FROM EARTH TO WATER

The complete story of how a Moroccan mosaic fountain is made



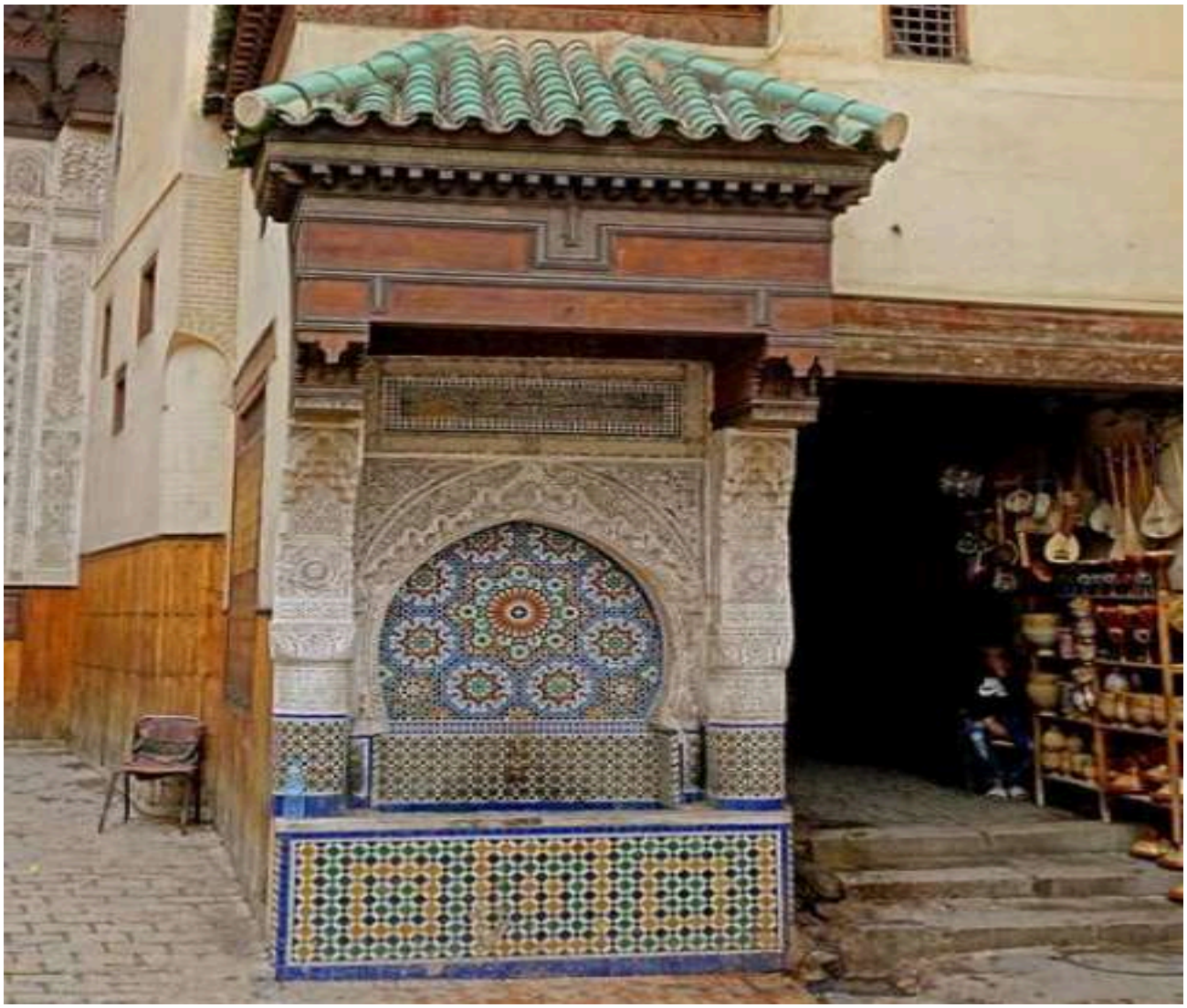
From raw clay to zellige, from zellige to mosaic, and from mosaic to a fountain handcrafted in Fez.

A Story That Begins in Fez

In Fez, fountains and zellige have shared the same architectural language for centuries. Found in riads, courtyards, gardens and traditional homes, they bring together geometry, colour, craftsmanship and water.

But a Moroccan mosaic fountain does not begin with its final pattern or with the water flowing from its spout. Its story begins much earlier, with the earth itself.

Before the small coloured pieces of the mosaic can be assembled, clay must be prepared, shaped, dried, fired, glazed and fired again. The finished zellige is then marked and cut by hand before hundreds of individual pieces are assembled into a composition. At the same time, the fountain structure, basin and water system must be created to transform the decorative mosaic into a functional fountain.



01 – THE RAW MATERIAL

Clay: Where It All Begins

The process begins with natural clay. The earth is prepared until it becomes sufficiently smooth, consistent and workable. It is moistened, kneaded and cleared, as much as possible, of unwanted elements.

