

HANDMADE ZELLIGE

INSTALLATION + MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES

ABOUT ZELLIGE

Nothing embodies the sentiment of “perfectly imperfect” like Moroccan zellige, which means “little polished stone” in Arabic. This traditional, hand-cut tile is made from natural clay traditionally from the Fez region of Morocco. The zellige technique of glazing and then cutting the tiles dates from the 10th century. Zellige has long been admired for its rich and varied colors and the slight imperfections inherent to the handmade production and materials. These are handmade tiles and these “imperfections” are why they have adorned palace walls for centuries and why their appeal endures today. The unique aspects of each tile are what make them stand-out beauties and in a mass-produced world, they remind us why unique and handmade products are covetable.

HOW ZELLIGE TILES ARE MADE

Filtered clay is pressed and then cut into slabs. These are air dried, trimmed, and then fired in a kiln, becoming what is called biscuit. Glaze is then applied to the biscuit and the tiles are fired a second time. Next the master cutters, hand cut the tiles into various shapes using a chisel.

INSTALLATION STEPS

When your zellige order arrives, inspect the tiles. Expect to find color variation (from the glazes) and some chipping (from the hand chiseling) as well as crazing, fine cracking and irregularity in the tiles’ surface.

- Unbox and blend tiles to achieve an appealing color mix. Even within a single color, expect delightful variation.
- Soak each tile in water for 1-2 minutes.
- Prep your installation surface, ensuring that it is level, waterproofed (if installing in a wet area), and free of any dust.
- Apply a layer of adhesive to the installation surface.
- Apply a layer of adhesive to the back of each tile, a technique called “butter backing”.
- Set the tiles into the wall adhesive one at a time.
- Use wedge spacers between the tiles, especially important due to the uneven edges of zellige tiles.
- Zellige tiles should be laid as close together as possible, “butt jointed,” without a grout joint.
- To cut the tiles, use a tile cutter or wet saw fitted with a diamond blade.
- Grout glazed tiles with Mapei Ultracolor Plus FA; for unglazed tiles, grout with Mapei Flexcolor CQ. The grout will also fill any pits, chips and cracks on the tile surface.
- Once grouting is complete, use a damp, clean cloth to clean excess grout and grout film.

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INSTALLATION NOTES

If installing in wet areas like shower floors or pools, the surface on which the tiles are to be installed must be waterproofed. To affix the tiles, use adhesive cement and grout fit the tiles so that the grout can be sealed against moisture absorption. Otherwise, glazed zellige tiles do not need to be sealed.

Unglazed tiles, which are porous, should be sealed with a penetrating sealant such as Miracle Sealant's Porous Plus to protect the tiles. The sealing should be done prior to grouting and again after the grout has been applied.

Zellige can be installed on floors, walls, in wet areas like shower rooms and pools, and in exterior applications like patios and balconies.

WHERE TO INSTALL (& NOT TO INSTALL) ZELLIGE

Avoid installing zellige outside in zones with freeze-thaw conditions. Avoid installing zellige tiles on high-traffic floors where they will be exposed to heavy impact as in a garage or driveway.

popham design is not responsible for tiles once installed.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCTS

Grout – Mapei Ultracolor Plus FA (for glazed tiles)
Mapei Flexcolor CQ (for unglazed tiles)
Sealant – Miracle Sealant's Porous Plus (for unglazed tiles)

For everyday cleaning, use mild soap and water.