FROM EARTH TO TILE

The story behind four traditions of Moroccan tilemaking



From raw clay to colour, pattern and geometry — four expressions of Moroccan craftsmanship, made by hand in Fez.

A Story That Begins in Fez

In Fez, tilemaking is more than the production of a decorative surface. It is a craft shaped by generations of knowledge, where earth, water, fire, colour and the artisan's hand come together.

Yet not every Moroccan tile follows exactly the same path.

Some become simple glazed tiles, valued for their colour and natural variations. Others become canvases for intricate hand-painted decoration. Some are shaped into the elongated form known as bejmat, while others are cut into small geometric pieces and assembled into elaborate mosaics.

They begin with the same fundamental material — clay — but through different techniques, they develop their own character and purpose.



One material, four traditions: glazed tiles, hand-painted tiles, bejmat and hand-cut mosaic.

01 – THE RAW MATERIAL

Clay: Where Every Tile Begins

Before colour, pattern or geometry, there is earth.

Natural clay is prepared until it becomes sufficiently smooth and workable. It is moistened, kneaded and cleared, as much as possible, of unwanted elements before being prepared for shaping.

The quality and consistency of the clay influence everything that follows, from drying and firing to the final surface of the finished tile.



02 – SHAPING

Giving the Clay Its Form

The prepared clay is flattened and shaped according to the type of tile being produced.

Square and rectangular formats can be created for traditional tiles, while bejmat takes its characteristic elongated form.

At this stage, the pieces remain raw and fragile. Their subtle differences in surface, edges and dimensions already reveal the handmade nature of the process.



03 – DRYING

Letting the Material Rest

Once shaped, the raw clay pieces must dry naturally before they can be fired.

During this period, moisture gradually leaves the clay. The process must happen carefully: firing a piece while too much moisture remains inside can cause cracking, distortion or breakage.

The artisan therefore works not only with the material, but also with time.



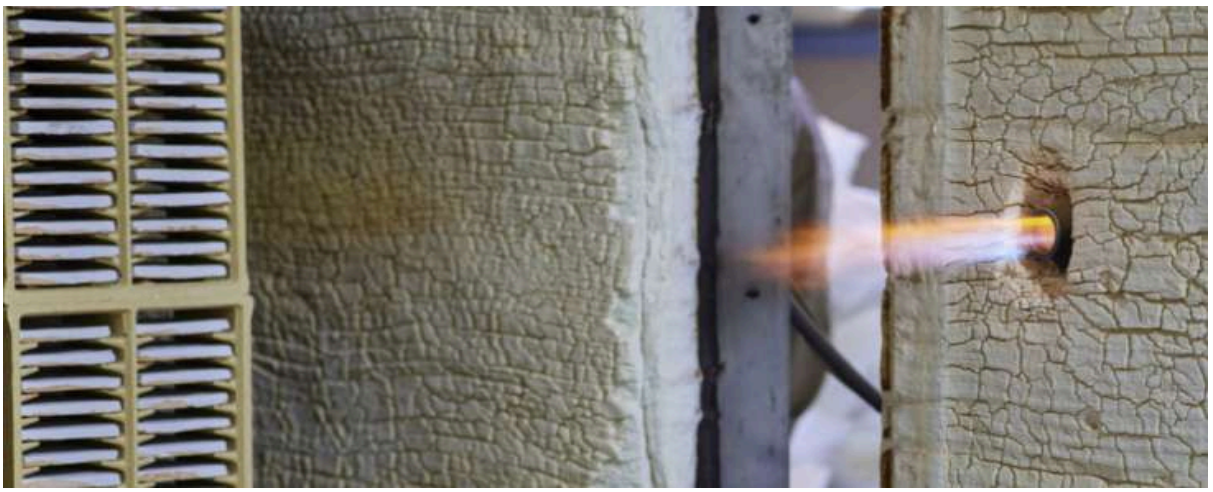
04 – THE FIRST FIRING

Transforming Earth Into Ceramic

Once sufficiently dry, the pieces undergo their first firing.

