CERSAIE 2014: Prime product trends
By David Stock

CERSAIE reaffirmed its primacy as the foremost ceramic tile and bathroom furnishings exhibition with 66,096 unique visitors and 23,363 attendees from abroad pushing the aggregate crowd figure into highly reassuring and deeply impressive six-figure territory. Visitors arrived from 153 countries with much improved numbers from Asia and the Americas.

Ariostea is extending the Pietre collection based on Ultra technology. Very fine 6mm-thick slabs with a variety of patterns and stratification. (Image courtesy of Oceans Merchant, NSW)

Atlas Concorde’s 20mm thick Lastra porcelain pavers for outdoor applications. (Image courtesy of DW Tiles, NSW)
The trade show is an essential appointment for the general public as well as those engaged in tile fixing, architecture and interior design. Pritzker Prize-winning architect Toyo Ito presented his keynote lecture to a thousand-strong audience and various initiatives such as Building, Dwelling and Thinking – which granted training credits to participating architects – proved popular. Inexperienced tilers benefitted from the installation techniques proffered at the Tiling Town demonstration while those planning to embark on renovation projects garnered much-needed advice at the Cersaie Designs Your Home exhibit.

Despite the concerted efforts of organisers to entice and educate onlookers with informative conferences and cultural programmes the abiding attractiveness and importance of Cersaie continues to rest on the diversity, novelty and quality of the products on display.

The subtle advances and truly groundbreaking developments that enrich and pervade our industry can often be sighted for the very first time in the crowded and cavernous hangar-like halls of the Bologna Exhibition Centre. This promise of originality and progress motivates people from around the globe to venture to the exposition on numerous occasions with renewed hopes of seeing something exceptional. More than five-hundred ceramic tile exhibitors were joined by scores of companies operating in the bathroom furnishing, tools and machinery, and raw material sectors.

This most recent staging of Cersaie broke with the long-established tradition of affording exclusivity to ceramic tile manufacturers and the products they sought to showcase. Reputable producers of alternative floor and wall coverings such as wood and parquet, composite and laminate materials and natural and reconstituted stone made a hitherto unthinkable appearance with a designated area set aside in Pavilion 22.

This review focuses on the prime product trends showcased by domestic and foreign exhibitors alike. The thoughts and observations of Australian industry figures such as Sandy Hercus (Southern Cross), Richard Mackenzie (Ocean+ Merchant) and Peter Halliday (Decor8) have been incorporated to expand upon my opinions and reflections.

The featured trends range from hexagonal shapes and undulating surfaces to ceramic wood and stone-look tiles of extraordinarily diverse thicknesses and formats. Pop Art and retro fashions have returned with coloured prints and images and richer decoration providing welcome respite from the plenitude of ever-improving ceramic tiles and panels that endeavour to replicate the appearance and texture of cement, concrete and marble. Traditional attributes coming to the fore heralded the reawakening of sometimes overlooked historical trends such as pressed porcelain with hammered edges and glossy wall tiles sporting embossed patterns.

This delicate balance between age-old custom and cutting-edge modernity defines Cersaie and the ceramic tile industry as a whole.

Formats and thicknesses

The most obvious products at the exhibition were the looming, monolithic panels positioned throughout the Florim stand which were 6mm thick and 320 x 160 centimetres: the largest size ever seen. Floorgres decorated the Oversize Magnum collection with neutral stone and sharp metallic patterns while Rex offered marble and precious wood imitations.

Classical and contemporary stone and timber-look series were showcased by Casamood and Casa Dolce Casa. Ariostea’s high-tech Ultra products and Neolith’s The Size adopted the same dimensions with the latter adding 6 and 12mm thicknesses to its collection. Cotto D’Este’s luxurious Exedra slabs measure 300 x 100cm and are between three and 5.5mm thick, while RAK Ceramics has made laudable advances with sophisticated Continua technology to fashion the Maximus mega slab range.

At the opposite end of the thickness spectrum are the 20mm-thick floor collections designed for outdoor areas. These porcelain products have the mechanical strength and

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depth to withstand substantial foot traffic and reflect the ongo-
ing encroachment of ceramic tiles from conventional domestic settings (such as bathrooms and kitchens) towards external applications and spaces where natural stone has predomi-
nated: balconies and gardens and patios. Tremendous exam-
pies include Cotto D’Este’s Outdoor series and Marazzi’s 20mm collection, which can be laid adhesive-free on gravel, sand and grass. Atlas Concorde’s multifarious Lastra range appeared to be of the highest standard.

