

Prep and tiling advice for laying a new reproduction period floor

Prep:-

The basis for tiling a new period floor is in all cases to start with a flat, level & smooth floor using a good quality levelling compound. **Leveller should be the final coating on the floor prior to tiling**, not Schluter ditra matting or other types of overlay materials. For concrete the floor should always be free of dust, solid and primed with an SBR primer then levelled. If the floor is timber make sure it is solid, all loose boards secured and any rotten boards replaced and then use cement fibre boards such as Hardie backer boards (1200x800x6mm) to overlay the timber floor laid at right angles. The boards bedded on tile adhesive spread over the timber floor then fixed down with around 30 screws per board - joints or gaps filled with adhesive and taped with alkali resistant joint tape. After boarding the timber floor apply a layer of levelling compound over the boarded floor and allow to dry. Do not cut corners, use good quality flexible leveller.

Making sure the floor is flat & smooth is very important. If the floor is not perfectly flat your joints will have to vary with the undulations of the floor or the tiler will need to vary the bed of adhesive under the tiles making joint widths vary even more and the tiling will not be perfectly flat when finished. A mosaic trowel with 4 or 5 mm notches is ideal for tiling a period floor.

Planning:-

Draw a centre line down the main floor and a few horizontal lines at 90 degrees to that at strategic places, use the middle of the room or if you have a scale drawing from us use that as a rough guide as to where the pattern will be in relation to the rooms walls / edges to indicate where some guidelines should be drawn. Start by loose laying sections of pattern and border to see what joints need to be used to make everything line up as it should. It may be necessary to loose lay a few modules/rows of the pattern tiles and a run of border across the top and down one side to see how the tiles will need to be spaced apart to make everything line up. The border pieces may not meet up correctly when getting to the end of a run or going round a corner as the number of pieces in the length of border does not necessarily correspond with full tiles in the pattern at every given length – this is normal. Loose laying and deciding how best to lay the tiles may take some time & trial and error using different joint widths in different triangles and squares until you can make things line up as they should. The joints will often be different between the pattern and border components (you may have 1mm joints in the border pieces but 2mm in the pattern), grout joints will not necessarily be joints that are "off the shelf" spacer sizes either, the use of cardboard or even by eye may be necessary. Where 4 triangles make up the space of a square in a design the joints between the triangles may be 1 mm each but the joints between the larger squares may be 2 mm - this is normal. Once you know what joints to use then mark some more guidelines on the floor to indicate where the pattern and border should be at different points across the floor to keep the tiling "on track" and straight. The tiles do vary in size - you inherently have lots of batches of tiles to lay at the same time - something that normally does not happen with ordinary tiles where it is just one sized / colour tile repeating. The different shaped tiles will all be made on different dates and the size will fluctuate slightly as all tiles do due to kiln temperatures, humidity and other technical reasons. This normal variation between batches / tiles is amplified because the grout joints are so small and you have so many tiles to lay in any given space.

If you need to lengthen the border just open up the joints in the border pieces by a small amount between each tile, if you need to shorten the border close the grout joints up a little. It may be a case of the joints being 3mm to make up the difference in border length you need to achieve. If triangles are touching the squares in the border move the two rows of triangles away from the centre row of squares (diamonds) slightly. With decorative borders you may need to cut some off the borders at either end of the run of borders, or reduce the size of the centre border within a run. Or the pattern tiles joints may need to be enlarged or reduced as well as the border pieces or instead of them. The thing is all this deciding what to do

should be done and decided at loose lay stage before mixing any adhesive not at the tiling stage, then the tiling is a case of laying the tiles with the joints you have found you need to use. It may be that you draw a line for each row of tiles so the floor may end up with lots and lots of guidelines drawn on it. This is all time consuming and needs a lot of patience which is why these floors take a long time to lay, putting the time in at this stage makes the job so much easier later on.

Tiling:-

Now you have determined the joint widths and positions of the pattern and border within the room you can start to tile, spread small amounts of adhesive at a time and tile the pattern fully. The pattern should all be tiled before any border is laid so you end up with a rectangle of pattern tiled within the guidelines you drew on the floor. Then the border is laid around the pattern and the plain outer most fill is cut to fit the gap left between the skirting boards and the border. The fill is usually supplied as full 151x151mm square tiles so they can be cut down to fit whatever sized gap you have left - normally between 40 and 120 mm. When tiling work cleanly and wipe adhesive off the tiles – particularly light coloured tiles. Once the tiles are all set, clean them thoroughly and allow them to dry then apply a coat of sealer and allow it to dry. Once sealed the grouting can commence using a mid-Grey coloured grout. Clean the grout off the tiles once finished and make sure the tiles are perfectly clean before applying a second / final coat of sealer. If you have grout residue on the tiles then clean the tiles with LTP Grout stain remover, rinse & dry before applying the second sealer coat.

All the tilers I work with are tiling collectively lots of floors every month and they tile all types of designs, some very complex, some simpler, small floors and large ones but the process is always as I have explained and they all do it the same way with great results and no headaches. I can't stress enough that it is the time taken to decide the positioning of the pattern and border as well as the correct grout joints at the start of the job that will make the process run smoothly and give the best result at the end.