The intense heat of the kiln transforms the fragile dried clay into a hard, porous ceramic body.

The earth now has strength and permanence, but its transformation is not yet complete. What happens next depends on the type of tile being created.



FOUR PATHS FROM ONE MATERIAL

From the same fundamental material, four distinct traditions emerge.

A simple surface can be transformed through glaze and fire into a richly coloured traditional tile.

It can become a canvas for the hand-painted motifs of Moroccan decorative art.

It can take the long, distinctive proportions of bejmat.

Or it can become the starting point for mosaic, where colour is cut into smaller geometric pieces and reconstructed into intricate patterns.

Each follows its own process, but all remain connected by the same material and the same tradition of hand craftsmanship.



05 – TRADITIONAL GLAZED TILES

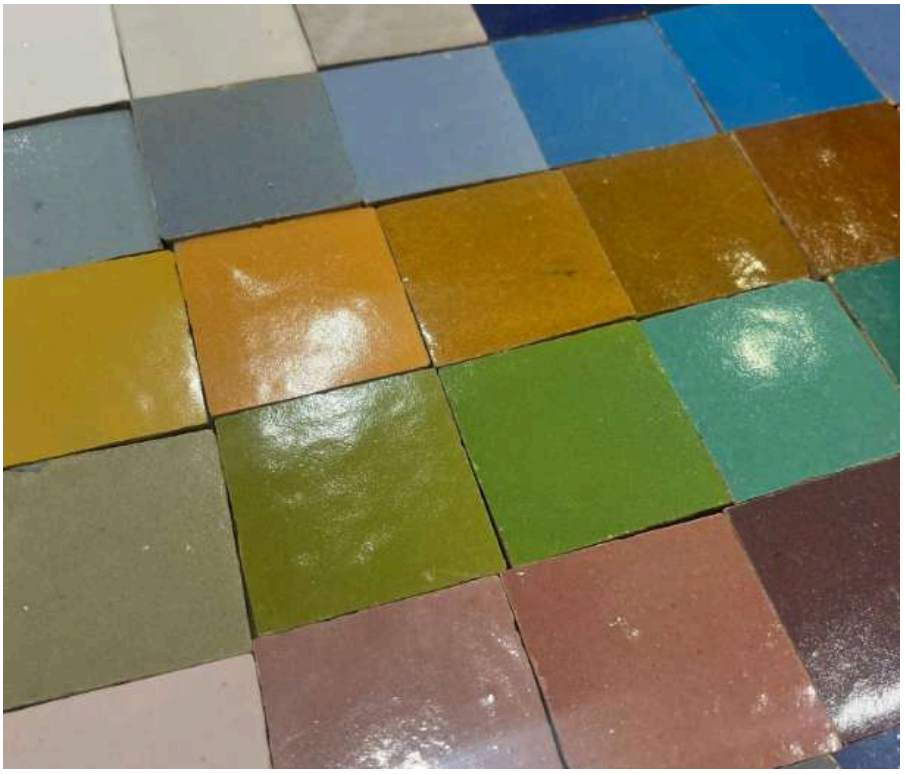
Colour in Its Purest Form

For traditional glazed tiles, the fired ceramic surface receives a layer of coloured glaze.

The pieces then return to the kiln, where heat bonds the glaze to the ceramic body and reveals its final colour, gloss and depth.

Even when several tiles receive the same glaze, the final result is not perfectly identical. Small variations in the clay, glaze and firing can produce subtle differences in tone, texture and reflection.

When the tiles are placed together, these variations give the surface movement and character rather than the uniform appearance of an industrially produced tile.



06 – HAND-PAINTED TILES

When the Tile Becomes a Canvas

Hand-painted tiles follow a more decorative path.

The ceramic surface becomes a canvas on which the artisan builds the design through careful brushwork and colour.

