

Revival of **CLAY** QUARRY TILES

Alex Patrick-Smith, Managing Director of **Ketley Brick**, details how clay quarry tiles are making a comeback with their timeless aesthetic and practical benefits

Clay paving materials of various types have been a feature of British homes and gardens for centuries. Quarry tiles in particular have been favoured for their naturally warm appearance, low-maintenance and versatility, which makes them suitable for hallways, kitchens, living areas as well as conservatories, patios and outdoor areas.

Timeless aesthetic appeal

Quarry tiles are made from natural clay and

shale, which has been processed, dried and fired - not 'quarried' from solid slabs as the name might suggest. They were originally made by hand with charming irregularities, and natural colours, which came from the characteristics of the local clay and temperature in the kiln when fired. With the advent of mechanisation, pressed and extruded quarry tiles known for their durability were produced in volume and often laid in utilitarian heavy-duty areas or rustic environments such as kitchens.

However, with the Victorian penchant for ornate geometric floor designs, quarry tiles soon

became a classic feature of 19th century homes. These elaborate decorative designs eventually fell out of fashion and were often covered over in the 1960s and 70s, however old quarry tile floors are now being rediscovered, lovingly restored, and treasured by home owners.

Quarry tiles in the modern home

Thanks to the modern trend for all things organic and natural, the use of traditional style quarry tiles in new and self-build homes is growing in popularity. Despite the variety of colours available, the most popular tones are



still reds through to multi browns and earth shades, which give a warm rustic and Mediterranean feel (as well as being the optimal colour for hiding stains), whereas cooler grey and blue tones tend to be better suited to modern styled homes.

Square quarry tiles are still widely used but the availability of different sizes and formats are offering self-builders much greater scope to create eye-catching laying patterns, such as chevrons or the popular herringbone designs. Large format tiles are often specified to cover spacious contemporary open plan surfaces, whereas smaller quarry tiles have a homely and vintage appeal, which suits more compact spaces.

As architects design homes with more flexible living areas, we are seeing the use of different patterns and configurations of quarry tiles to subtly divide areas into distinct sections or alternatively to create a flow between interior spaces so that the combined area seems much larger. As quarry tiles perform equally well both inside and outside, they can be used to help a traditional indoor living area merge into an outdoor shaded courtyard, a modern urban patio or an open terrace, making it a natural extension to the home.

Practical benefits and considerations

Durability, low maintenance and good slip resistance is critical for any indoor or outdoor floor surface, particularly where there is heavy footfall and constant wear and tear. As quarry tiles are fired at temperatures of over 1130 degrees over a long duration, they are essentially vitreous or 'glass like' which means that they are highly durable, have a low absorption rate and are usually frost resistant.

For optimum performance, it is advisable to choose quarry tiles that have less than 3% water absorption, as this is a key characteristic governing frost resistance. For complete reassurance that your quarry tiles are safe in wet and potentially slippery conditions, they should comply with R11 and category C of BS EN 14411:2012, which is the highest rating for slip resistance in wet barefoot tests.

As quarry tiles are not glazed and are less absorbent than Terracotta, they do not generally need to be sealed unless they are fitted in areas which are at particular risk from water stains or spills of acids, alkalis, oils, grease or fat; in fact, care should be taken as sealing can potentially affect the tone and finish of some quarry tiles. Once laid, the unsealed quarry tiles are then generally easy to keep clean by regular sweeping or simply washing with warm water with a non-soapy detergent. Furthermore, as they are made



from clay, a material that will heat quickly and hold the warmth, they work well with modern under floor heating systems.

An increasingly important consideration for many self-builders and architects these days is the specification of healthy materials without Volatile Organic Compounds, (VOC), which are toxic to both the environment as well as to

people. As unsealed quarry tiles are made from natural clay, they do not contain any VOCs and can help you create of a healthy home.

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Image credit: Ruth Butler Architects