Extra glossy, rectified Evoque porcelain wall tiles are manufactured by Fap Ceramiche in the fresh 300 x 900mm format.

There was no shortage of distinct shapes at Cersaie with standard rectangular and square tiles sharing the limelight with more unusual triangular, octagonal and rhomboid-shaped options. Herringbone and Chevron patterns were also in evidence. Hexagonal products were seemingly omnipresent, with a host of exhibitors reinterpreting such an appealing and quintessential tile. Far from being staid and circumspect, manufacturers engaged in this revival have succeeded in making contemporary and eclectic tiles that can be used to embellish almost every de-
sign and setting. Hexagons lend themselves to an astonishing number of colours and variations of style such as three-dimen-
sional printed patterns and rhombille tessellation. They differed quite considerably in size and complemented every conceivable fashion and trend at Cersaie. Australia’s very own Everstone showcased its Durastone Classico porcelain tiles that cite the ever-changing hues of our native landscape.

The sincerest form of flattery

Imitative fashions are almost ubiquitous with cement, timber, concrete and stone-look tiles emanating from the design studios and production premises of countless manufacturers eagerly adapting to the possibilities of digital inkjet technology. Quite remarkable standards are attainable with their ca-
pacity to replicate other materials continuing to evolve and improve. Timber and concrete were especially commonplace while there appears to be an aptitude and readiness to blend different styles simultaneously. Kronos displayed the Trellis collection which features concrete and ceramic wood moulded and imprinted onto the same tile.
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TRENDS

Millelegni by Emilceramica (Image courtesy of Di Lorenzo Tiles, NSW)

Urban Wood from Fioranese (Image courtesy of Colortile, NSW)

Forest Acero is the new timber-look for Cotto D’Este’s Kerlite.

Dakota by Flaviker Pisa Ceramiche. (Image courtesy of Elite Tiles, Queensland)

Lea Ceramiche’s Slimtech Wood-Stock (Image courtesy of Trend Tile, NSW)

Settecento’s glazed porcelain Matiere collection (Image courtesy of Beaumont Tiles)
Timber-look

Timber-look porcelain tiles have evolved from unconvincing, one-dimensional products into astounding creations that can be sourced in a plethora of shapes and patterns. Beautiful printed damask and striped overlays were included and manufacturers such as Grespania showcased wood-effect tiles that appeared burnt or charred. Timber’s natural blemishes and bucolic charm influenced several exhibitors whilst others sought to minimise or eradicate such characteristics through the application of glazed and polished finishes. Timber-look products will be imbued with greater colour diversity, and lengths approaching 160 and 180 centimetres will become more pervasive.

Notable collections included Dakota by Flaviker, Wood-Stock by Lea Ceramiche and the Millelegni range by Emilceramica.

Stone-look

The technical characteristics of stone-look tiles are developing apace with limestone, marble and granite replications combining the inarguable splendour of such materials with the negligible porosity and renowned sturdiness inherent to porcelain tiles. Imitation stone products are also capable of outperforming the extracted equivalent on an environmental basis with much less damage wreaked upon the countryside and recycled content comprising an appreciable amount of the man-made alternatives.

Some manufacturers prioritised the creation of sumptuous white marbles such as Calacatta, Carrara and Statuario with Marazzi’s Evolutionmarble and Ariostea’s Statuario Altissimo series catching the eye. Travertine’s cream-coloured hues are an abiding source of fascination whilst others have turned to darker stones and effusive volcanic rocks. Atlas Concorde’s feted Marvel Pro collection includes 8.5mm-thick wall tiles modelled on Noir St Laurent marble from France.
Concrete and Cementine

Concrete finishes in assorted formats and sizes were prevalent at the exposition with whole sections enveloped by glossy, reflective and polished concrete-look products that continue to progress in terms of quality and quantity of options. Broad spatula strokes bring the Ergon series by Emilceramica to life and the tactile One collection from Ceramiche Caesar merges the traditions of terracotta with the modernity and sophistication of concrete.

