

Tile School: The Top Five Things You Should Know about Grout

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Adapted from: https://www.fireclaytile.com/blog/full/tile-school-the-top-five-things-you-should-know-about-grout/?utm_source=pardot&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=makers_muse_v51

You've picked your tile, your fixtures, the paint color and likely a host of other materials, but what about grout? Grout plays a starring role in maintenance and the longevity of your tile and also can be a major component of the design if you go for a contrasting color. Whether you're choosing between grout types, sealer, or the color, we are here to cover all the bases and help you make the right grout choice for your tile installation.

The top five things to know are below.

1. What type of grout should you use?

Grout type will play a huge role in your tile's lifespan, and different grout types will be appropriate for different applications, so let's go over all of your options:

Epoxy: Epoxy grouts are the most durable of all grout choices because they are resistant to stains and water damage, and will hold up against harsh cleaners. Epoxy grout is a great choice where moisture and food will be present, such as in bathroom installations and kitchen backsplashes. Epoxy grout has two parts, the base and the activator, when combined a chemical reaction begins which means you have limited time to finish grouting before it sets and becomes too hard to work with. This is why we recommend hiring a professional tile installer when working with epoxy grout. Epoxy grout is also the most expensive grout choice, however it doesn't need a sealer, which will save time and money in the long run.

Sanded: Sanded grout is a cement-based grout where sand is literally added to the mix. The sand creates a bond within the grout making it resistant to cracking and shrinking, and will also help with slip resistance in wet areas. Sanded grout is most suitable in installations with grout lines wider than 1/8th of an inch, like our Glass tile, to help prevent shrinkage and cracking.

Non-Sanded: Non-sanded grout is a cement-based grout used for smaller grout joints with spacing between 1/16th and 1/8th of an inch. If used in larger grout joints a non-sanded grout may crack because of too much shrinkage and because of the lack of sand which creates a bonding effect. Non-sanded grout is easier to work with on vertical walls because of its "sticky" property, and will stay put during application.

2. When and why should you seal your grout?

Sealing your grout is a must, especially in moisture prone areas and when working with a light-colored grout. The only type of grout that doesn't need sealer is epoxy grout, which is inherently pre-sealed. Grout sealers typically come in two forms, spray on sealers, and applicator sealers. Applicator sealers are applied directly to the grout with a roller ball or a brush. Not as much precision is necessary with spray on sealers, however they require more clean up time later on.

You will likely want to choose a penetrating grout sealer, which soaks through your materials creating an impenetrable barrier. There are also Membrane sealers, which form a layer on top of the tile and grout, however these can become penetrable with age, and moisture can get trapped underneath, creating major problems down the line. No matter which type of sealer you choose, always re-apply every 10-15 years to keep your tile looking its best.

3. Which grout color should you choose?

Selecting a grout color can feel stressful, there are a lot of options, and the color of your grout can significantly affect your overall design. Grout color also has a huge impact on tile maintenance, for example, a darker grout will hide stains but can be prone to fading, and can stain lighter colored tiles (we suggest testing a small area first if you go this route), while a lighter grout will show stains and will be hard to keep clean. Color is everything, so be sure to take your time.

There are three main directions you can go with grout color:

You can match your grout color to your tile: If you want your tile to be the center of attention, we suggest matching your grout color (or just get as close to it in tone if you have chosen a bright color). This will prevent the eye from being distracted from the pattern found within the grout line.

You can select a contrasting grout color: A contrasting grout joint will highlight the pattern found in the layout.

You can go neutral: A neutral grout is always a pretty safe bet, neutrals go with everything and it is hard to go wrong. Pattern will be more noticeable than a matching grout but not a main feature as seen with contrasting grout installations.

4. What is grout release and do I need it?

If you are using a dark or colored grout with a light tile color, there is always a chance of staining. Grout release is a removable, water soluble surface coating that is used to protect tile from staining when using a colored grout. It also makes grout clean up a little bit easier. You will need grout release when you are applying a dark or colored grout to a light tile color. This especially applies to glazes which have any sort of crackle. A dark grout will inevitably get into those tiny cracks and stain your tile. A grout sealer should also be used when applying a dark grout to our Handpainted designs that have a light dry line, such as in the image below.

5. What size grout line is best?

The size of grout lines for tile is something that comes up with just about every tile installation, and is a question we are asked almost every day. When it comes to size you should keep in mind that the tighter the grout joint, the more variation from tile to tile will show, which can cause an installation to look sloppy, this is why your tile installer may suggest a larger grout line for a straighter, more

professional looking installation. It is an aesthetic decision whether to go slightly larger or tighter. Here's what we recommend:

- 3/16": We recommend a 3/16" grout size for our ceramic tiles. This thickness leaves room for the natural variation in size, and the perfectly imperfect edges of handmade tile.
- 3/8": We manufacture our Glass tiles in individual molds which results in a soft, pillowed edge; because of this we suggest using a 3/8" grout line for our Glass tiles, including CRT.
- 1/8": a 1/8" size is used for our product lines that feature a rectified, clean cut edge, including our Handpainted Collections and our large-format tile line, Edge. A rectified edge allows for smaller grout lines because the precision cut of the edge of the tile itself. There is less irregularity so less spacing is needed between each piece of tile.

Below are a few things for you to consider when it comes to grout line size:

- The amount a variation in size from tile to tile: Because we make everything by hand and everything is high fired there is a considerable amount of variation in size and thickness from tile to tile. With handmade tile we always recommend larger grout joints to account for these irregularities.
- The characteristic of the edge of the tile: Each of our product lines have different edge characteristics which help determine which grout size you should use. While our Glass tiles have a rounded, pillowed edge our EDGE product line has a precise, rectified edge and our recycled tile is in between with a slightly cushioned edge.
- Tile size: The size of your tile should be considered when choosing a grout size. In general there is more size variation in large sized handmade tiles so they need a bigger grout joint.
- Where the tile is being installed: Where you are installing your tile should also be considered when choosing your grout size. For example, floor installations should consider using larger grout lines for more traction. Also, grout size should be considered when there is a differences in the angle of a surface. If your surface is not level, the grout will slope from one tile to another. You should also keep in mind that when tiling over a corner, your grout joint will open up and when tiling into a recess, the top of the grout joint will narrow.
- The style you are hoping to achieve: The size of the grout joint can dramatically change the way your overall tile installation looks, this is where personal preference comes into play. Some may prefer very minimal grout lines, while others like there grout lines to stand out and become part of the design.