

## Glass tile comes of age as more than just a design component

By Ron Treister

**T**wo arenas where designers' imaginations can run wild are retail and hospitality in the commercial construction sector. During the past 20 years, more glass tile has been incorporated in their creations. Most of these specifications have consisted of mosaic tiles designed in a style characterized by classic Venetian glass products.

But something has happened to open the door to much greater interest in these materials, which previously were being specified quite frequently, but generally speaking, in the same-old way.

*Commercial Construction & Renovation* recently spoke with **Carl Steadly**, president and founder of **Stone & Pewter Accents**, who has as much worldwide experience in the glass tile business as anyone, anywhere.

Some background: In 1990, Steadly began his glass mission in Hawaii representing **Bisazza Mosaico**, perhaps the grandfather of Italian glass tile design. With his arsenal of glass materials, he went after major hotel design projects within the Hawaiian Islands, Taiwan, the South



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Pacific Islands and Japan, landing some major ones. They included **Ihilani** (Hawaii), **Grand Hyatt Wailea** (Hawaii), **Ritz Carlton** (Hawaii), **Hapuna Beach** (Hawaii), **Hualalai** (Hawaii), **Toyota Executive Homes** (Hawaii), **Uraku Towers** (Oahu), **Guam Hyatt**, **Tomamu Resort** (Japan), **Imperial Hotel Osaka** (Japan) and many more.

After just two years, Steadly became totally “glassy eyed” regarding these materials, so he started a tile design and distribution company in Los Angeles that covered the entire West Coast, as well as Hawaii. A few more years passed, and his business continued to grow, as did his love of glass tile design. Shortly after the New Millennium, he decided his destiny was to create and market glass tile designs of his own.

**You already had a successful distribution business before you began designing and producing your own lines of glass tile material. Why, in your estimation, is glass ideal as a design element for retail and hospitality designs?**

Glass has pizzazz, sophistication. It is one of the few surfacing materials that can easily be specified alongside stones, metals, leathers and virtually all fabrics. Because of its amazing colors and myriad textures, glass is

simply a great design medium. It picks up light and has great depth. Unlike stone, for example, which tends to have a flatter look, it can reflect light not just from its surface, but from its inside, as well.

Additionally, glass tile may be specified in virtually any color. Of course, glass is ideal for the “wet areas” of hospitality and retail design projects (such as public bathrooms, food courts, et al). And, most people are in agreement that glass is a lot easier to clean and maintain than other surfacing materials.

**What are some of the advancements in glass tile products during the years?**

The differences have been more in the installation systems, which have been updated and improved, therefore making glass tiles a more logical consideration for commercial projects. But today, glass tile is looked upon more as a high-performance design element than simply as a “covering.”

More products are being produced not just as “me-too” items, but as color visions starting with an artist’s eyes. For example, a true glass tile designer envisions his product in many ways that include adjusting colors, ranging from hot to cool hues. Textures no longer necessarily have to be smooth and polished. They may be stippled, curved,

honed, etched, antiqued and tumbled. Even more unique surfaces are available, each eliciting a different effect relative to the way light relates to it. These days, architects and designers finally perceive glass tile as “reproducible commercial art.”

Savvy production methods now allow for recreations of glass artwork to be produced via clockwork methods. This includes reproducing color variations, layers of different colors and even thin brushstroke effects.

**Are there any limitations relative to glass tile materials?**

Not really. Just like anything else, if they are installed correctly, they will perform as advertised. All tile materials essentially are intermediate products. For example, the installer has the ability to create a world-class piece of art (if installed correctly), or a total piece of junk (if installed incorrectly).

**When you design a product, what are your considerations?**

I always think about the ultimate finished installation. How the product will interact with other design elements. How it will enhance the overall luminosity of the room. Will it be the main focal item, or another component that must complement a number of materials such as porcelain tile, wood, stone, metal, leather, and more?

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**Give us an example of a product you've created that has had great success in both retail and hospitality. In your estimation, why has that happened?**

Our most successful glass tile product is called "Sumi-e," which is Japanese for "Calligraphy." The unique production process of Sumi-e includes folding streams of brilliant, colored frit into pure, crystal-clear (post-consumer recycled) glass, which bleeds into the body of each clear tile, resulting in a stunning and deep color effect.

Each Sumi-e tile has its own distinctive variation of color, tone and shade. Additionally, there are creases, wrinkles, shivers, waves and bubbles, all topped off with a natural glass surface that catches and filters all forms of light, resulting in an amazing visual effect.

When I brought it to market a few years back, we offered it in 15 colors and just one size (one inch X one inch). Now I am making Sumi-e in many unique sizes, including brick shapes, mini mosaics (11.5 mm X 11.5 mm), penny rounds, trapezoids, etc. The response continues to be high. I have created an identical line (with straight edges and a completely flat surface) called Tozen, which continues the same special color mixing effects as Sumi-e. This enables us to better accommodate members of the A&D community who don't want the special rustic effects of the Sumi-e glass.

**What are some of the signature installations in which your designs have appeared?**

We've been specified for the **W Hotel in Seoul**, for the pool at the **Del Coronado Hotel**, at **Gap Headquarters** in California, **Sandals Resort** in the Bahamas, and lots more. We know it will continue as people want more creative materials, which make unique design statements. Glass tile does that now more than ever. **CCR**