

National Tile Contractors Association

September 2006

# TileLetter

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## ON THE COVER:

Schluter Systems L.P.

Essential water management in tiled showers

TCNA-recognized tile backers  
offer superior performance to greenboard

NTCA Workshops  
Summer review and fall forecast

TileLetter Awards:  
Award of Excellence and Recognition



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# TileLetter

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# A Turkish Diary

CTDA's trade mission to Istanbul

*by Tricia Terraneo*

I signed on without hesitation when I first learned the Turkish Ceramic Federation (TCF) had extended an invitation to Ceramic Tile Distributors Association (CTDA) members to visit Turkey in mid-June. A day later, I wasn't so sure. Turkey is a long way from home and its neighbors aren't too pleased with the U.S., so I was concerned about safety. But after doing some research, I decided to forge ahead. I'm very happy I did, because it turned out to be one of the most memorable adventures of my life!

## **DAY 1 AND 2**

The TCF had arranged for our group of about 135 distributors, press and related company members to fly to Istanbul from Chicago or New York on Turkish Airlines. Our group left Chicago Sunday evening and arrived 11 hours later in Turkey.

Our deluxe accommodations at the Swissotel, located on the European side of Istanbul, overlooked the famed Bosphorous River. The Bosphorous divides Istanbul; one side sits on the European continent, the other on Asia, a geographic fact unique to Istanbul.



The Turkish Ceramic Federation (TCF) hosted cocktails and dinner in a garden of the Swissotel for CTDA members on the day of their arrival in Turkey.

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That evening, we met and mingled with our Turkish hosts at a poolside garden at the hotel, enjoying cocktails and a buffet dinner. After a convivial evening, many of us retired early to get a good night's sleep before the main events began the next morning.

## DAY 3

After a sumptuous breakfast, we got right down to business by attending a mini-trade show in the hotel, arranged by the TCF. Nine companies featured basic lines or specialty items, amidst approving murmurs of "wouldn't it be great if all trade shows were like this!" from our crowd. Exhibitors included Altin Cini, Ege Seramik, Graniser, Kale Seramik, Kutahya Seramik, Termal Seramik, Umpas Seramik, Vitra and Yuksel Seramik.

I was particularly drawn to the beauty of the traditional Turkish Iznik tile designs, named for their city of origin. Dr. Ozotrac of Altin Cini explained that although these quartz-based tiles were produced for thousands of years, the formula for making them was lost for some 300 years. Only recently has the method been recreated with the



American distributors had an overview of Turkish ceramic tile production and design choices at this mini-trade show at the hotel.

help of modern science. Iznik tiles are rich in blues, greens and reds on a snow white background and typically depict the flora and fauna of the region, but can also contain geometric patterns ([www.turkishembassyoman.org/izhist.htm](http://www.turkishembassyoman.org/izhist.htm)). Designs are applied under the glaze, making the colors more vibrant and enhancing durability.

During TCF's official presentation, Mr. Adnan Polat, TCF president and the brains behind the trade mission, briefly reviewed the history of this project, gra-



*Produced in Turkey for thousands of years, Iznik tiles are quartz-based and rich in blue, green and red colors on a white background.*

ciously thanking everyone involved. The guest of honor, Mr. Kursad Tuzmen, Minister of State, reported that Turkey is the fifth largest exporter of ceramic tile in the world following Italy, Spain, China and Brazil. Since 1995 Turkey's tile exports to the U.S. have risen from 3.45 percent to 12.93 percent in 2005, he said. Mr. Tuzmen's message was clear: he's ambitious for Turkey to increase its exports of ceramic tiles and he has been supporting government strategies to accomplish this goal. Mark Carlson, president of the CTDA thanked the TCF and everyone involved in the process, and stressed the necessity to develop

relationships and exchange ideas.

After lunch we were off on our first sight-seeing jaunt around Istanbul. Our first stop was the impressive Dolmabahce Palace built between 1843 and 1856. It was home to six sultans before the Ottoman Empire was abolished in 1924. Highlights included the Turkish bath –



*From left: Mark Carlson, CTDA president, Kursad Tuzmen, Turkish Minister of State, Adnan Polat, TCF president, Ahmet Yamaner, president of the Turkish Ceramics Promotion Committee.*

made entirely of alabaster and marble – and the chandelier in the Ceremonial Hall, a gift from Queen Victoria, which has 664 bulbs and weighs 4.5 tons! ([english.istanbul.gov.tr](http://english.istanbul.gov.tr))

At the Archaeological Museum we saw the Alexander Sarcophagus, one of Turkey's most valued treasures from the 4th century B.C.