The quality of this preparation influences every stage that follows. A consistent clay body is easier to shape and helps reduce cracking and deformation during drying and firing.



02 – SHAPING

Transforming Earth Into Tiles

The prepared clay is flattened into slabs, levelled and cut into tiles. At this stage, the pieces are still raw and fragile, without the strength, colour or shine associated with finished zellige.

Small irregularities in the surface and thickness naturally reflect the handmade process.



03 – DRYING

Letting Time Do Its Work

Before firing, the raw tiles must be allowed to dry. Moisture gradually leaves the clay, preparing it for the intense heat of the kiln.

This stage cannot be rushed. If too much moisture remains inside the clay, the tiles may crack, distort or break during firing.

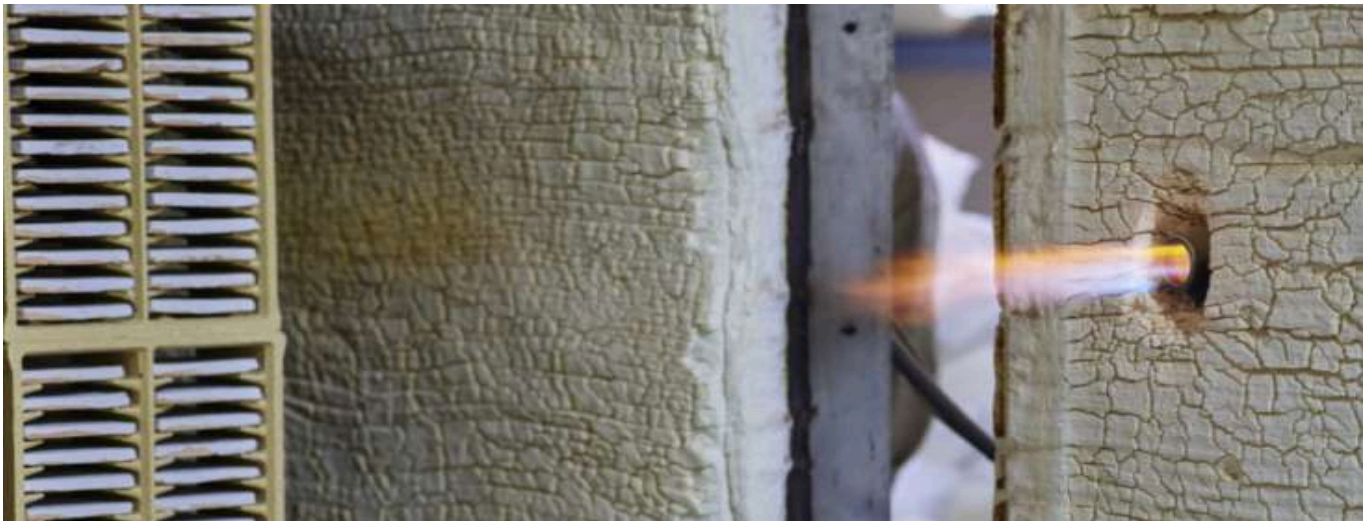


04 – THE FIRST FIRING

From Raw Clay to Bisque

Once sufficiently dry, the tiles enter the kiln for their first firing.

The heat transforms the fragile clay into a hard, porous ceramic known as bisque. The tile now has the strength necessary for the next stage while remaining ready to receive its coloured glaze.



05 – THE GLAZE

Bringing Colour to Life

After the first firing, one face of each tile receives its glaze. Deep blues, greens, whites, yellows, reds, earthy tones and countless other shades can be combined according to the fountain's design.

Because glaze reacts naturally to the clay and the heat of the kiln, subtle differences in tone, depth and sheen can appear from one piece to another.

These variations are part of the distinctive character of traditional zellige.



06 – THE SECOND FIRING

Setting the Colour Through Fire

The glazed tiles return to the kiln for a second firing.

Under intense heat, the glaze bonds with the ceramic surface and develops its final appearance. What entered the kiln as glazed bisque emerges as finished zellige, with the colour, depth and subtle variations that will eventually animate the fountain.



07 – THE MARKING

Preparing the Geometry

The finished tiles are not yet the mosaic.

According to the chosen fountain design, geometric shapes are marked onto the zellige in preparation for cutting. Stars, diamonds, triangles, squares, crosses, borders and numerous smaller adjustment pieces may all be required.

Each shape has a specific role within the composition.

