

Encaustic tiles: Mosaico hidraulico, Carreaux ciment, Encaustic cement tiles

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April 10, 2008 - [PRLog](#) -- In the mid-19th century, a revolutionary technique was discovered to mass produce tiles without the need for firing to harden them. This new technique involved the use of a hydraulic press and mould to apply a multi-colored pattern. The great advantage of this method was that the tiles could be manufactured in one go. This in contrast to the traditional technique to produce ceramic tiles that involved the application of each color separately and repeated firing -a labor-intensive and time consuming practice.' Hydraulic tiles' were simply left to dry for some weeks after pressing. Hydraulic tiles are 2cm thick and consist of three layers. The top layer is decorated surface, about 4mm thick made from a mixture of white Portland cement, marble powder, fine sand and mineral base pigments. For each color, the pigments were blended with water and placed in the corresponding section of a mold. The second layer, the intermediate layer, is about the same thickness as the top layer and made of a mixture of grey Portland and fine sand; its function was to absorb the excess of water from the top layer. The third layer is approximately 12 mm thick and was made of a mixture of grey Portland cement, regular cement, sand and limestone powder; its porosity made it easy for the tiles to adhere to the floor during installation. The first reference to a manufacturer of this type of tiles is the factory "Butsems Compania" in 1857. At the 1867 Paris Universal Exposition, hydraulic tiles were introduced by Barcelona based Garret, "Rivet Compania". Later on, "the company Orsola", "Sola y compania" was established, which made this type of tiles popular in Barcelona. Thanks to its modern machinery and capacity for mass production. Another prominent manufacturer is Escofet, "Fortuny i compania", founded in 1886, which was soon noted for its innovative, Art Nouveau-style designs, and whose rapid expansion throughout Spain and Latin America contributed to making this type of flooring so popular. The popularity of hydraulic tiles fortuitously coincided with the rise of Modernismo, the local version of Art Nouveau; innovative, bold designs were created that would have been unthinkable in other periods. Many factories had specialized draughtsmen on staff, and occasionally commissioned prominent artists to design tiles. A wide variety of design elements were employed: geometrical shapes, stylized floral, vegetal and other organic motifs, and on rare occasions, animals or human figures. The most widely used colors were shades of: maroon, green, pink, yellow, brown, cream, grey, white and black, although other colors such as red, blue, orange and even purple can be found. The tiles were made in variety of sizes and shapes; the most common is squares measuring 20x20 cm and hexagons with each side measuring 11.5 cm. The designs devised to create a flooring pattern using hydraulic tiles often bear some similarity to carpet design: a central panel consisting of a repeated pattern, framed by tiles with a length-wise repeating design with matching corner pieces. The design would be complemented by an outer border, made of plain tiles in subtle colors, these elaborated design "carpet" were mainly used in the rooms in the main part of the house, such as the entryway, the living room, dining room, bathroom and patios. In the secondary quarters, designs tended to be simpler. The construction boom in the 1960's required building materials to be manufactured more economically and hindered the customary focus on quality. Thus, hydraulic tiles gradually stopped being used. As since older buildings have been torn down or remodeled, many beautiful mosaics have disappeared. So, although still a familiar sight, there is a risk of this elaborated art to vanish. Fortunately, in recent years some construction companies and interior designers have once again shown an interest in hydraulic tiles, viewing it as a beautiful and high-quality alternative to modern industrial products.

For more information:

Saint Tropez Boutique

25 Evelyn way San Francisco, California 94127

(415) 513-5920

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