

Why you need to learn how to install gauged porcelain tile slabs/panels



By Donato Pompo, CTC, CSI, CDT, MBA

Gauged porcelain tile panels/slabs (GPTP/S) are the latest and greatest buzz in the tile industry. As an installer that's all you needed, right – one more tile to learn how to install plus the need to buy a whole new set of tools? You thought a 24" x 24" inch tile was big, but now we have tiles that are larger than 5 x 10 feet. These porcelain tiles can come as thin as 1/8" (3mm) and as thick as 3/4" (20mm). They can be installed on walls, floors, and as counter tops.

Gauged porcelain panels/slabs are normally glazed using the latest inkjet technology, which allows slabs to look just like natural stone slabs of marble, limestone, or any other type of natural stone or concrete. There really is no limit to what

kind of look manufacturers can produce using computers and inkjet technology. The inkjet technology that manufacturers use allows them to create the natural variations in tile panels that are typical of natural stone. The reproductions are so good that even I have to get on my hands and knees to determine if it is a real stone or not.

These tiles are very durable, as long as they are installed correctly; but of course that is the trick. If you learn how to install these tiles properly there are big rewards: more jobs; more money; and no problems. To install these tile panels correctly, you need the right tools, you need to properly prepare the tile substrates, and you need to properly install the slabs in a way





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that is different from installing traditional tiles.

Take note: there are now new ANSI standards for these tiles. ANSI A137.3 is the new standard for “Gauged Porcelain Tile Panels/Slabs” dictating how they should be manufactured to meet certain physical properties. ANSI A108.19 is the new standard for the interior installation of “Gauged Porcelain Tile Panels/Slabs.”

Benefits of installing gauged porcelain tile panels/slabs

So why should you learn to install gauged porcelain tile slabs? Well, to start with, you can differentiate yourself from others because most installers don't know how to install these tile panels. That means more jobs and more money. There is a higher demand right now for



gauged porcelain panel installers, so high demand/low supply means you charge more.

Actually, you have to charge more for labor because the productivity is much less. You need at least two laborers to install a panel and you probably should have up to four laborers in a crew to manage the process and ensure a successful installation. More labor means more profit.

You need the right tools too, which will cost you about \$1,000 to get started. You need a good rack for moving the slabs around and to lift them into place. You need the extended forklift forks for properly lifting the crates. You need a good flat table to work on. You need the scoring and cutting tools to make good cuts. You need to buy the Euro slanted trowels to help ensure you achieve full thin-set coverage. You need to buy the plastic leveler clips to avoid tile lippage. So you have to figure this into your cost too. (For more information on this, see Tech Talk, *TileLetter* October 2017 issue)

This tile also sells for a lot more. It goes for \$7.00 or more per square foot. You have to figure in waste and breakage, which adds up. A 5' x 10' foot tile panel will cost you \$400 or more. So putting your profit margin on your tile purchase brings you even more profit. On a square-footage-basis, you are making some good profit, and deservedly so.



Learning how to install GTP/S

So how do you learn how to install gauged porcelain tile panels/slabs properly, so you avoid an expensive lesson or learn at someone else's expense?

Manufacturers and importers of gauged porcelain tile panels realize they need installers to install the product in order to sell it. They know it has to be installed correctly or it will come back to haunt them, as well as everyone else. As I always say, when there is a problem it doesn't matter who is at fault – everyone pays either in time, money or reputation. So it is in everyone's best interest to help the installers learn how to install these products correctly.

Tile manufacturers and setting material manufacturers provide installation guidelines for gauged porcelain tile panels. Some have videos showing the installation process. Many of them provide workshops to help train installers.

The critical part of installing these large tile panels is to achieve a structurally sound and flat substrate so it does not vary out of plane more than 1/8" in 10' or 1/6" in 24". Another critical part of the installation is to achieve full thin-set mortar contact between the back of the tile and its substrate. There are special techniques for applying the thin-set that you must follow. There are also special techniques for

embedding the tile panels into the thin-set mortar in a way that allows the air to escape from under the tile, which is critical. If air is trapped under these tile panels, then that makes the tile panels more susceptible to damage if they are subjected to certain live loads or other stresses.

Online education about installing GTP/Ss

If you don't have time to attend a manufacturer's workshop to learn how to install these large gauged tile panels, you can always take the University of Ceramic Tile and Stone's online course and complete it in one night, or in as little as about five hours. The Tile Installer Thin-set Standards (ITS) Verification course not only will teach you in detail how to install these large tile panels on walls and floors, but it will also teach you the current tile industry standards, practices, and methods for substrate preparation and for the tile installation. The online courses give you 24/7 access for two weeks. All you need is a computer and an internet connection. For details of the ITS Verification course content go to <https://uofcts.org/online-courses/titc-certified/>.

The ITS Verification course section on how to install large tile panels is professionally narrated and has video and animations showing the detailed steps to installing the tile panels. It goes through

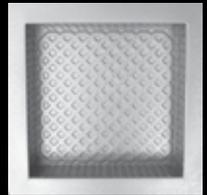
the step-by-step process both for a floor application and for a wall application. The course is taught in both English and Spanish. Other versions and sites to access the ITS Verification course are:

- TTMAC offers a Canadian version at <http://ttmac.com/en/technical/training-courses>.
- NTCA offers a discount version of the course at: www.tile-assn.com/?page=CTS
- CTDA also offers a discount version of the course at www.ctda-home.org/content/education/online-education.asp or from
- Fuse Alliance offers a discounted course at www.fusealliance.com. Donato Pompo, CTC, CSI, CDT,

MBA, is the founder of Ceramic Tile and Stone Consultants (CTaSC), and of the University of Ceramic Tile and Stone (UofCTS). He has more than 35 years of experience in the ceramic tile and stone industry from installation to distribution to manufacturing of installation products. Donato provides services in forensic investigations, quality control (QC) services for products and installation methods, training programs, testing, and onsite quality control inspection services. He received the 2012 Construction Specifier Magazine Article of the Year. Donato can be reached at donato@ctasc.com.

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