



TILE

& DECORATIVE SURFACES

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**ALL
ABOUT
WALL
TILES**

An
AMERICAN
Designs With
ITALIAN
Ceramic Tile

Editor's note: TILE & DECORATIVE SURFACES Magazine is proud to present its readers this exclusive U.S. tile trade magazine interview with interior designer Barbara Lazaroff.

Barbara Lazaroff, one of America's leading restaurateurs and interior designers, was presented with the first Assopiastrelle Design Award earlier this year for her innovative use of tile in her restaurants located throughout Southern California. Lazaroff, whose husband is the celebrated chef Wolfgang Puck, is co-owner and operator of many of the restaurants she designs. Assopiastrelle, the Association of Italian Ceramic Tile and Refractory Manufacturers, is the organization representing Italy's producers of ceramic tile.

Lazaroff has gained international recognition for the design of such noted restaurants as Spago, where she helped to introduce the "exhibition kitchen," Chinois on Main, Shane Hidden on the Glen, Eureka and Granita. She and the firm she heads, Imaginings Interior Design, Inc., have translated some of these unique concepts overseas, designing a branch of Spago in Tokyo and the Playboy Club in Japan.

Some of Lazaroff's most memorable and colorful concepts have made extravagant and dramatic use

of ceramic tile—most notably, at Granita in Malibu, CA, where she installed multicolor tile wall mosaics as dramatic backdrops for dining. The tiles highlight a Mediterranean-inspired design theme that employed the talents of a group of artists and crafts people who utilized many different types of creative media.

Lazaroff's newest and broadest-ranging project is the planning and design of the first Wolfgang Puck Cafes, a network of casual-but-elegant restaurants, which are being

Coast Plaza (all in Southern California) and the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas. Plans are under way for outposts in Manhattan Beach, CA, San Francisco, Mexico City and as far afield as Kuwait.

Born and raised in New York, NY, Lazaroff first studied theater arts, including lighting and set design, in college, before going on to study biochemistry and then working in the biomedical field before returning, 17 years ago, to her career in architectural and interior design.



Los Angeles, CA, designer Barbara Lazaroff was the first recipient of the Assopiastrelle Design Award, presented by the Association of Italian Ceramic Tile and Refractory Manufacturers at this year's International Tile & Stone Exposition in Anaheim, CA. The award, which will now be presented annually, recognizes an American designer whose creative use of ceramic tile has helped to enhance the image of the material.

planned for college campuses and other informal venues in a number of major cities across the country. These will all feature the same distinctive design motif of bold black and white Italian ceramic tile floors and elaborate, vibrantly colorful decorative ceramic mosaics. The concept was launched in May 1993 at the University of Southern California, and cafes have opened also on Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade, Universal Studio's City Walk, Orange County's South

In the recent interview, Lazaroff had this to say about Italian ceramic tile and her use of it as an artistic medium:

Q: Why do you use ceramic tile as one of the dominant materials in your interiors?

A: Depending on how you use it, tile is a versatile material with a great deal of textural and visual dimension. Italian tile is a very beautiful material with history and character—it has an artisan quality. The restaurants range from mid-

to high-end establishments, and I feel that the use of tile contributes to this upscale feeling.

In addition, our restaurants experience an enormous amount of traffic, making tile the perfect material to use. It's a hygienic product that can be easily cleaned. It's also durable and maintainable for the commercial environment, and that's very important.

Another advantage is the fact that tile is acoustically perfect for us. We have lively restaurants and the reverberation of noise created from tile keeps it lively. Our restaurants are not the kinds of places where you can listen to your neighbors' conversations!

Q: Can you discuss your manner of working with tile?

A: With Granita I had very elaborate ideas, which included designing compound curves and such. I used thousands of different tiles and custom-created them using 120 different artists. I wanted amorphous forms and textures with interesting glazes and design. So, in addition to using manufactured tiles, we also created tile with crackled and halo glazes. Some of the tiles were finished by hand-painting them in gold. The whole process was quite elaborate—some pieces were fired four or five times. As the tiles were finished, we laid them out on the floor to see how they looked and how we would arrange them. Around the coral tanks and columns I handpicked and actually laid the tile myself. Altogether, I spent four years creating Granita!

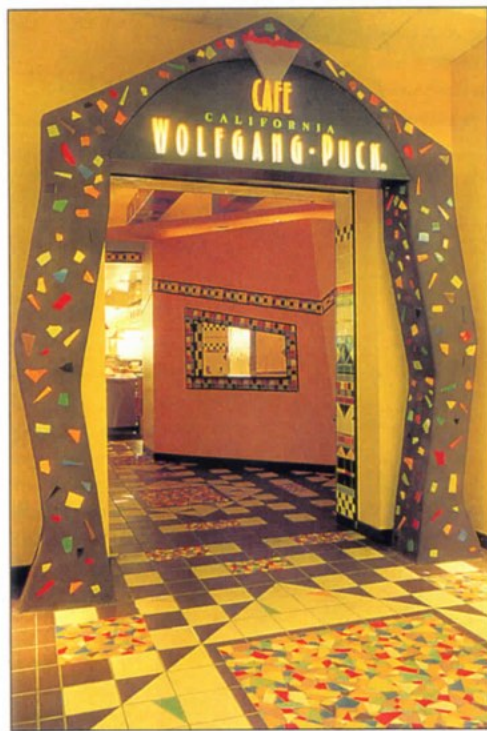
There were no formal laid-out floor plans for Granita. But, for our new Wolfgang Puck Cafes, I created patterns for the floor on paper, colored them in and then made the tile grids. We designed personalized patterns for each of the cafes so that they have the same feeling but are not exactly alike.

Q: What do you like about Italian ceramic tile in particular?

A: I like everything Italian! As far as tile goes, I am very impressed with the new stone-like effects. They are very authentic looking and are of the highest quality. I chose Italian tile for the restaurants because the colors are so vivid and

Q: What would you like to see in tile that's currently not available?

A: My biggest problem is finding floor tile in intense colors. Tiles that are created in intense colors tend to have a high-gloss finish, making them too slippery for the floor. I would like to see more vivid and unusual colors in floor tile. ■



The whimsical entrance to this Wolfgang Puck Cafe at the South Coast Plaza in Costa Mesa, CA, left, shows Barbara Lazaroff's colorful and highly original design statement, which uses solid and broken mosaic ceramic tile to set an inviting mood. The network of casual-but-elegant restaurants all feature the same distinctive design motif of bold black and white Italian ceramic tile floors and elaborate, vibrantly colorful decorative ceramic mosaics. Lazaroff is married to the well-known chef. (For a look at Lazaroff's Wolfgang Puck Cafe at Universal Studio's City Walk in the Los Angeles area, see the September issue of *TILE & DECORATIVE SURFACES Magazine*, pg. 42.)

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE GURA AGENCY

the glazes so rich The Italians are artists, they have a sense of color and a history in all the arts. They also have a wonderful sense of style, and their products are always innovative and unique. Quality and craftsmanship is important to the Italians, and it is apparent in their work