Swimming pool trends, materials and statistics

With ceramic tile import figures averaging 35 million square metres over the last five years, including ceramic mosaic, and local production hovering around five million square metres, members of industry naturally reflect on where these products are primarily used. According to data collated by the Australian Tile Council the vast majority of ceramic tiles and mosaics are utilised in residential construction and renovation, with the latter providing the greatest stimulus for tile consumption.
Traditionally, most of this product is installed on wet area walls and floors, and while this well established trend continues, there have been a number of new developments in regards to use of tile, which include extending tiled floors into living areas, bedrooms and outdoor entertainment areas.

External tiling is one of the most significant and fastest growing trends. A growing number of these outdoor entertainment areas are centred around an in-ground swimming pool. According to statistics published by poolexpress.com.au in April 2010, one in four Australian homes have a swimming pool. At first glance this statistic is staggering, however, the Swimming Pool & Spa Alliance of Australia (SPASA) confirms that we have the largest per capita rate of pool ownership in the world.

SPASA released a press statement on 5 December 2012 which states, “The swimming pool industry is estimated to currently contribute in excess of $1 billion a year to GDP (Gross domestic product), whilst the spa industry is estimated to be worth around $300 million a year. An additional estimated $255 million is spent on renovations, services and chemicals. The industry also employs approximately 40,000 people nationally.”

SPASA is a newly formed national alliance designed to represent “all facets of the swimming pool and spa industry in Australia — the industry’s first such unified organisation.” The new alliance is the result of the relaunch of the Swimming Pool and Spa Association of New South Wales.

In terms of numbers we have -
- 800,000 existing pools
- 300,000 backyard pools in New South Wales alone
- We install 20,000 new in-ground pools per annum — population 22 million
- The USA installs 90,000 in-ground pools per annum — population 300 million

**A tile industry perspective**

When we think of tiled pools we immediately picture pool interiors tiled with glass or ceramic mosaics. However, from an industry perspective we should not overlook the fact that many pool perimeters and surrounds also feature substantial volumes of ceramic tile, usually porcelain or terracotta, or natural stone in the form of bluestone, granite, marble or travertine. A large proportion of these material are installed using appropriate thin-set tile adhesives and suitable waterproof or water resistant grouts.

The average in-ground concrete pool is usually eight metres long and four metres wide. Including an allowance for waste, the average tiled pool will feature approximately 90 square metres of ceramic or glass mosaic. During recent times plunge pools have become popular. Even the average plunge pool will require 50 to 70 square metres of mosaic.

Naturally, home owners have a choice when it comes to covering the interior of their pool, popular finishes include:
- Fully tiled
- Render
- Spray on texture coating
- Glass crystals

Our research indicates that at the lower to middle end of the market an increasing number of pools have a rendered finish which often incorporates

Glass mosaic is the premier pool finish, providing a hygienic, low maintenance surface. The flexibility of mosaic is highlighted in this image of exquisite Trend Australasia mosaic recently installed at Crown Metropol Hotel in Perth, WA. Trend’s glass mosaic blends are assembled in Australia using 78 per cent internal and post recycled glass (Courtesy Trend Australasia, NSW).
Q-crystal, or Q-pebble glass beads which are blended with the render and sprayed onto the pool interior to a depth of 1mm. Typically, a 300mm line of ceramic or glass mosaics is installed to the waterline.

At the top end of the spectrum, Carl Decker, the principal of Waterview Pools, said that in his experience “Sixty per cent of in-ground pools are fully tiled with mosaic and 40 per cent are rendered. The fully tiled element consists of 85 per cent ceramic and 15 per cent glass mosaic. In spite of the relatively slow economy and property market, the top end of the pool market is still going well.”

Carl added, “Architects regard pools as a water feature, a valid extension of the property. A fully tiled pool adds value to a property and provides the home owner with a durable low maintenance finish.”

