

Glass act

**HOMEOWNERS USE GLASS TILE TO
TRANSFORM KITCHENS, BATHROOMS
AND EVEN FLOORING**

BY ALLEN NORWOOD | PHOTOS BY DIEDRA LAIRD

Consider this: a splash of warm red on the wall behind your stove. A strip of cool blue beckoning from your vanity. Or how about dots of vivid purples and greens amid the neutral earth tones of your stone-lined shower?

In the world of design, glass tile is to your kitchen or bathroom what jewelry is for your neckline. It's "bling," says Jeanine DeVaney, founder of Charlotte In-Vironments and award-winning room designer. But if you struggle choosing the right piece of sparkle to compliment rather than overwhelm your favorite ensemble, you might also have trouble with glass tile. "Glass tile is a hot item right now," DeVaney says. "But people will tell me, 'I love glass tile!' And then, 'How am I supposed to use it?'"

Homeowner Linda Farley chose what she calls "tweed" and "denim" glass tiles to pair with traditional limestone tile.

The variety is amazing – and we’re not just talking colors. Glass tile is available in a wide array of sizes, patterns and textures. If you choose carefully, you can even use it in flooring. But as DeVaney hints, variety can sometimes be intimidating.



DEVANEY

Faced with her own looming indecision, homeowner Linda Farley turned to DeVaney for help in selecting glass tile highlights to brighten her new kitchen. But it wasn't easy. "It came in every color of the rainbow," Farley says. "Some of them were pretty outrageous."

Was she overwhelmed? "Let's just say I was directed well," she says with a laugh.



BROOME

She finally chose what she calls "tweed" and "denim" glass tiles to pair with the traditional limestone tile in the recently remodeled kitchen of her home off Quail Hollow Road. She and DeVaney created an eye-catching geometric pattern behind the stove and a subtler stripe of glass tile in the backsplash using rectangular strips of gray crackled glass and tiny squares of blue.

Some Charlotte homeowners, particularly those in uptown condos and other contemporary settings, choose to cover entire walls or even rooms with tile. But most use the glass as Farley did.

Fellow award-winning designer Angela Broome says most of her clients use glass tile as an accent. "You can pair it with travertine, ceramic, porcelain. There are so many different ways to use it ... the choices are almost limitless."



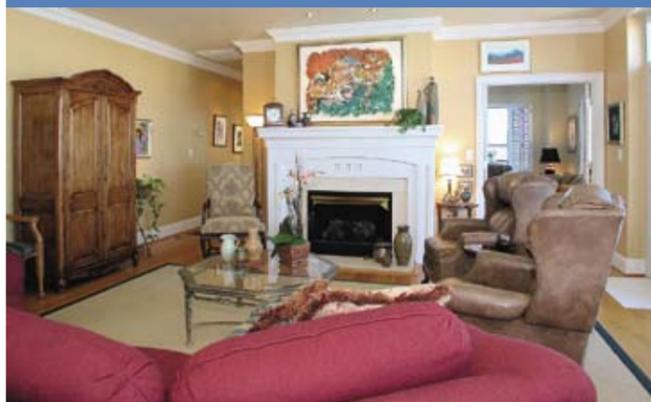
From left to right, contractor Jim Millikan, designer Jeanine DeVaney and homeowner Linda Farley in Farley's renovated kitchen.

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ANGELA BROOME,
DESIGNER WITH URBAN BUILDING GROUP

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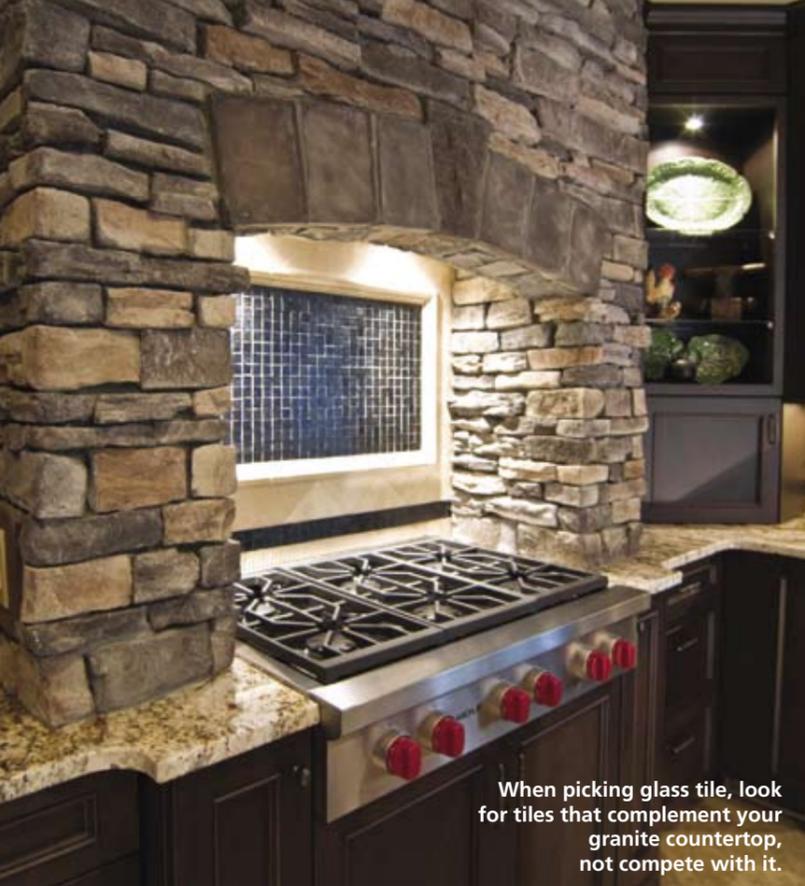
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When picking glass tile, look for tiles that complement your granite countertop, not compete with it.

