

Zellige installation and maintenance

Definition, installation steps, wet areas, exterior use and maintenance

ZELLIGE, DEFINITION

Zellige is a ceramic tile made by hand from light-coloured, unrefined natural clay from the Fez region of Morocco. The clay is kneaded with water, shaped by hand, air-dried and then fired for an extended period at 1000 °C to turn it into a strong clay body. This body is then coated with glazes (vitreous compounds and mineral pigments) in a wide range of semi-transparent, pearlescent, metallic/volcanic or opaque shades, which are melted and vitrified during a second firing at 1000 °C in a kiln with a controlled firing cycle. The final manufacturing step is cutting the glazed pieces into a wide variety of shapes and sizes.

Zellige is characterized by irregularities in its surface, tone, flatness, thickness, sheen, colour and glaze depth. Every Zellige tile is unique.

INSTALLATION STEPS

01 Mix the tiles

Before installation

Open several boxes and mix the tiles before bonding them to create a random, harmonious composition representative of all the shades and tones of the selected colour.

02 Prepare the substrate

Sound, level substrate · layout planning

The substrate must be sound, clean, waterproofed and level before installing Zellige.

It is recommended to plan the layout, especially for complex formats and panels.

03 Apply adhesive

Flexible ceramic tile adhesive or construction silicone

Apply adhesive evenly to both the substrate and the back of the tiles (double application). Zellige can also be installed using construction silicone.

04 Position the tiles

Hand installation

Loose tiles: position the tiles leaving a narrow gap. Adjust each tile within the overall composition to achieve a harmonious result. Complex formats may require additional adjustments.

Pre-positioned panels: as with individual tiles, variations in size and shape are normal. Position each panel, adjusting the joint spacing and adhesive thickness.

Flexible panels: once the panel is firmly fixed, heat the surface with a heat gun or hair dryer so the adhesive film can be removed easily without damaging the glaze.

05 Cut

Water-cooled diamond blade · professional safety rules

Zellige is easy to cut, including on a bevel. As with any tile or mineral material, cutting must be carried out with a machine fitted with a rotating diamond blade and water feed to eliminate dust. Follow applicable rules for operator protection and waste management.

06 Grout

Very fluid grout · flexible spatula

Once the adhesive is dry and the tiles are firmly fixed, spread the grout with a flexible spatula, working it thoroughly into the irregular gaps between the tiles.

07 Clean and finish

Damp sponge · dry cloth

After the grout has dried briefly, carefully remove the excess with a damp sponge. Manually remove any remaining grout from the irregularities of the tiles.

Once the surface is dry, remove the white residue with a cloth.

SURFACES IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH WATER

Swimming pools, showers (trays, floors and walls), fountains: make sure the substrate is waterproofed because, regardless of the type of tile installed, water can seep through the joints.

As with any glazed tile covering, a Zellige finish does not provide waterproofing on its own: the waterproofing of the wall substrate or slab is what ensures the integrity of the installation.

FLOOR INSTALLATION

Zellige has traditionally been used on floors. Natural variations in flatness and thickness create a slightly uneven surface, which can provide additional grip but may also leave some tile edges more exposed to impact. Minor chipping may occur over time.

For floor installations, leave a grout joint of approximately 1–3 mm, depending on the installation, to help accommodate movement.

EXTERIOR INSTALLATION

Zellige is a glazed ceramic: it is unaffected by sunlight or UV. The quality of the substrate and installation, using an adhesive and grout suitable for exterior use, ensures durability against thermal shock (expansion and contraction of the substrate).

Weather resistance depends on the watertightness of the grout joints and the quality of the bond between the tiles and substrate, which prevent water from penetrating beneath the tiles.

Zellige is commonly used outdoors in mild climates, but we do not recommend installation in areas subject to freezing. Water that may accumulate beneath the tiles and in installation irregularities expands when frozen and can eventually cause the tiles to come loose.

MAINTENANCE

Zellige tiles are cleaned like any other glazed tile.

Note: these recommendations supplement the technical data sheets provided by adhesive and grout manufacturers, which must still be followed. Good trade practice and all applicable professional and regulatory installation requirements must be observed.

For tile characteristics and test results, see the Zellige tile technical data sheet.