The inherent charm and beauty of encaustic cement tiles informed many collections at Cersaie with designers and manufacturers of cementine or cement-look tiles deriving inspiration from Moorish and colonial Spanish patterns and faded organic shades. Panaria’s Decor Mood Mix was a veritable riot of colour, and Majolica Brick and Prism Brick from Fondovalle’s Toka were indicative of this trend.

Spanish company Apavisa captured attention with its Hydraulic collection based on the widespread flooring fashion that defined domestic and public architecture in southern France from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1960s. The black, blue and grey options are produced in separate patterns and the stunning patchwork tiles are available in 27 aleatory designs.

Colour and decoration

Colour ostensibly occupies a niche position in the global ceramic tile market, with the more austere and sombre tones associated with minimalism reigning supreme throughout the previous decade. Pockets of colours could nevertheless be found at Cersaie with muted organic pastels and deeper hues ranging from maroon and purple to blue and green prevailing on stands occupied by manufacturers like Target Studio.

Target started life in the mid-nineties as a third-firing specialist dedicated to the design and production of applied decoration for ceramic floor and wall tiles. The baneful consequences of the eurozone and global financial crises dented the prospects and called into the question the continued existence of several Italian tile firms – Target clients among them.

The restructuring that ensued encouraged the Fiorano Modenese-based concern to commence manufacturing, thus minimising exposure to the vagaries and hardships of others.
while enjoying unprecedented autonomy to realise its own creative ambitions.

Target endeavours to amalgamate the finest time-honoured aspects of ceramic tile production (such as handmade glazes and traditional techniques) with modern tastes and technologies. Inspiration has been drawn from the worlds of fashion and design which have stimulated and shaped the development and appearance of exquisite 600 x 600mm porcelain products like Blur, which forms part of the overarching Unica collection.

The more restrained floral motifs of the Hampshire series call to mind the decorative arts of the Victorian age while the texture-driven Quadra range seems influenced by textiles. The fluorescent panels and mesh-mounted square tiles that comprise Vibration are perhaps the most contemporary addition to the Target portfolio with colours such as mint, orange and purple combining with tasteful and unobtrusive patterned decoration.

Beaumont Tiles returned from Bologna with a decorative tile series based on Juan Vidal’s award-winning fashion designs from the northern hemisphere. The vernal Margarite collection by Peronda enlivens surfaces with pink and white flowers and carries traces of Asian and European culture. This unique blend is reflected in the name of the series which references the acclaimed Vietnamese-born French film director Marguerite Duras. It should be available from Beaumont stores within three to four months in a 440 x 440mm format.

Tagina assembled a remarkably diverse and comprehensive stand with colourful products positioned alongside three-dimensional hexagonal tiles and rustic stone-effect porcelain. Deco Perlage has floral and grid patterns redolent of ancient and eastern fabrics with conspicuous flashes of cobalt, crimson and mint green delightfully offset by comparatively unassuming sand and sage alternatives. These 10mm-thick porcelain tiles are manufactured in myriad formats with the standard 600 x 600mm product complemented by options which include 100 x 100mm square tiles and 600 x 100mm rectangular strips.

An unquestionable highlight of Cersaie was the Bisazza stand which epitomised the boldness and luxuriousness that has earned the company international plaudits and confirmed its standing as the foremost manufacturer of glass mosaic. In recent times Bisazza has sought to embrace other disciplines and facets of decor and design including hexagonal and square-shaped cement tiles with multicoloured patterns. These were produced by a triumvirate of eminent designers entrusted to create their own collections in partnership with the Bisazza Design Studio.

Contemporary Cement Tiles are entirely made by hand blending high-strength cement with coloured oxides to fashion 14mm-thick products that are cold pressed and rendered impervious to the detrimental effects of oil and water, owing to the application of a protective coating. Scarlet, teal and salmon pink are three of the twenty-five available colours destined to adorn floors and walls in commercial and residential settings exposed to medium foot traffic.

Other colourful Bisazza creations were the golden floor tiles and glass bricks that dazzled between adjoining corridors otherwise devoted to the cement series.

Modern mosaics

Despite venturing into new territory, Bisazza has enhanced its digital and handmade mosaic decorations which have sought to capture the essence of disparate cultural themes such as the Terracotta Army of emperor Qin Shi Huang (Xi’an)
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and Classical figures in the Oro series. Floral designs such Peachtree and Peonies are particularly eye-catching, and historic prints from the Emilio Pucci fashion house have been transformed into the Amelie Green and Pizzo Blu ranges.

