

style homewares

know&tell

Get a tile smile

A few handy hints can help you turn your floors from drab to fab.



I need to replace the vinyl floor in my kitchen and hubby wants tiles. Won't they be too cold and slippery for a kitchen floor?
Floor tiles get a bad rap for being slippery with many people preferring timber floorboards or vinyl to the hard practicality of tiles. Ceramic tiles are the most durable choice for a kitchen floor but quarry tiles like terracotta or slate can be warm underfoot, especially if they are in a room that has plenty of natural sunlight to heat them up. The best thing about tiles is that they are a cinch to clean with either a quick sweep or mop. The bad thing about floor tiles is that if you drop your crockery while doing the dishes, you will smash your plates and could chip the tiles. Oh, and tiles often aren't great for acoustics.

The ugliest tile splashback resides in my kitchen - can I tile over the top to improve it?
Tiling over an already tiled surface is definitely doable but is like applying a new layer of foundation to your face when you haven't washed off the old lot. It's risky. Tiles need a stable, level surface and something solid to adhere to. Any wobbles or rough bits will make tiles look a tad quaky and ick. Preliminary setting out of tiles is just as important as the way they are laid and grouted. A splashback is an easy thing to tile over as, unlike a floor, it won't have to take heavy foot traffic or pressure, which risks making the tiles pop off or crack. You can try tiling a splashback yourself but getting the measurements, alignment and grouting right takes some practice and unless you have the time, it's best to invest in a professional.

I love the new large tiles for bathrooms but my builder says they are a stupid choice. What do I do - go for aesthetics or follow the builder's advice?
Tiles larger than 600 millimetres x 600 millimetres are certainly a

challenge for tilers to lay on a floor. They work well on walls, especially when they are level and straight but a bathroom floor needs to "fall" to a drain to make sure the water doesn't sit on the floor and damage the tiling. The problem with large tiles is that they often need a diagonal slice to "fall" towards a drain, thereby ruining the lovely large tile look. If you do want to take the leap with a huge floor tile, make sure you use a tiler who is experienced and can level the floor correctly. The great advantage of large tiles is that the bigger they are, the larger the room will look. Experienced tilers know all kinds of tricks to give the illusion of space, so ask them what they think is best and judge for yourself whether you think they are talking sense. Remember, builders want the least hassle for the best price and are usually trying to talk you into simple solutions to make their job easier. But they aren't talking trite, either - large tiles are more difficult to lay but a great tiler can do it.

I have a cracked tile in my kitchen floor - can I replace it myself?
That's like asking whether you can replace the broken brick in a wall or the cracked pipe in the bathroom. We can all do the DIY jobs we put our mind to but do you really want to do this yourself? It's hard work to remove the tile and lay a new one in its place without it looking like you've done a DIY job. I would suggest calling in a professional if you want the repair to look seamless. If you're happy for it to look a tad botched, then give the job a go. Just be warned not to do more damage trying to save money than it will cost you to repair.

Follow Alex on Twitter at: twitter.com/lexybrooks

Font of inspiration

The word is that letters and numbers are big news in decorating, writes **Alexia Biggs**.



365 diary, \$29.95, Kikki K. For nearest store phone (03) 9645 6346, kikki-k.com.



You and Me unsharpened 200mm x 240mm print, \$140. Castle and Things, castleandthings.com.au.

style tip

Emerging sunny yellow will add a zing to walls and this print would look perfect on a mantel with all manner of groups of accessories in the same hue.



Noughts and Crosses game, \$60, Mediterranean Markets. For stockists phone (03) 9427 1988.



Magazine rack, \$65, Aero Plus, 9380 8856, aeroplus.com.au.



Numbers cutout storage, \$66, Aero Design, 9380 8856, aerodesign.com.

"What a lovely tote, \$33, Materialistic, materialistic.com.

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