Geometric forms, floral motifs, borders and traditional Moroccan patterns can be painted individually or designed to connect across several tiles as part of a larger composition.

For custom projects, colours and motifs can also be adapted to the intended design or space.

Because the decoration is applied by hand, subtle differences naturally appear in lines, colours and details from one tile to another.

These variations preserve the presence of the artisan within the finished composition and make every piece slightly different.



07 – BEJMAT TILES

A Different Shape, A Different Rhythm

Bejmat is immediately recognisable by its elongated rectangular form.

Like traditional glazed tiles, the pieces can receive coloured glaze before returning to the kiln, where the final surface and colour are created through fire.

But it is the proportions of bejmat that give it its distinctive character.

Its long, narrow shape allows the pieces to be arranged in straight rows, herringbone patterns, diagonal compositions and many other geometric layouts.

Because the tiles are handmade, subtle differences in dimensions, edges, glaze and colour naturally remain from one piece to another.

Once installed together, these variations create a surface with rhythm, texture and movement.



08 – MOSAIC TILES

From Tile to Geometry

The fourth path transforms tile into something entirely different.

Instead of remaining whole, coloured zellige becomes the starting material for mosaic.

The artisan determines the colours and geometric shapes required for the intended composition. The surface can then be marked according to the pieces needed for the pattern.

Squares, triangles, diamonds, stars, crosses and many other geometric forms can emerge from the original tile.

What begins as a complete tile is now ready to become part of a much larger design.

09 – THE CUTTING

Every Mosaic Piece Is Cut by Hand

The mosaic process continues with one of its most distinctive stages: hand cutting.

Using traditional tools, the artisan cuts and shapes the tile into individual geometric pieces.

Each piece is progressively refined so that its edges and proportions work with the surrounding elements of the pattern.

Complex compositions may require many different shapes, sizes and colours.

There is no single piece containing the complete design. The final mosaic is created from numerous individual elements, each prepared separately by hand.



10 – THE ASSEMBLY

Hundreds of Pieces, One Composition

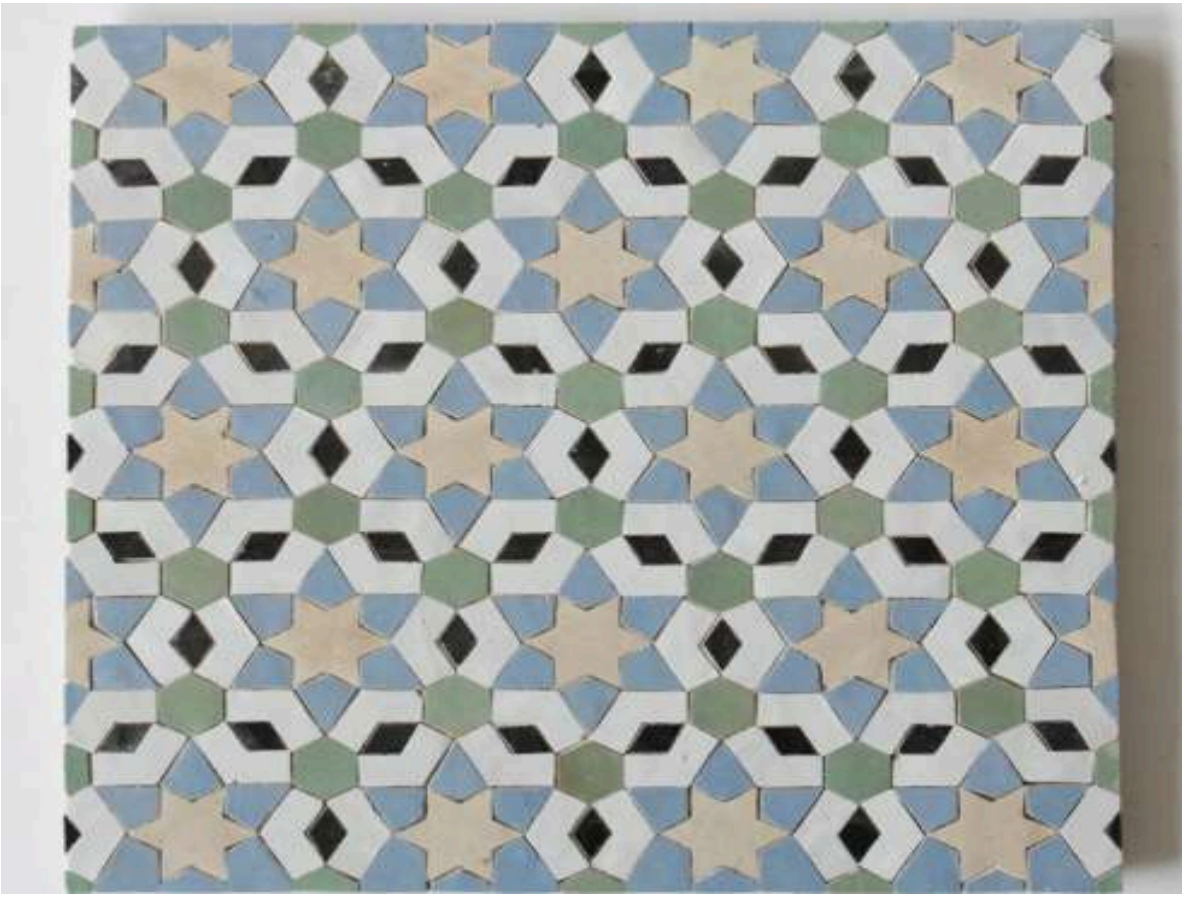
Once the pieces have been prepared, the mosaic begins to take form.