Luca Boschini – Bisazza’s General Manager in the Asia Pacific region – enthused about the reception the company has received in the Australian market, which boasts the only overseas subsidiary established by Bisazza, with products such as the Hot Melt collection tailored to our climate and tastes.

Another company with a deserved reputation for excellence in Australia is the Spanish firm Ezarri which has consolidated its position in our domestic market due to the notable efforts of Paula Cowell-Yench and her team at Europe Imports. Topping was the new collection on display at Cersaie with magical colours and unique motifs and textures combining with digitally printed images and patterns to feed the creativity and imagination of consumers. This rich polychromatic collection is especially suited to wet area applications such as splashbacks and swimming pool surrounds.

Innovative mosaics were showcased in abundance with traditional square and hexagonal pieces joined by completely new formats such as linear, rhombus and organic-shaped tesserae. Dialoghi by Mosaico+ and Fibers by Sicis were other attractive sights around the exhibition.

Pop art and animation

There was an array of graphic tiles at Cersaie with exhibitors such as Ascot and Del Conca channelling the exuberance of animation and Pop Art to produce vivid wall tile collections.
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that are functional and dynamic in equal measure. Ascot Ceramiche plans to pay tribute to famous artists and opened its Game of Fifteen collection by acknowledging Keith Haring’s politicised artwork that characterised New York City’s thriving street culture during the 1980s.

Imola unveiled its three-dimensional Pop series which consists of celebrated Roy Lichtenstein images encompassing facial expressions and explosive exclamations. Del Conca reproduced characters from Monkey Punch’s iconic 1960s manga series Lupin the 3rd.

Although the aforementioned examples look back to the twentieth century, this heightened emphasis on various mediums and artistic movements provides a unique platform for emerging designers and reinforces the inexorable impact of evolving digital technologies.

Metallised and industrialised
As the Western world transitions towards a post-industrial future the evocation and remembrance of our cultural and societal past seems to have acquired an artistic cachet, exemplified by the romanticised and sentimental reconfiguring of disused and dilapidated urban spaces that once echoed with the clang and thrum of manual and mechanised activities.

This theme has pervaded the ceramic tile industry, with numerous companies showcasing metallised products that possess a bronze or platinum lustre as well as the weathered effects of oxidised copper and rusted steel. Fine examples include Trace by Caesar, Fusion by Astor, Oxyde by Fioranese and Etro by Target Studio. The industrial-look also featured in RAK’s Maximus mega slab portfolio.

Wallpaper
Having returned to prominence in the design world, wallpaper has made an appearance in the ceramic tile industry, with wallpaper-like product created for domestic applications and settings such as kitchen splashbacks and bathrooms where the real thing is naturally ill-suited.

The neoclassical and oriental tapestry and lace patterns of Marazzi’s Wallpaper collection brought discreet elegance and refinement to perhaps the busiest stand at Cersaie with four sublime pastel shades and beautiful gold, platinum and transparent crystal decorations intended as residential bathroom wall coverings. The series was completed with decor and strip tiles for creative laying solutions.

Sandy Hercus of Southern Cross Ceramics noted this secondary trend with exhibitors such as Naxos (a constituent of the Fincibec Group) showcasing superb emulative products like the Chestnut, Black Cherry and Marine colours of the Florence series.

Black and white
Although the entire colour spectrum could be found at the exhibition centre from dusty hues to vibrant, playful pop tones there was a significant return to the elegant, clean edges of classic black and white tiles with added effects such as fading reliefs and abstract Op art graphics which give the impression of movement, swelling, warping and vibration. The Deco D’Antan collection showcased by Tagina consisted of
double-fired porcelain wall tiles and custom-made mosaics with intricate graphic patterns such as Fleur and Tressage.

Other companies and series that contributed to black and white’s revitalisation included Eden by Ava, Fantasma by Brix, Filo by DesignTaleStudio and Absolute by Lea Ceramiche.

The oriental minimalism of Origami by Target Studio was another highpoint, with understated textural decoration and shapes that evoked traditional Japanese paper-folding techniques. Black and white tiles are a renaissance trend that should appeal to city dwellers in search of timeless and uncomplicated style.

Customisation and modernisation

Tile manufacturers have responded to the demands of architects and designers by creating flexible systems that encourage the more audacious and creative to express themselves through custom-made compositions.