Lastly, we visited the ancient Roman underground cistern. Fifty-two stone steps transport you to another world: a dimly lit cavernous space with 336 stone columns that support the brick-domed ceiling which was waterproofed with "Persian mortar." The Emperor Justinian had the cistern built in 542 A.D. when the Eastern Roman Empire was flourishing. It was essentially a reservoir, with a capacity of 21 million gallons of water, transported by aque-



*This marble sarcophagus depicts scenes from Alexander the Great's wars with the Persians, but it was not actually Alexander's coffin.*



*Tourists can now walk through what was once an underground reservoir built in ancient Roman times, designed to hold 21 million gallons of water.*

duct and stored here to supply the emperor's palace. It's been drained to about three feet of water so tourists can walk through it on platforms above the water line. The evening ended with a dinner cruise on the Bosphorous, complete with belly dancers, exotic food and a band.

#### DAY 4

A chartered jet delivered us 40 minutes later to Canakkale (pronounced cha-knock-a-lay) where Kale Seramik is located. (Each group of distributors

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selected a different factory to visit: Kale, Vitra, Ege, Termal and Yuksel). On a bus ride to the factory, we viewed picturesque countryside ambling through cherry, apricot and peach orchards, with women in head scarves picking vegetables. (Conservative dress was recommended for jaunts into the countryside, but Istanbul is a modern, western-style city with no restriction on women's attire.) We also had a glimpse of the Dardanelle Straits, a strategic waterway at the heart of intense fighting during World War I.

Kale Seramik is immense. Established in 1957, it has 24 companies in its group with 5,000 employees and revenue of \$650 million per year. Today it is one of Turkey's top industrial corporations ([www.e-kale.com/en](http://www.e-kale.com/en)).

Our group of about 50 U.S. distributors was warmly greeted by Kale's vice president and founder's daughter, Mrs. Bodur Okay, Mr. Ozcelik, president of the ceramic division, and many others from Kale's management team. We drank Turkish tea as we viewed tile displays and enjoyed a brief presentation that detailed a new product called Kalesinterflex.

Using cutting-edge production technology, Kale has developed this extra-large porcelain ceramic slab that can be used as an exterior veneer. Pieces measure 1x3 meters with a thickness of only 3 mm and can be cut to specifications. Extremely flexible, the through-body tile can be used in applications with curved structural elements and offers the benefits of stain-, chemical-, frost-, water-, fire- and sunlight-resistance

([www.kalesinterflex.com](http://www.kalesinterflex.com)). The facility where these enormous porcelain slabs are produced is about the size of a football field with specialized machinery the Italians helped Kale develop.

At two other Kale plants, we witnessed high-technology machinery such as double-presses and robotic equipment in the manufacturing seg-



*A roller press early in the production stage of Kale's oversized flexible porcelain Kalesinterflex slabs that have a thickness of only 3 mm.*



*The Kale Seramik company flew about 50 people to its headquarters in Canakkale and provided tours of their modern, well-organized and spotless factories.*



*This is one of two high-tech tile presses of Kale's twin-press system used for making floor and wall tiles.*

ment, though quality control is still largely the job of women who pull imperfect tiles from the conveyor belt before packaging.

Kale's full-time chef prepared an elaborate feast for us in the company's private banquet facilities. We sampled Turkish fare at its best: local specialties like sardine dolmas (stuffed grape vine leaves), bread, seafood stew with tiny shrimp, scallops and octopus, shrimp kebobs, salad and the kicker – homemade pistachio ice cream and semolina helva. Helva is a simple, but delicious combination of grain, sugar, butter and milk.

After that delightful and gracious visit, we took a siesta on the long bus ride to Troy. First made famous in Greek mythology – and recently by the movie starring Brad Pitt – it's lush and green, unlike its cinematic portrayal. Our guide informed us that throughout history, Troy was home to nine cities built one on top of the other. When one was demolished by natural disaster or war, another was constructed, often using the stone blocks from the old city. The ruins are sparse, but still fascinating. The movie studio donated the Trojan horse used in the film to the city of Canakkale where it



*Only few ruins remain of the ancient city of Troy. Unlike the movie that depicted Troy as a desert, the surrounding area is very fertile.*

now sits in the town square.