Following the intended design, the artisan places each individual element in position, combining colour and geometry piece by piece.

Stars, borders, interlacing forms, floral-inspired motifs and repeating geometric patterns gradually emerge from what were once separate fragments.

In traditional methods, the mosaic may be assembled with the glazed surfaces facing downward, meaning the artisan constructs much of the composition while working from the backs of the pieces.

Only when the individual elements come together does the complete pattern reveal itself.



11 – NATURAL VARIATION

The Signature of the Hand

Although the four types follow different paths, they share one important characteristic: the traces of handmade production remain visible in the finished material.

A glazed tile may carry subtle variations in colour or reflection.

A hand-painted tile may reveal tiny differences in brushwork and detail.

Bejmat may vary slightly in dimensions, edges or surface.

A mosaic piece may retain the small irregularities created as it was cut and shaped by hand.

These differences are part of the character of handmade Moroccan tilework.

Rather than creating perfect mechanical repetition, they allow the finished surface to retain the material, movement and touch of its making.

12 – THE FINAL RESULT

Four Expressions of Moroccan Craftsmanship

From the same fundamental material, four distinct forms of Moroccan tilework emerge.

Traditional glazed tiles celebrate colour, surface and the natural variations created through glaze and fire.

Hand-painted tiles transform ceramic into a canvas for pattern, colour and decorative expression.

Bejmat tiles use their elongated proportions to create rhythm, movement and countless geometric layouts.

Mosaic tiles transform coloured zellige into smaller hand-cut pieces before bringing them together again as intricate compositions.

Different techniques. Different forms. Different possibilities.

Yet all four begin with the same simple material and are shaped by the relationship between earth, fire, colour and the artisan's hand.

Every handmade piece carries small traces of the process that created it — and no two are perfectly identical.

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From Fez to Your Space

From a single decorative detail to an entire wall, floor, backsplash, bathroom, courtyard or architectural project, Moroccan tiles can transform a surface through colour, texture and geometry.

Their journey begins with something remarkably simple: earth.

Through shaping, drying, fire, glazing, painting, cutting and assembly, that earth can take many different forms.

What ultimately reaches a home, restaurant, hotel or architectural project is therefore more than a surface covering.

It is material transformed by fire and finished by human hands — carrying a part of Fez's craft tradition into a new space.