Ceramica Bardelli’s Arianna collection shares its name with the mythological woman who helped Theseus escape from the Labyrinth by giving him a ball of string, which he used to keep his bearings. The series comprises twelve ceramic tiles which have a silkscreened pattern and thread design that enables pieces to be rotated and sequenced in accordance with personal tastes to produce complex and unpredictable pathways.

Mirage’s Xgone transforms porcelain stoneware into a phenomenally creative material abounding with energy and colour. These hexagonal tiles eliminate serial repetition by offering innumerable coloured patterns and compositions. Such variation is possible as individual pieces can be notched together, then configured to create unique visual and graphic effects.

Tagina has assembled a whole Atelier team dedicated to the creation of custom-made ceramic products for architects: even on a large commercial scale. Dot-to-Dot embodies this artisanal approach and affords prospective end-users with an unfathomable degree of creativeness when composing architectural coverings and ventilated surfaces.

HOK Product Design created Lea Ceramiche’s Nest and Pixel collections which boast Slimtech and Microban antimicrobial technologies. The interlocking Nest series offers infinite variation with attractive triangular cut-outs and hexagonal shapes. Pixe’s rectangular strips are used to create saturated fields of colour, born of coastal and pastoral Italian landscapes.

These extremely thin products are three millimetres thick for wall applications and 5.5 to 7mm thick for surfaces subjected to severe foot traffic.
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Pixel by Lesa Ceramiche
(Image courtesy of Trend Tile)

Italian manufacturers are the technological pioneers responsible for advancing ceramic tiles beyond the constraints of age-old functions and formats into the realm of smart materials. Designers were intrigued by ABK’s auto-levelling technology, which featured in Issue 83 of Tile Today. Porcelain’s aesthetic perfection and strength is supplemented by once unimaginable elasticity, which has the capacity to revolutionise the transportation and installation of ceramic materials.

Ceramiche Piemme’s timber-look porcelain stoneware range Cottage has integrated photovoltaic cells which illuminate outdoor floors in the absence of artificial light, and after the sun has set.

Estilo Ceramics distributes Piemme products from its premises in the Melbourne suburb of Niddrie.

Allied products and machinery

Mapei featured 14 colours from the new range of Ultracolor Plus cementsitious grouts, Kerapoxy Design epoxy grouts and Mapesil AC acetic silicone sealants. Large boards depicted their application with products from distinguished companies — Laminam, Ceramica d’Imola, Atlas Concorde, Marazzi, Florim, Flandre, Mirage and Marca Corona 1741.

Mapei also exhibited Ultralite S2 and S2 Quick adhesives: one-component, high-performance and rapid-setting products specifically developed for large-sized tiles to be laid on expansive surfaces without the need for double buttering. These revolutionary adhesives can bond all types and sizes of ceramic tile and possess much lower density and higher yield.

Also present at Cersaie was Laticrete, which made public its new installation materials for reduced thickness porcelain tiles. These products included Hydro Ban for crack isolation and waterproofing, Latapoxy 300 adhesive and Latapoxy 312 vapour-reducing membrane. HP Spartacote polyaspartic coating systems were also displayed following Laticrete’s acquisition of the enterprise in August.

Raimondi, the respected machinery and tools manufacturer, was situated outdoors in Area 44. Its well-stocked and well-patronised stand showcased the Raimondi Levelling System, exclusively distributed in Australia by B.A.T. Trims.

Expert opinion

Peter Halliday: ‘I felt this year was a consolidation and refinement year on the advances seen in the previous Cersaie. There was a lot of reflection and reinterpretation of historical trends in ceramic tiles. Handmade-look “Subway” wall tiles in traditional sizes of 75 x 150mm and the larger 75 x 300mm were even more prevalent than years gone by.’

Sandy Hercus: ‘This was definitely an evolution year rather than a new direction year, in terms of trends. The timber and concrete looks stepped up a notch or two and were the main two trends. New shapes and lengths were impressive. Secondary trends included more encaustic-look product and the combining of looks — timber combined with concrete, hexagons with encaustic look.’

Richard Mackenzie: ‘The most noticeable directional change was decoration, layer on layer and colour on colour. However, the colours were more muted, more like natural organic pastels. Timber-look was everywhere, but many of the new designs were morphed into a culture clash of timber and stone with the odd unlikely colour introduced to try and capture the customer’s eye!’