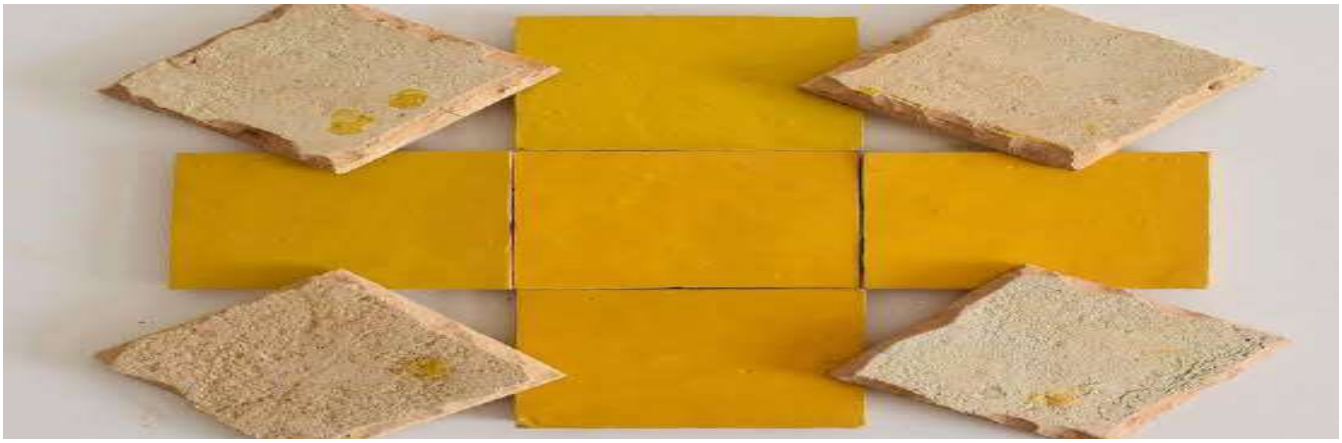


08 – THE CUTTING

Every Piece Is Cut by Hand

Using traditional tools, the artisan cuts and adjusts each tile to create the required shape. The pieces are shaped progressively, and their edges are refined to allow them to fit closely together.

This work requires precision and experience. The subtle differences between individual pieces are a natural result of the handmade process and give the mosaic its unique, living character.



09 – THE DESIGN

Designing the Future Fountain

Before assembly, the fountain must be considered as a complete composition.

Its dimensions, proportions, colours, border, central motif, basin and overall geometry are planned according to the chosen design.

For a bespoke project, the starting point may be an existing fountain, a photograph, a drawing or simply an idea. The artisan then adapts the pattern to the requested dimensions rather than simply enlarging or reducing it mechanically.



10 – THE ASSEMBLY

The Mosaic Appears Piece by Piece

Once the pieces are prepared, the mosaic begins.

The tesserae are positioned individually according to the design. In traditional assembly methods, the glazed faces may be placed downward while the artisan works from the backs of the pieces.

Little by little, individual fragments become borders, stars, floral forms, geometric repetitions and larger compositions.

What appears effortless when finished is the result of hundreds of small decisions and adjustments.



11 – THE STRUCTURE

Giving the Fountain Its Form

The mosaic alone does not make a fountain. It must become part of a structure capable of supporting its weight, holding water and remaining stable in use.

The body and basin are constructed according to the dimensions of the design. The mosaic sections are integrated into the fountain structure, while the back and supporting areas are reinforced.

The proportions of the basin, decorative panel and overall structure must work together both visually and functionally.



12 – THE WATER SYSTEM

Preparing the Fountain to Flow

Behind the visible craftsmanship is the system that brings the fountain to life.

A pump circulates water from the basin through the internal hose and towards the spout. The water then falls back into the basin and is recirculated through the system.

The pump, hose, cable and connections are positioned so that the functional elements remain as discreet as possible once the fountain is installed.

Depending on the project, the fountain can also be prepared for a specific water configuration or installation requirement.



13 – THE FINISHING

Bringing Every Element Together

Once the mosaic, structure and water system are in place, the fountain enters its finishing stage.

The joints are completed, edges are refined and the surface is carefully cleaned. The basin, borders and surrounding areas are inspected and adjusted where necessary.

Small variations in colour, cutting, joints and surface remain visible. Rather than signs of industrial uniformity, they reveal the individual handwork behind the fountain.

14 – THE WATER TEST

The Moment the Fountain Comes to Life

Before the fountain is considered complete, its water system must be tested.

The basin is filled, the pump is activated and water begins to circulate through the fountain. The artisan can then observe the flow, check the pump and connections and ensure that the water returns correctly to the basin.

After weeks of working with earth, ceramic, geometry and structure, water finally becomes part of the piece.



15 – THE FINAL RESULT

From Earth to Water

The transformation is complete.

Clay became ceramic. Ceramic received colour and became zellige. Zellige was cut into geometry. Hundreds of individual pieces became a mosaic. The mosaic became part of a structure, and the structure was given movement through water.

Every fountain is made individually. Its dimensions, colours and complexity determine the number of pieces, cuts, adjustments and hours of work required to complete it.

No two handmade fountains are perfectly identical. The subtle differences created by hand, material and fire are part of what makes each one unique.

From Fez to Your Space

Whether placed in a home, courtyard, garden, terrace, hotel, restaurant or another architectural setting, the finished fountain carries with it a part of Fez's artisanal heritage.

Once water begins to flow, the craftsmanship becomes more than something to look at. Colour, geometry, movement and sound become part of the space around it.

What arrives at its destination is therefore more than a decorative object. It is a piece that began with earth in Fez, passed through fire and through the hands of artisans, and was ultimately created to bring water to life.

