

## Tiles that are too good to be left in the bathroom

Taking their cues from mosques and palaces, cathedrals and chapter houses, interior designers are adding a glazed gleam to unexpected walls, doors and exteriors

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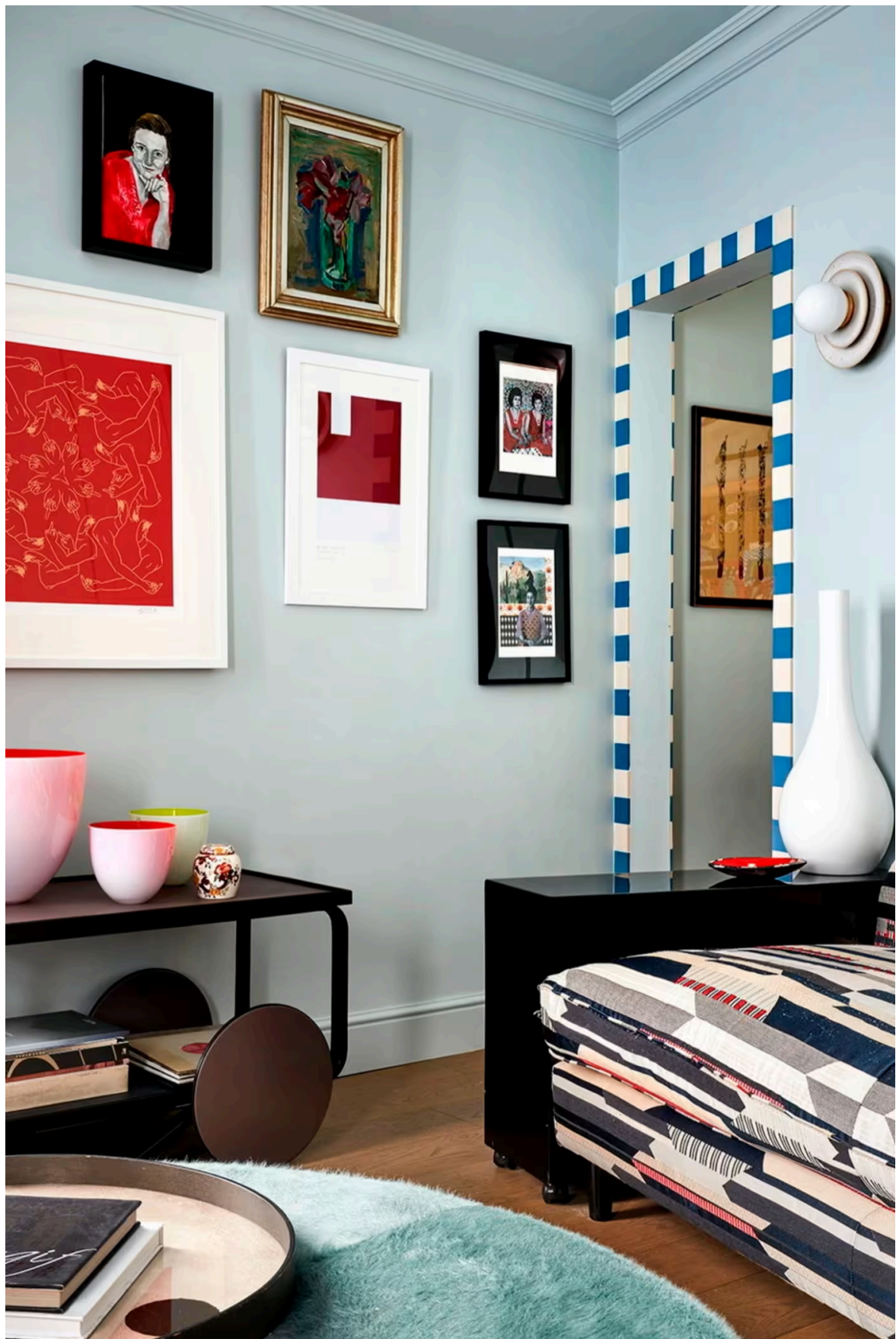
The corner of architect Aida Bratovic's Edwardian home in London has become a magnet for people posing for selfies. For the exterior cladding she used midnight-blue tiles as a nod to the property's past as a shop and post office. The glazed backdrop, both "familiar and unexpected," says Bratovic, has become a local talking point.

