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Quarry Tile:
A beautiful, versatile, enduring workhorse for interiors and exteriors
Quarry tile: a beautiful, versatile, enduring workhorse for interiors and exteriors

Slip resistant, economical and available in a variety of colors, shapes and colors, quarry tile can create beauty and long-term performance in your next project.

By Ron Williamson, Ironrock

Quarry tile, specifically when fired hard at high temperatures, is an excellent choice for outdoor installations. It offers a more versatile selection of colors, patterns and shapes than you may think. It's very durable, and — when left unglazed — has a slip-resistant surface. It's an economical option that has a unique quality which is hard to duplicate.

Of course, quarry tile has become synonymous with commercial kitchens. Heat, cold, grease, oil, heavy traffic, and water build-up are all part of the commercial kitchen environment. Quarry tile effectively stands up to these conditions.
The same combination of features and benefits that make it the right choice for commercial kitchens makes quarry tile a good option for outdoor applications where sure footing and long wear are primary concerns.

Quarry tile is extruded (usually in 1/2" thickness) and can be fired to temperatures in excess of 2,000°F Fahrenheit. Why does extrusion make such a difference? Material pushed through a die under pressure — extrusion — creates a tile body that is very densely compacted with a tight die-skin surface that reduces staining and surface porosity. Because it's extruded, quarry tile is thicker than most other tile, giving it added strength.

The slightly rough surface of unglazed extruded quarry tile makes it one of the most naturally slip-resistant ceramic tiles available. Also, the extrusion die normally produces a ribbed back that offers excellent adhesion for thin-set mortar. The dense, extruded body is vitreous — with less than 3% absorption — which makes quarry tile perfect for outdoor use in freeze-thaw climates.

**Roots in brick making**

Unglazed quarry tile production has its "roots" in the brick-making industry and uses raw material very similar to that used in the manufacture of brick products. “Natural” and “durable” are the words best used to describe hard-fired high-quality quarry tiles. The simple earth tones associated with unglazed quarry tile come from the choice of raw materials put into the "mix" to create the tile. Quarry tiles with a base of shale generally have a red or brown color. Tiles with a base of clay generally have a gray or beige color.
But quarry tile is not limited to one simple color and size. A large variety of colors, sizes and even textures are available to create interesting patterns and borders with a very natural look. When combined with other organic materials, quarry tile can be part of a warm and inviting setting.

Some quarry tile is produced with a shade variation from tile to tile. This classic architectural look (sometimes known as flashing) is achieved through controlling the flow of oxygen and gases in the kiln.

**Installation considerations**

When installing hard-fired quarry tile outdoors there are additional considerations that should be kept in mind, much the same as for any outdoor tile installation.

1. Be sure you are installing over a proper substrate. For outdoor installations this will likely consist of a cement slab that is dry, clean, firm, flat, and properly prepared. For best results the concrete should be a minimum of 5" thick and reinforced.

2. When tiling over a cement slab, check the concrete to see if it has been treated, painted or sealed. If so, the sealer or paint will need to be removed to ensure a strong bond. Once the surface is free of any sealers, clean the concrete using a stiff bristle brush and a solution of concrete cleaner and warm water.

3. Repair any cracks in the concrete before proceeding with the installation. A concrete slab that shows large cracking may not be an acceptable substrate.

4. A slight grade may need to be incorporated into the surface to keep water from pooling and to allow for proper drainage. A crack-isolation membrane is recommended. Also, be aware of the extrusion process creates a strong, thick, tile body that is very densely compacted with a tight die-skin surface that reduces staining and surface porosity.
the need for movement joints throughout the installation and where the installation abuts a structure.

5. Use a good quality wet saw with enough power to cut through thick, dense tile.

6. Use proper setting materials for outdoor applications; check with the manufacturer. When installing in hot weather, drying times will be accelerated.

7. Hard-fired unglazed quarry tile does not need to be sealed after installation. But for convenience and added protection both the tile and grout may be sealed with a water-based penetrating sealer. Do not use any surface-type sealers as they may adversely affect the characteristics of the quarry tile surface.


Many areas of the home – indoors and out – will benefit from the durability, slip-resistance and easy maintenance of hard-fired unglazed quarry tile. Mudrooms, sunrooms, walkways, patios, pool surrounds, garage floors and walls, entryways and laundry rooms are all good candidates.

When considering what floor covering – and more specifically what ceramic tile – will be the right choice for your next project, consider the ceramic tile that will give you great value, durability, and slip resistance: unglazed hard-fired quarry tile.

Ironrock (www.ironrock.com) has been a leader in providing quality ceramic products since the inception of the company in the late 1800s. This fifth-generation, family-owned company manufactures Metropolitan Ceramics® quarry tile and METROBRICK® architectural thin brick in its Canton, Ohio-based facility.

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