

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a vibrant, multi-colored floral patterned jacket, is shown from the side. She is holding a clear, circular object, possibly a lens or a piece of glass, against a wall. The wall is covered in a repeating pattern of light blue, circular tiles or tiles with a circular pattern. The overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting an outdoor or well-lit indoor setting.

clé

tips to guide
good grout

about grout: grout, what is it good for?

absolutely everything, say it again

who's in charge of your installation?

hint: it's your installer

grout 101

fun facts and good to knows

choosing the right grout joint size

find out what it depends on

choosing grout color

some advice

do you need grout at all?

young hearts run free

sealing and maintenance

forever, forever ever? forever ever?



featuring: clé guild new california in mallow / design: cathie hong / photo: margaret austin



grout, what is it good for?

absolutely everything, say it again

one of the most frequently asked questions at clé is "which grout should i use with my tile?"

the grout selection process for any tile is so much more than selecting the most complementary color.

grout is a key component to a tile installation that can last generations, affecting (even shaping) the ultimate look and finish of your tile project. grout is a serious matter.

but why do we even need grout at all?

when installing tile, particularly handmade tile like ours, gaps will form between individual tiles. these gaps are called joints, and in the vast majority of situations, they require fill — otherwise known as grout.

grout allows these joints to be filled with the correct color and material that will solidify the surface not just visually, but also physically, by preventing debris build-up and the settling of your installation that can occur over time. because of this, grout is a necessary step to finishing your tile installation.

the more you know: grout fills joints to ensure your tile installation lasts for the life of your project.

our grout guidelines do not tell you what you should use. they only tell you what your project professionals will be deciding upon when helping you make your grout selection. this guide was only created to help inform you about which grouts are available, how they are made, and general guidelines for grout selection.



who's in charge of your grout installation?

hint: it's your installer

if your installer is asking you what grout they should use, they do not have enough experience to install your clé tiles.

with so many colors and types of grouts to choose from along with the correct grout joint size for your project, your selection must be the responsibility of the professionals you have hired to install your tiles.

the right grout can only be decided upon by your project's professional team (designer, architect, and tile contractor).

your successful clé installation will heavily depend on the installer's experience with non-uniform, artisan tiles. a good tile installer will always know everything there is to know about grout without requiring that their clients provide grout information for them. your installer should be helping to guide you toward the correct grout — not the other way around.

and how will you know that the correct grout has been selected for your project?

you will know you have an expert installer because they will create several grout boards, using your tiles, that show selected options for grout colors, joint size, and application.

you and your design team can also use the grout boards to see your tile and grout selection together in situ. take some time to make sure you are happy with the effect in real time (and life); how does it look with the lights on, off, with morning light, or damp — if you're installing in a bathroom or elsewhere that might get wet.

this critical grout selection work cannot be done after your tiles are installed! grout sample mock-ups created long before you start your project can help you avoid costly and irreversible failures.

featuring: foundry flats in sand cast / design / photo: zio & sons



grout 101

fun facts and good to knows

at its most basic, grout fills the joints between individual tiles, helps the installation settle properly, prevents shifting, and helps prevent debris, water, and other substances from entering the gaps between tiles. generally it is applied over the top of installed tiles and is wiped away to only fill the joints.

there are two main types of grout, and the one you use depends on the installation.

cementitious grouts are made from a mixture of cement, sand, and water, with cement acting as the binding agent allowing the paste to fill tile joints and dry to a hardened surface. they can be “unsanded” or “sanded” when sand is

added to help the grout to fill and provide more stability for larger joints.

chemical grouts are formulated to address particular issues, such as water absorption and long curing times. two main chemical grouts are colorfast grouts (which use different fillers such as kevlar® and quartz particles to create a grout with long lasting color) and epoxy grouts. some are designed to reduce water absorption or shorten curing times, although they generally have a more plastic-y looking finish.

your installation and design teams will have the best information about which of these options is the best for your project.





choosing the right grout joint size

find out what it depends on

some tiles (such as cement, stone, or zellige) can have thinner gaps because they're formed by cutting smaller tiles from larger material, so they'll have more uniform sides.

