



THE FIX

INTERIORS

# BENEFIT OF THE GROUT

Picasso, Miró and Gaudí turned tiles into masterpieces. Now a new generation of creatives are reclaiming them once again. By Jackie Daly



Above: Corrispondenza tiles by Dimore Studio for Ceramica Bardelli, £435 for a 30-piece set, from Artemest. Below: Famed Khaliq engineered 3D wood tiles, from £1,595 per sq m



Folded tile by Raw Edges for Mafino, from £108 per sq m, from Tile Expert

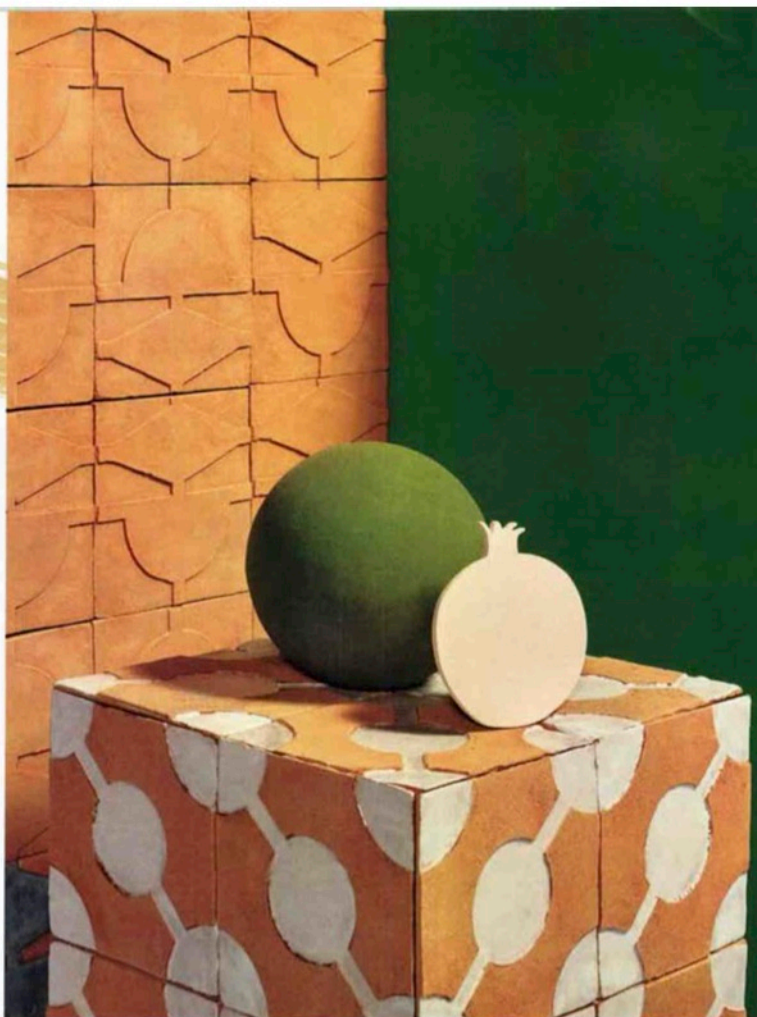
Some of the most striking examples of public art in cities around the world explore the medium of tiles. Several bring life and colour to subterranean spaces: from pop art pioneer Eduardo Paolozzi's mosaic murals on the London Underground (glorious technicolour interpretations of the cityscape completed in 1986) to artist Elizabeth Murray's kaleidoscopic *Blooming* mural (1996) and Chuck Close's photorealistic *Subway Portraits* (2017), which were installed on New York's subway. Theirs, like much public art, is a postmodern two-fingered salute to sterile urban planning, and a means of bringing art to the masses.

Antoni Gaudí, the father of Catalan modernism, explored *trencadis* (a technique used to cover abstract forms with mosaics) to transform parts of Barcelona into his own works of art, his buildings an organic ode to the asymmetry of the natural world. The surrealist painter, sculptor and ceramicist Joan Miró, who was born in the same city, also took his art to the streets, and his colourful abstract *Pla de l'Os* mosaic can still be seen on the pavement at the centre of La Rambla.

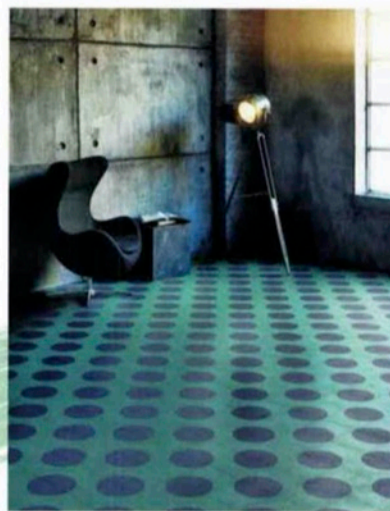
Like Miró, Pablo Picasso was a keen ceramicist, experimenting with earthenware, specifically terracotta, to create painted plaques following his visit to the Madoura Pottery Studio in southern France in 1946. Both artists also shared common ground in creating public artworks destined for Chicago – now a mecca for urban art where the most evocative are to be found in the city's "The Loop" district. Although Miró and Picasso's offerings did not feature tiles, Chicago is a metropolis bursting with bright, colourful mosaics, most notably Marc Chagall's *Four Seasons* at the Chase Tower Plaza. Unveiled in 1974 (when the artist was 87), it was the last of over 20 public-art mosaics produced by Chagall, and its surrealist motifs reflect key themes of his work. "The seasons represent human life, both physical and spiritual, at its different ages," he stated.

Contemporary mosaic artists working today include French street-artist Invader (who has used the pavements of cities worldwide as a canvas for his mosaics of Space Invaders and other video-game icons) and Philadelphia-based Isaiah Zagar, the mind behind the city's *Magic Garden*, an installation where the tiles are inlaid with poetry, quotes and the names of artists who have inspired him, as well as portraits. Fellow American Sonia King views mosaics as "opening a creative dialogue between the artist and the viewer. A dialogue guided by the interplay of light and texture."

There are several UK-based artists of note too, not least Peter R Mason, Emma Biggs, Ed Chapman and Gary Drostle. The latter, whose public works include *Entwined Histories*, a twisting organic sculpture created to celebrate the immigrant communities of Poplar in east London, cites Italian artist Marco Bravura's tesserae-clad works as a revelation, in particular, his undulating *Ardea Purpurea* fountain (1999) in Beirut, Lebanon. Bravura, born in Ravenna (the capital of Byzantine mosaics), has been a flagbearer for the artform, displaying works at the Venice Art Biennale and the Moscow Biennale in 2011. But, in truth, this is a small, select group. Some of its number describe themselves as architectural artists, while on a more general level,



Above: Cristina Celestino's *Labyrinth* (cotto and glaze) designs from the *Giardino all'Italiana* collection by Fornace Briani, €380 per sq m, fornacebriani.it. Right: *Delizie* tile by Cristina Celestino for Fornace Briani, from €10 per piece



Above: Dot cement tiles from the *Mahdavi* tile collection by India Mahdavi for Bisazza, £159.20 per sq m, from Yorkshire Design Associates

ILLUSTRATIONS WILLIAM LUCAS