you require a good grip surface.

Can Middle Earth Terracotta tiles scratch?

It is possible, if a harder material than the tile is forcibly sheered across their surface, but this is unlikely to occur in most domestic circumstances.

- What are the benefits of Terracotta Tiles?** The warm everlasting variegated colours of terracotta tiles, which can range from deep reds and browns through to cream and even ochre tints creates a long lasting floor, which transcends fashion. With softened, irregular edges, the pleasing surface texture and the flamed colour tones terracotta tiles bring back the welcoming atmosphere of country floors. With wear Terracotta tiles, achieve a style, which improves their overall appearance.
- Other important features are:
- They are non-slip and the perfect tile for outdoor paving
 - They are perfect for under-floor heating, acting as a heat soak retaining heat remarkably well
 - Used outside they will not dazzle you in bright sunlight
 - They are easy to maintain
 - Terracotta tiles last a long time, since they have no pattern or glaze to wear out.
 - They are timeless and have been in fashion for 4,000 years. Often copied but never replaced
- What is the difference between Middle Earth Terracotta tiles and Mexican tiles?** Mexican Tiles are mainly made from very wet clay and then often laid out on paper to dry in the sun. For firing, old car tires have been known to be used as fuel. Because of low firing temperature, Mexican terracotta is often relatively soft and porous and may not be suitable for use outdoors.
- Do Terracotta tiles stain?** Most unglazed surfaces can stain, because Middle Earth Terracotta tiles are Factory Treated, staining is minimal and can be generally avoided if wiped quickly. If a stain does persist, there are several proprietary brand stain removers available. Stains may also be cleaned with vinegar or alternatively a paste of mineral turps and lime left on overnight will usually remove the mark.
- Can vehicles be driven over Terracotta tiles?** Terracotta tiles have enormous strength and can take the weight of a vehicle, if they are correctly bedded to a firm concrete base.
- How wide should the gaps be between the tiles when installed?** The joints between the tiles can add or subtract from the appearance of the floor. If they are too wide, they can overpower the tile, which in some cases might be good. If you want an old world look, use a thick wide grout filling between the terracotta tiles. On the other hand, if the tile is what you want to emphasize, the grout should be minimal. Normally to allow for any slight size variations, it is recommended that terracotta tiles be laid with 8 to 10 mm joints.
- Are expansion joints necessary?** All ceramic products have a tendency to "grow" and although this is usually very minute (a fraction of a percent) allowance should be made in large installations for expansion joints. For further information refer to BRANZ Publication "Good Tiling Practice".
- Will Middle Earth Terracotta tiles chip or break if something is dropped on them?** Under normal circumstances, if Terracotta tiles are properly fixed to a firm base, they are almost indestructible. Exposed edges of Terracotta tiles can chip if struck by hard sharp objects, but if flush grouted they are practically chip resistant.
- Should Terracotta tiles be sealed?** Factory Treated Middle Earth tiles are noted for their low maintenance.
- (For further information see Middle Earth Product Sheet - Sealing and Maintaining Terracotta Tiles)*
- Outside Installation** - Normally if installed outside no further sealing is required, although it is suggested as with all tile installations, the grout joints are sealed. If, however, the area to be tiled is subjected to extreme freezing, dirty conditions or spilling of oils, a further sealing of the entire tiled area with a penetrating sealer may be required.
- Internal Installation** - A further sealer or wax may be applied depending on the final surface required (shiny or matt). However if the tiles are to be exposed to oils or oily foods we recommend the tiles be further sealed with a penetrating sealer.
- Can the tiles be laid on sand?** No. Unlike bricks and pavers, terracotta tiles must be fixed to a firm base.