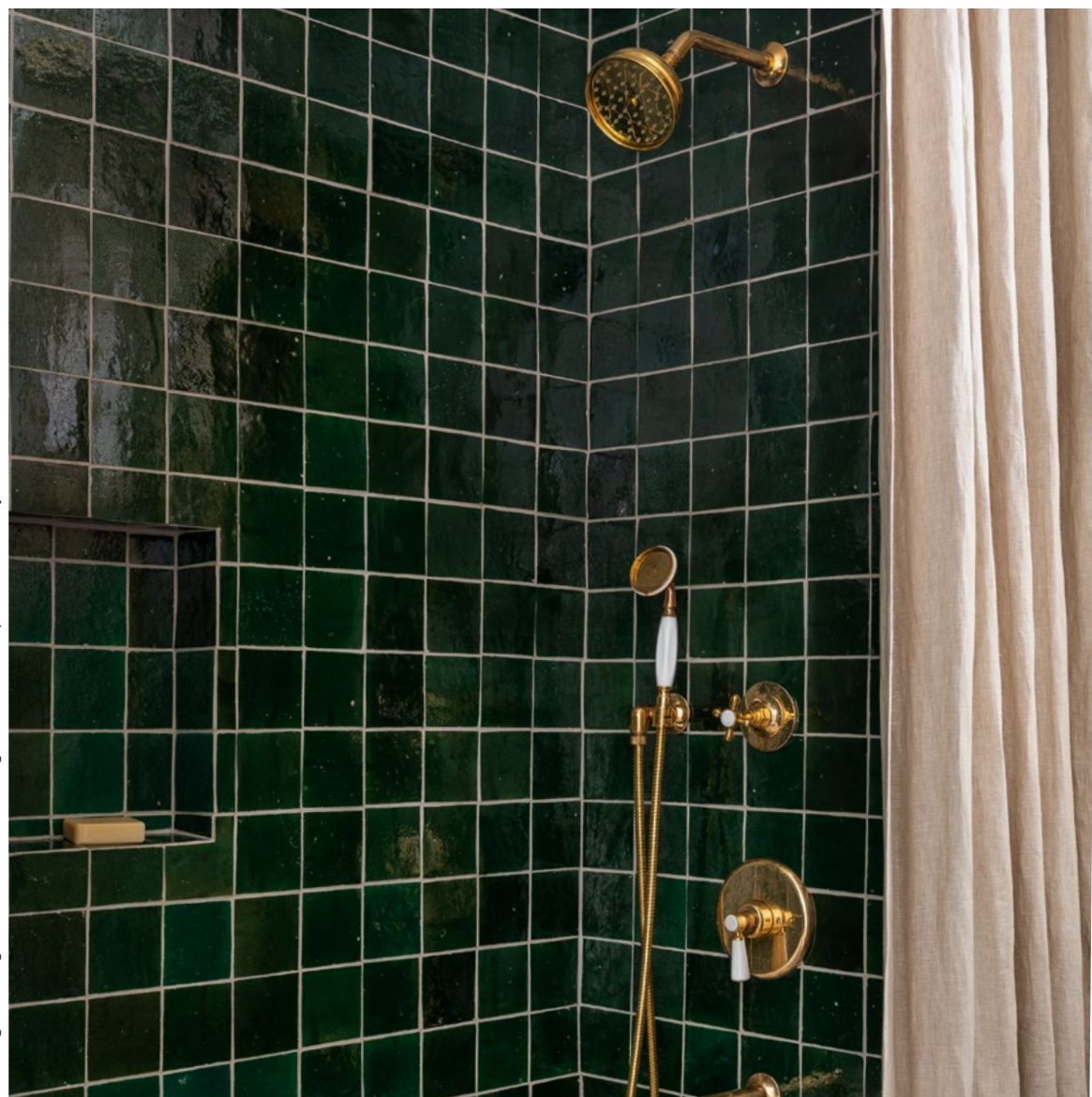
other tiles (such as terracotta and brick) require wider joints, primarily to give the appearance of more uniform gaps because these types of tiles were molded or extruded, then fired after being formed. this generally leads to more movement of size and shape once the tile is completed.