The chief advantages associated with concrete pools are:

- Structural integrity
- Built to engineers’ specifications
- Pools can be built on flat or sloping sites
- They can be built in any shape or size
- Steel reinforced structures can even be built out of ground

Fully tiled glass mosaic pools are rightly regarded as the most luxurious finish. A customised tiled pool may
include a variety of added features, such as: heating, fibre optic lighting, distinctive coping, disappearing edges and unique stunning mosaic designs (emblems), which can be designed and supplied by most of our leading glass mosaic suppliers.

Mosaic provides the user with endless design opportunities which can be as simple as introducing an alternative colour by removing one tessera from a sheet and replacing it with a contrasting colour, or installing a cascading vignette or colour using one of the fabulous pool blends.

With 800,000 pools (including more than 50 olympic sized pools) the renovation and repair sector is significant. Carl Decker confirmed, “A lot of owners of old painted, pebbled or rendered pools upgrade to add value to their property in line with renovations and improvements made to the property’s interior.”

In 2012, a comprehensive review of the Swimming Pool Act 1992 (NSW) was undertaken. The review identified a number of amendments designed to enhance the safety of children under the age of five around private (backyard) swimming pools.

Consequently, pool owners are now required to register their pools. Failure to register will incur a penalty notice of $220.

A growing number of Australians are building indoor pools, even in high rise developments. This project reflects striking use of glass mosaic as a flexible, decorative finish which is ideal for curved surfaces. Most pool surrounds are tiled with a suitable ceramic or natural stone product. (Image courtesy Europe Imports)
Building a pool represents a significant investment and safety should be a key consideration. There are a wide variety of private and public pools including: competition pools, exercise pools, hot tubs and spa pools, ocean pools, infinity pools and plunge pools. The interiors and surrounds of virtually all of these pools provide extensive opportunities for the creative use of every kind of ceramic and natural stone product. The featured projects illustrate how effective these products are when they are correctly specified and installed.

A comprehensive review of mosaic pool tiling techniques can be viewed at infotile.com. Simply click on the ‘Advice’ button on the homepage, click on ‘Archived Articles’ and access ‘Pool Tiling’...

Incredibly, the first pool, the ‘Great Bath’ was built at Mohenjo-Daro in Pakistan during the third millennium BC (www.harappa.com/indus/8.html).

If one in four Australian homes do have an average size pool with a 90 square metre interior, coupled with perimeter tiling opportunities, every effort should be made to inform the nation’s pool builders and the public at large about the undoubted benefits associated with use of mosaic, ceramic tile and natural stone.

One of the prime objectives of leading mosaic suppliers is establishing a sheeting technique which complies with Australian Standards by allowing the installer to obtain the 90 per cent adhesive coverage required in fully immersed conditions.

In the so-called ‘good old days’ paper-face mosaic left the back of the mosaic clear to make direct contact with the tile adhesive or rendered bedding.

Today, we have a variety of fixing/sheeting methods some of which comply with the standards, and others that work when the mosaic manufacturers instructions are followed to the letter.

Several of the featured suppliers have redesigned or are in the process of redesigning their mosaic assembly practices.

The dot mounted method pioneered by Ezarri is extremely popular, but there are a number of sheeting and installation techniques that are widely employed.
Living Tiles of Rozelle, New South Wales import Togama glass mosaics from Spain. These versatile, durable products are manufactured from 99 per cent pure recycled glass and one per cent pigments.

Togama mosaics are available in two finishes, a smooth, flat surface, or an anti-slip texture which contains elements of quartz that provide a suitable surface finish for steps and landings. These hygienic products are produced with rounded corners which increases safety, in accordance with the manufacturers guarantee.

An advanced polyurethane dot-system promotes improved planarity, and ease of installation. Togama tessarae are manufactured in two sizes — 25 x 25 and 50 x 50mm assembled on 333 x 333mm sheets. The larger format is supplied as a paper-faced product which cannot be used in pool interiors. While much of the glass mosaic we import is principally used in pools, Togama mosaic and all the featured products can be used in spas, bathroom walls and floors, saunas, kitchen splashbacks, feature walls in living areas, in water features and other wet areas.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Refer overleaf to view glass and ceramic mosaic import statistics.