Ceramic tiles are increasingly spilling out of bathrooms and kitchens, as [interior](#) designers take their cues from mosques and palaces, cathedrals and chapter houses to add a glazed gleam to doorways, floors, furniture and exteriors. In the 19th century they were seen as practical and hygienic. For the Modernists, glazed surfaces softened the austerity of glass and concrete. Minimalists were less keen. Decorative tiles were replaced by monolithic slabs of grey or beige. For a while, tiles became boring. No longer.

For designer Scott Maddux it is their "intricacy" that appeals. "You can use tiles to break up large expanses in an interesting way." A recent London project featured a column clad in earth-toned tiles, creating "a softened version of Brutalism," he says.



The tiled exterior of Aida Bratovic's home . . . © Simon Brown



... and the interior, where tiles surround a doorway © Simon Brown



For an art collector's study, where the brief was to "be different", interior designer Olivia Outred used chevron-tiled flooring in tutti-frutti hues. Delft-style squares embellish the doorway to designer Angus Buchanan's sitting room. A library recently designed by Nicola Harding is lined with inky-black brick tiles. For a dining nook, Studio Ashby commissioned a bucolic glazed mural by artist Anna Glover, made by British tile manufacturer Balineum.

Balineum founder Sarah Watson emphasises the decorative and architectural possibilities of tiles: "They add depth and movement, like the play of light on water. You don't get that from paint or wallpaper." She encourages clients to use her customisable designs — available with mottled glazes, hand-painted details or lively figures and animals — with "abandon", for stair rises, bars or around doorways.

Petra Palumbo has a similar attitude. Her ceramics, transfer printed in Stoke-on-Trent, can be contrasted or matched with her collection of wallpapers in wobbly candy stripes and florals. "The less orthodox the better," says Palumbo.



Delft-style tiles embellish the doorway in Angus Buchanan's sitting room © Alicia Waite

It's the approach Belgian-born ceramicists Koen Meersman and Kris Scheerlinck, co-founders of Boquita de Cielo, took when they found damaged 19th-century tiling in their former home in Ghent. Instead of "lamenting" their loss, the duo, now based in east London, decided to make their own.



With a background in [architecture](#) and interiors, their 1970s-style murals, tiles and tableaux are designed to add brightness and texture. “It’s not just about decoration, but changing the atmosphere of a space,” says Meersman, citing a project embellished with the fashion-designer client’s hallmark stripe. Another project consisted of 4,000 tiles, all handmade and signed. “They are brothers and sisters. Or distant cousins,” says Scheerlinck of their tiles. “No two are the same.”



Petra Palumbo's tiles can be matched with her wallpapers in candy stripes and florals © Alexander Baxter



Olivia Outred chose chevron-tiled flooring in tutti-frutti hues for this art collector's study



Brent Dzekciorius's interest in architectural ceramics began with a quest to develop materials "with longevity — and a narrative." The brick-shaped tiles — a collaboration with Milanese designers Formafantasma — are glazed using volcanic ash from the foothills of Etna. It took months of experimentation to achieve the warm hues.

Ash is typically used as fertiliser. Dzekciorius, who previously had a career in exhibition design, likes the idea of turning an agricultural staple into an aesthetic material. His ExCinere tiles have been used for columns, planters, a bedhead and a fountain in a garden designed by artist Anthea Hamilton for gallery Studio Voltaire.

In Britain, ceramics production peaked in the 1900s. "Most of the major [pottery] firms like Minton or Burmantofts produced tiles," says Kate Cadman, curator at the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust in Shropshire. They were exported across the world. At the Mysuru Palace in India, says Cadman, a floor is decorated with "glorious" peacock-embellished tiles by Shropshire-based Maw & Co.



Brent Dzekciorius's architectural ceramics are glazed using volcanic ash from the foothills of Etna © Angus Mill Photography

Matthew Raw's furniture draws on his research into those 19th-century production methods. His cabinets and side tables, sold by the New Craftmaker, are clad in handmade tiles. The lustrous tones mimic Victorian glazes that were originally based on lead.

“Victorian tiles were so rich — and juicy. The colours are always changing, drawing your eye,” says Raw, who won a Jerwood Makers prize in 2014 for his tile-clad “imaginary” pub installation. “That’s what I celebrate.”

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