the right joint size will also depend on the application and effect you seek.

for example, a larger joint size with a sanded grout provides extra slip resistance.

tip: selecting a joint size on the larger end of the tile's appropriate range is easier than a smaller joint. with a smaller joint, you will need to buy more tiles, because your "tile per square feet" count is based on the recommended grout joint size. a smaller grout joint may require unsanded grout, which can make it more difficult to have a uniform grout joint due to the tile size variation.

be sure to refer to the product page of your particular selection for more information.



choosing grout color

some advice

choosing the wrong type and color of grout can ruin a tile project.

we strongly suggest that you make this selection with your project professionals' support, because it's their job to ensure your project selections meet the requirements from both an installation and design standpoint.

for those who are not consulting a design professional, we offer the following four pieces of grout color advice.

1) avoid using high-contrast colors. though this design option has been trending lately, we rarely see this used successfully and it requires extreme installation measures.

contrasting grout colors used with any tile can result in issues including showing invisible crazing and noticeable texture that can create undesirable changes in the color of your tile. always test, and test again, and use at your own risk.

2) have your tile contractor bring their preferred grout samples so that you can pick the shades that work best with your tile in real life.

again, the grout samples the contractor brings should be the correct grout type for your project. the contractor is always responsible for providing the grout for your project, and they will have grout manufacturers that they favor.

3) choose grouts during times of the day that you will be in the space (either with natural lighting, installed lighting, or a blend of both).

any surface will change in shade, and even color, depending on the time of day. therefore, clé recommends that you select several grout colors that best match your tiles. once selected, **your contractor will be able to make mock-up boards with your tile and grout selections to see in your space during those times of day and night.** this method of color selection is involved, but assures you will have selected the best type of grout, grout joint, and grout color.

4) your expert tile contractor is responsible for using the correct type of grout in whichever color you select. the only way to do this properly is to have your contractor create sample boards using tile from your project to sample color and application.



featuring: natural unglazed clay zellige



do you need grout at all?

young hearts run free

there has been a recent trend to go grout-free, particularly when it comes to zellige.

in our experience, there are instances when you can go grout-free, but there are some important factors to consider first.

for example, grout can sometimes be eliminated when you're installing tiles that have only slight sizing variations (cement, stone, zellige).

however, we advise this approach be limited to decorative surfaces or non-sanitary surfaces.

going grout-free in bathrooms or kitchens is not recommended.

grout provides for a more sanitary finish for these locations, due to risk of moisture and bacteria growth in the gaps in the absence of grout.

and don't forget the construction risk of not using grout.

tile installers often refuse a grout-free project because many believe this type of installation falls outside of what they can ensure as a "sound" install.

any and all construction is always settling, which means that if there isn't grout between your tiles, there is more potential for cracking, pitting and instability in your installation.

featuring: clé + erica tanov fern in metal + plaster / design / photo: erica tanov



sealing and maintenance

forever, forever ever? forever ever?

most of the time, you should pre-seal tiles to protect them from the grouting process. additionally, sealants should be used on most tiles and grout joints post-installation. this will help grout joints stay as clean and dry as possible, though maintenance will be required, depending on a project's individual wear and tear.

please be sure to check recommendations for pre-seal and post-seal products from your contractor before deciding on a grout, so that you can ensure any maintenance or re-sealing will be a fit for you.

due to the variety of usages a tile can provide on a project (wet applications, floors, walls, exteriors, interiors, etc), you must ask your installer to get all sealant details from the grout manufacturer they have selected for your project.

all grout manufacturers have recommendations for proper cleaning of their various grout types and colors. please be sure to check these recommendations before deciding on a grout so that you'll know that the upkeep works for your cleaning schedule and your project needs.



clé

copyright 2025 clé tile

cletile.com