Gaze at glass

Top tile makers offer extensive portfolios online, both of individual products and entire rooms of glass tile. Visit their Web sites to explore all the options, and be sure to increase the brightness on your computer monitor to accurately display the depth and clarity of color in transparent varieties. The Crossville site, www.crossvilleinc.com, offers an online tool that lets you mix and match glass tile with traditional options and see what your combination looks like in a digital room. To locate a showroom, visit www.walkerzanger.com and www.renaissancetileandbath.com.

When tackling a kitchen, DeVaney typically starts with a dominant surface like a granite countertop, as it sets the tone for the entire room, followed by cabinet colors and trim moldings. Some polished granite can be almost glass-like itself, with embedded bits of red, green or blue. Colors in granite, just as in glass, can shift subtly with the light. It's important to choose glass tile that complements the granite, but doesn't compete with it.

Broome, who's with Urban Building Group, agrees: Choosing glass tile comes later in the design process. To ease some of the anxiety, she shares décor magazines with clients to show examples of glass tile combined with other tiles to help them visualize the finished room. Then it's off to showrooms such as Crossville, Renaissance and Walker Zanger to see the latest products.

Anthony Coggins, manager of the Crossville showroom, says the growing popularity of glass tile is prompting manufacturers to develop and offer more variety – the kind of variety that could land those brown and green bottles you toss into the recycling bin right back in your kitchen. Last year, Crossville introduced "Echo," a new line of tile made from post-consumer recycled glass, and says his customers like that it's made of recycled jars and bottles.

Tiles made of recycled glass can contain anywhere from 10 to 100 percent recycled glass depending on the color. Hues that can be achieved purely from the recycled material are 100 percent; if the manufacturer has to add other material to achieve a color, the recycled percentage goes down. Darker, richer colors have a lower percentage of recycled glass, Coggins explains.

Sizes vary too, ranging from 1-by-1 inch on up. Typically, the smaller "mosaic" sizes are the most popular, often mounted in sheets for easy installation. Small stone and ceramic tiles are frequently mounted the same way. Coggins says many customers use glass tiles as what he calls "clip-ins." The installer might clip a corner off four larger traditional tiles of stone or ceramic. Then, where those clipped corners intersect, a small glass tile is dropped in.

You can also find glass tile designed specifically to be used as an accent or trim. Many makers offer long strips that mimic the profiles of traditional chair rails and crown moldings. DeVaney refers to the gray crackled tiles in Farley's kitchen, which came from Crossville, as "feature strips." In catalogs you'll see "listellos," or border tiles, of glass.

You'll also see the name Tiffany invoked often on swirled glass pieces inspired by those iconic lamps.

Glass tile is more expensive than most other materials – two

to three times more, Coggins says – which helps explain why it's often used as an accent. Adding a few pieces here and there is a lot cheaper than tiling an entire room with glass.

Coggins does note, however, that the price compares favorably to other accent options, such as stainless steel or sculpted stone. "Even if a square foot costs, say, \$30, that's not too bad if you get 12 or 15 decorative pieces."

While Farley hadn't considered using glass tile when she turned to DeVaney and B&E Construction, she is glad she did. She admits that because of her traditional tastes, she wasn't sure the glass tile would be appropriate – but she loves it.

Although the kitchen itself wasn't expanded, the reconfigured space and larger island offer more room for Farley and her five daughters – ages 9 to 20 – to cook together. A natural focal point, the wall behind the stove now not only adds a touch of elegance, but the depth of color in the transparent tile lends a certain level of intrigue that just can't be matched in other materials.



Glass tile above the stovetop in the kitchen of Linda Farley.

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