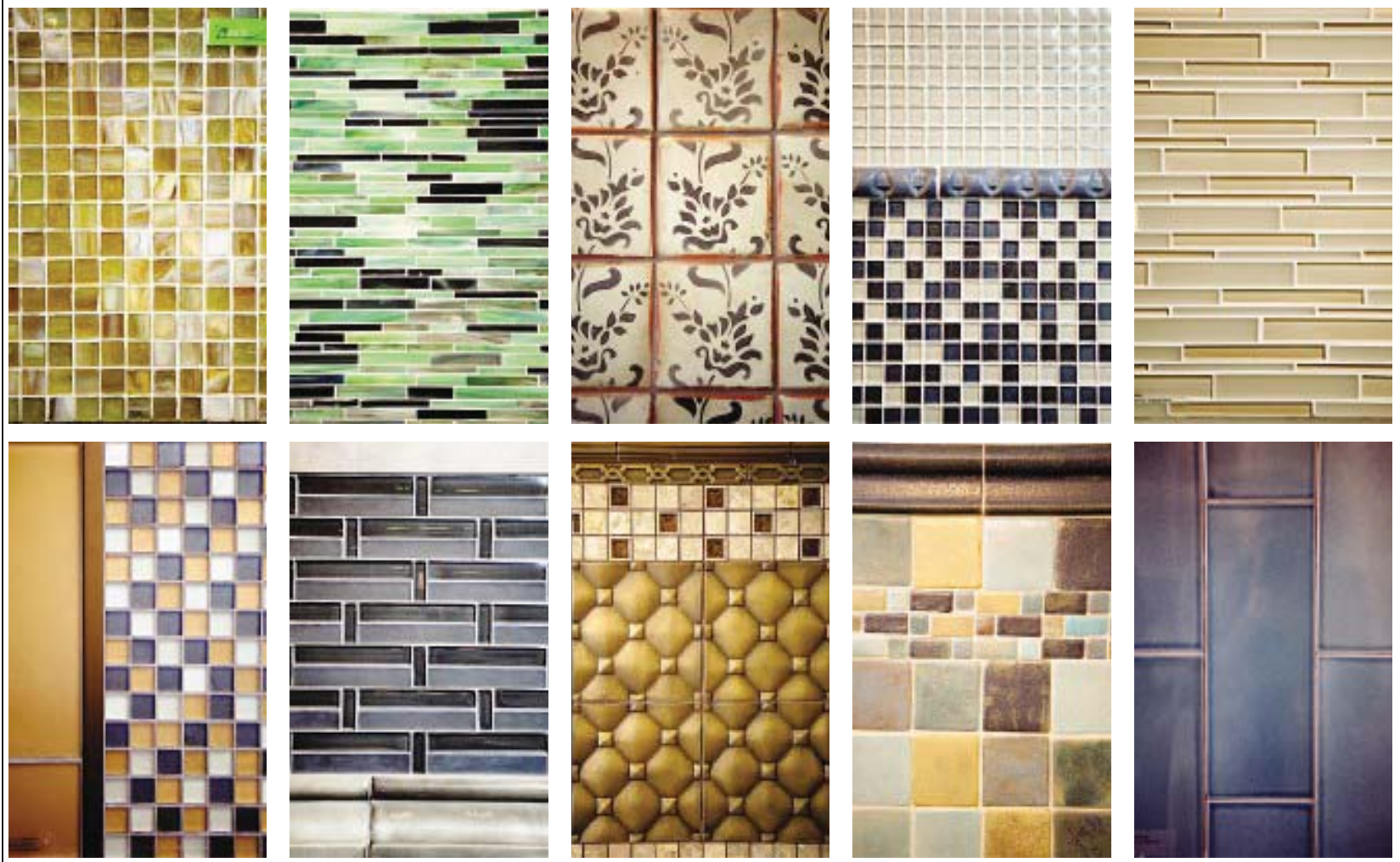


AT HOME

IN THE KITCHEN



Tile options for backsplashes range from traditional patterns in ceramic and porcelain to glass, stainless steel and copper. Patterns run vertical, horizontal, diagonal, in mosaics and with any color combination imaginable.

PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Endless options: For every style, there is a backsplash

By Merlisa Lawrence Corbett
Special to The Washington Examiner

With manufacturers and designers developing new ways to use old materials, backsplashes are taking center stage in kitchens.

Once just a defender against wayward water and spills, the

backsplash now dazzles as the main attraction. “When people come in, they are kind of overwhelmed by all the choices,” said Don Pannell, kitchen and bath design consultant with Renaissance Tile and Bath in Alexandria.

The options in tile alone range from traditional patterns in ceramic and porcelain to glass, stainless steel and even copper. Patterns run vertical, horizontal, diagonal and in mosaics. With color combinations, textures and finish options in the hundreds, how do you choose?

“A good rule is to start with the countertop or cabinetry. If the countertop is plain, you can go for a backsplash that’s more elaborate,” Pannell said. “If there is a lot of pattern in the countertop, you will want a simple backsplash. You don’t want too many things going on, or too much movement.”

Porcelain and ceramic tile remain the most widely used materials for backsplashes. “They are durable and easy to clean,” said

Resources:

- » **Renaissance Tile and Bath**
renaissancetileandbath.com
- » **Stuart Kitchens**
Stuartkitchens.com
- » **Architectural Ceramics**
archceramics.com



Pannell. Ceramic is made primarily of clay mixed with different minerals and water. The mixture is processed with heat and sealed with a glaze, which provides the surface that determines the tile’s color, design and texture.

Real porcelain is made of finely ground sand. Unlike ceramic, processing porcelain involves pressure and extremely high heat. The results is a dense, glasslike finish. Both can be arranged to suit any design or style. For example, French Country kitchens often feature porcelain backsplashes with provincial images on select single tiles or as murals. Using ceramic tiles in one tone gives a kitchen a clean, more modern look.

Although glass tile reportedly made its debut back in second century B.C., it has recently gained popularity with a new audience: mainly hip urbanites who want something a bit more contemporary.

“Glass has been a big trend, and the choices with glass are increasing,” Pannell said. “You can use interlocking glass, clear glass or frosted glass. A lot of people are mounting the glass vertically, staggering the pieces, creating a bamboo look.”

For an artsy vibe, mix glass,

ceramic or porcelain tile to create mosaics. For a commercial-style kitchen, consider metals such as stainless steel and copper.

There are as many trims, edges and accent pieces available as there are colors. Judy Bracht, a kitchen designer for Vienna-based Stuart Kitchens, said the straighter the edge, the sleeker the look. “With a more jagged or uneven edge, you add texture and interest.”

Want to create a showstopper? Display a design under a hood range or elevated feature in the kitchen. “There is more space and more to see,” Bracht said. “The biggest mistake people make is running a design like a stripe horizontally into a switch plate. You have to be very careful about patterns when it comes to outlets.”

With so many options, Pannell said it’s important to keep an open mind.

“We have people who come in with a picture of something they’ve seen in a magazine and leave with something totally different.”

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