After the quick plane ride back to Istanbul, we were seated at a chic restaurant under Istanbul's main bridge – eating again! The mild evening temperature and spectacular view of the city created a perfect backdrop to our main course of fish and wine. Soon we left for the hotel, anticipating our last day of sight-seeing.

## DAY 5

Our last day in Istanbul was chock full of its most well-known landmarks – the Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace and the Grand Bazaar – which are impossible to do justice to in a few words.

The Blue Mosque is only a nickname chosen for the dominant color inside the structure – the walls, columns and domes are largely covered with Iznik porcelain tiles. Because Islam forbids portrayals of Allah, humans or animals in mosque artwork, mosques feature tiles decorated with floral or geometric designs.

The Hagia Sophia was a Christian church built in 532 A.D. by the Roman Emperor Justinian. It's a magnificent example of Byzantine art and architecture. Converted to a mosque in 1453, the Christian-themed gold mosaics were plastered over and replaced with Islamic icons. The first president of the Turkish Republic, known as Ataturk, made the church into a museum in 1935, at which time the plaster was removed, revealing the very well-preserved mosaics.

The Topkapi Palace and the objects on view from the sultan's private collec-

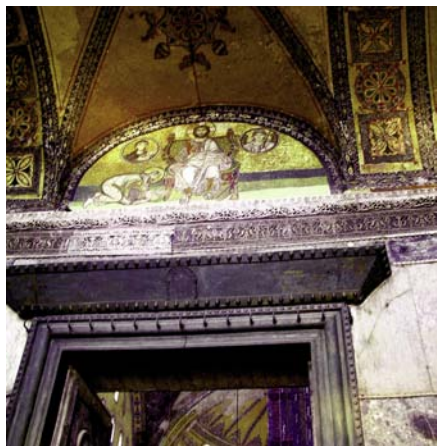


tion were opulent to the extreme. Here you will find the “Spoonmaker’s Diamond,” so called since it was found by a poor man digging through the trash. He later bartered it for three wooden spoons. Today, the diamond is the fifth largest in the world, consisting of 86 carats!

After a break for lunch in a cozy outdoor setting, we indulged our guide by



*Iznik tiles are one of the main decorative elements inside the Blue Mosque, as seen here.*



*This gold mosaic, in the Byzantine church Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, dates back to about the 8th century A.D.*

attending a presentation of authentic Turkish carpets, knowing that he would benefit if any sales were made. The rugs were truly beautiful, if not expensive. The key here, as in everywhere in Turkey, is to bargain, bargain, bargain!

This was important to remember at the Bazaar, where we were also mindful to guard our wallets and purses against pick-pockets. Originally built in 1461, this indoor arcade is a labyrinth of thousands of shops offering jewelry, pottery, textiles, leather goods, rugs, artifacts, hardware, gadgets and more. Americans may find the vendors’ selling tactics a bit aggressive, but if you don your shields and put on your bargaining fez, you may score some interesting and inexpensive souvenirs of Turkey there.

By the time we extricated everyone from the bazaar, we had all of forty-five minutes to get ready for our farewell dinner in an enchanting, historic riverside villa. As we all exchanged stories about our experiences in Turkey, there was a sense that something wonderful



*Turkish carpets are known for their “double knot” weaving method and intricate designs. Donato Pompo of Ceramic Tile and Stone Consultants, checks out the selection in a Grand Bazaar shop.*

was about to end. But not before the CTDA could thank the TCF for its exceptional hospitality. Mark Carlson presented Mr. Adnan Polat with a quintessential icon of the U.S., the Frederic Remington bronze sculpture, The Bronco Buster.

I look back on this trip as a great learning experience about Turkey's culture and its industry. Turkey is a beautiful country; the people are friendly and the food delicious. The history is measured in thousands of years, unlike our young country and its tile industry



Mark Carlson (left) presents Adnan Polat with Frederic Remington's bronze "The Bronco Buster" at the farewell dinner.



Author Tricia Terraneo and Donato Pompo took a side trip to the ancient city of Ephesus in Turkey after the CTDA trade mission concluded.

is ambitious and growing. There is still so much more to see....and I hope to go back soon to see it!

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