



The Great Outdoors

Expert landscaping tips from the designers at Middle Earth

Summer is finally upon us and with the glorious sun drenched days comes the hordes of friends and family that will descend on your house during the holiday season. Traditionally, pools, gardens and decks are where everyone congregates, so when people landscape their gardens they are looking at tiling outdoor areas to make them practical for entertaining and versatile enough to be used 365 days a year.

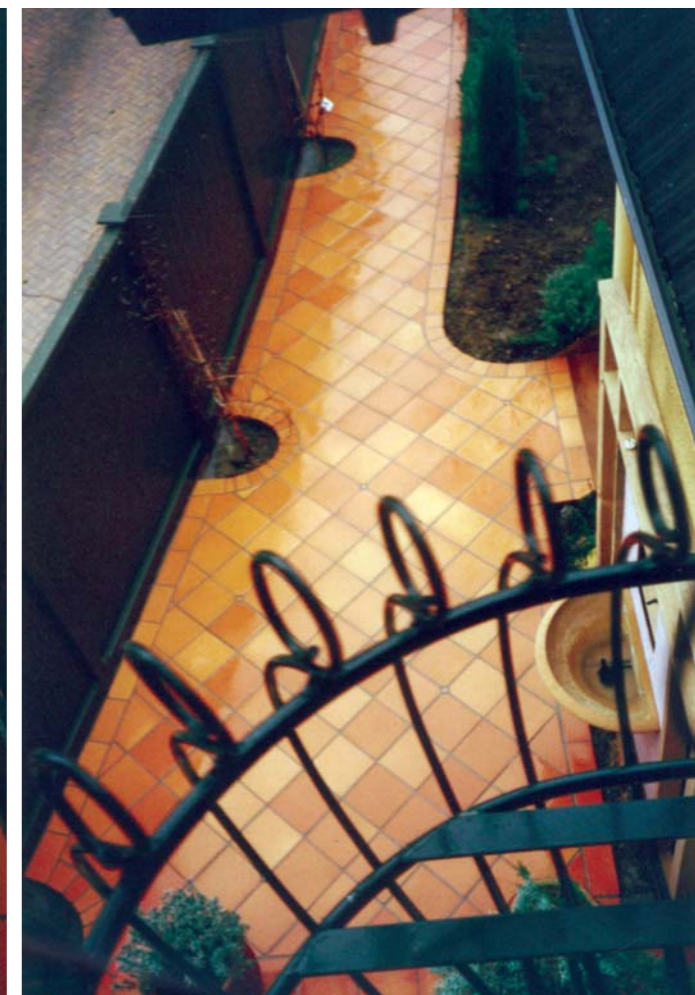
Tiles need to be laid on a concrete base, and although this can make the initial cost more expensive than using pavers, in the long run those that choose tiles over pavers appreciate the extra time they have not needing to weed between or pull-up and re-lay uneven pavers. Tiles have become especially popular around pools where it gets particularly wet, as they will never buckle and get uneven like pavers can when their base is washed away.

Using tiles outside will enhance the indoor/outdoor flow of your home, increase the value of your property, introduce the concept of the outdoor room and transform an unappealing outdoor space into the entertainment centre of a home.

TOP TIPS FOR OUTDOOR TILING

- Make sure the tiles are suitable for the environment. Smooth tiles may be easy to clean inside but outside when they get wet they can get very slippery. If you use smooth ceramic and porcelain tiles outside they are best laid undercover where they can't get wet.
- White and off-white tiles will reflect light and can dazzle you in direct sunlight.
- Due to their thermodynamic nature, black, very dark coloured tiles and ceramic tiles will get hotter than other tiles in direct sunlight. In areas that are exposed to direct sunlight it is advisable to use terracotta tiles or light coloured stone.

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CHOOSING TILES

When deciding on which tile to use outside it is important to remember that the tiles could be the largest continuous surface area outside so they are crucial in finishing off 'the look'. There are three considerations when looking at tiles; the colour, size, and tiling texture (pattern in which the tiles are laid).

Even the humble terracotta tile these days comes in a range of colours from creams and light greys to the traditional red and orange hues. Size of the tile should be taken in consideration with the theme and size of the outside area. Just as an antique cobble tile is better suited to a classical garden, a large modern tile should only be used in roomy, not cramped areas.

A tiled area can also be accentuated by laying square and rectangular tiles in simple geometric patterns. The idea of laying tiles in geometric patterns has been around since the first century AD in Europe, starting out in large palaces and state buildings as a sign of high social status and progressing to the plebeians. This idea of being creative with tiles is so ingrained in Europe and especially Italy and Spain that vineyards, farm houses, and village squares have examples of exquisite terracotta textures dating back hundreds of years.

Fashionable for over a thousand years, terracotta has become even more popular as the tile of choice to spruce up outside areas.

Terracotta's main asset - that it is naturally non-slip and incredibly hardwearing - has made it the product of choice around swimming pools. New Zealand made terracotta is also high-fired making it both frost resistant and colourfast so it does not fade with age like coloured concrete.

TRENDS

The designers at Middle Earth Tiles in Auckland have noticed a definite swing to tiling outdoor areas over using pavers - due to tiled areas lasting longer, requiring less maintenance and being similar in overall cost to paving.

Laying tiles in patterns (otherwise known as texturing) like "herringbone" has become more popular as New Zealanders look to the great houses of Europe for inspiration, and people are now starting to realise that terracotta tiles laid on a solid concrete base will still look good in several hundred years.

Middle Earth Tiles, who produce over 15 different terracotta tile colours - used indoors and outdoors - have discovered that while the classic red terracotta colours are popular for older properties, for a modern look people are more interested in light brown and grey colours like Doeskin and Pompeii.



Some of the most popular tile colours at Middle Earth are:

Terracotta - This popular traditional red hued Mediterranean colour is warm and welcoming. It is the colour of the earth.

Gunmetal - A deep rich earthy brown coloured tile. Combines well with natural materials and textures like jute, hessian, natural stone and wood.

Doeskin - a light yellowish brown colour, which blends easily with modern architectural trends. It is a warm and welcoming colour without being overpowering.

Pompeii - Light grey coloured terracotta. Ultra-modern and designed to match almost any surrounding.

MAINTAINING & CLEANING TILES

No matter what product you eventually decide on be it stone, ceramic, porcelain or terracotta you will need to seal the area once you are done. The rule of thumb when it comes to sealing tiles is that if doesn't have a glaze it needs to be sealed. The best time to do this is after the tiles are laid as then you can seal the grout joints too. To keep the tiles looking their best it is advisable to seals tiles around a barbeque area with an oil-resistant sealer.

Cleaning tiles outside is relatively easy. Day-to-day the wind and the rain will wash the tiles, and a hose down or stiff yard broom will clean up any stubborn dirt. ■

Information and images courtesy of Middle Earth Tiles & Design, Auckland. For more information phone (09) 523 4080 or visit the website www.middle-earth-tiles.com