



BATH

By Andrea E. McHugh



Tile *with style*

With the invasion of home improvement super-centers and the popularity of television decorating shows, custom-designed, one-of-a-kind rooms are in demand more than ever. Using decorative tile is a way to represent your personal taste in any room, not just in the kitchen and bath. Inspiring design ideas can be discovered almost anywhere: on a trip to Europe, in a fancy showroom or by drawing upon your own hobbies.

Island living and the history of the sea are popular décor themes in Newport County. Mermaids, sea nymphs, fish, a compass rose, wave silhouettes, lobsters and sailboats are popular picks when creating a nautical motif. Used in a mosaic or as an accent on countertops, back-

splashes or tables, custom tile will add personality, beauty and an upscale look to your space. "Custom and handpainted tile can be expensive," says Patty Duke, staff designer at Newport Tile & Marble in Middletown. "You don't have to use a lot of these specialty tiles in a space," she explains. "Your placement of the accent tile is key, and using less expensive stock or border tile will be easier on your budget."

An inspiring international flair can incorporate blue and white Delftware tiles from Holland for a clean, classic kitchen. Capture the aura of the French countryside by installing Provencal-inspired tile with a romantic, rustic feel, sure to rouse any homeowner to master the art of French cooking. Richly-hued tile adorned with tomatoes, grapes and olives can give a kitchen the old-world ambiance of Tuscany.

To literally add your own touch to a room and guarantee the ultimate in custom tile, consider making your own. "Sometimes people paint just a few accent tiles, while others establish a pattern they

From the smallest backsplash to a spectacular master bath, decorative tile can be artistic and daring or just add that subtle, personal touch.

will use throughout a room," says Meredith Collins of the Clayroom in Portsmouth. Collins provides standard four-inch or six-inch tiles, a palette of paint colors and a bevy of style ideas. She says the best thing about painting your own tile is that anyone can do it. "Whether you're working on a simple design idea or looking to create a colorful border," says Collins, "there is a

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Facing Page // Top, a mural image tile displaying a Jan Armor photo, available at Weatherly Tile & Stone Inc., Portsmouth // Shower design using accent tile by Artworks available at Newport Tile & Marble, Middletown



Jan Armor photo / Weatherly Tile & Stone, Inc.

real pride in creating the tile yourself." The Clayroom does the firing and glazing, and from there the tile is ready to be installed.

Interior designers occasionally appoint artists to paint tile for their clients, bringing any vision to life. Commissioning an artist to produce hand-painted ceramics for a specific design may sound like a luxury reserved for those with carte blanche budgets, but that is not always the case. Collins recently assisted an artist and designer duo as they fashioned a collection of hand-painted tile with traditional Nantucket baskets overflowing with striking blue hydrangeas.

If you have the perfect image in mind, but cannot find the exact tile you are looking for, do not despair. "If you took a photo from the back of a boat of Nantucket Harbor, I can make a custom mural from the photo on tile," says Gaye Weatherly of Weatherly Tile & Stone in Portsmouth. Treasured photo images add a personal, detailed accent to any kitchen or bath. "I have a customer who summers locally but lives in France," says Weatherly. "I created a tile mural from their favorite photograph of trees that the customer loved."

Patty Duke has been working with tile for many years, and suggests that homeowners consult a professional

designer when taking on a challenging renovation or new construction. With an ample supply of vendors, home improvement centers, specialty shops and click-and-buy options on the Internet, choosing what kind of tile you want can be overwhelming. What color, style or finish will work best in the space? Should you use commercial-grade tile or natural stone? Another consideration is calculating the amount of tile you will need and accounting for border tiles. The completion date of a project can be delayed if you run out of tile.

These little treasures lend a refined, often artistic touch that so many rooms so desperately need, answering the call when something is missing in the décor. Embrace your creative spirit and choose accent tiles to turn your once-ordinary room into a unique, exceptional space all your own. ❖

