



Tile Heritage Foundation

for research and preservation of ceramic surfaces

Founded in July 1987 Tile Heritage is celebrating its 33rd anniversary this year. Supporters like YOU... members, major contributors, industry sponsors, generous grantors... everyone... have made possible the continued fulfillment of the Foundation's mission to Document and Preserve tile history in the U.S., both past and present.



Hotel Irvin Cobb, completed in 1929, located at the corner of S. 6th St and Broadway in Paducah, Kentucky.
Photos courtesy of Richard Mohr, 2019.

E-News for Summer 2020

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Paducah's Finest Hotel

by Joseph A. Taylor

Located strategically in western Kentucky where the Tennessee River joins the Ohio, Paducah was also favored by the Illinois Central Railroad that established its repair shops there. By the turn of the 20th century, prosperity had begun to take hold with the city's population approaching 20,000. Being the seat of McCracken County, Paducah experienced considerable growth during the 1920s, enough to inspire major local investments.

By the mid-'20s Adolph Weil (1868-1943), a successful businessman, appreciated the need for a landmark in town, one that would serve as a gathering place for locals as well as for people

Paducah's Finest...

visiting from out of town, namely a luxury hotel. Wisely, he hired Walter Alschlager, the architect from Chicago who had designed The Peabody in Memphis. Construction got underway in 1927 at the corner South 6th and Broadway Streets celebrating its grand opening on April 29, 1929 as Hotel Irvin Cobb at a cost of \$400,000. A portion of that purse was paid to the Paducah Tile and Pottery Company that supplied tile for the entrance wainscot, the lobby floor, the office wainscot and the pictured staircase (below) off the lobby.

J. Andy Bauer (1856-1923), recognized among collectors today as the founder of the popular J. A. Bauer Pottery in Los Angeles, was born to German immigrants in Jeffersonville, Indiana and began his career in clay in Louisville, Kentucky before moving to Paducah. He purchased a small pottery there and began making pots and tiles in earnest in 1886 establishing the Paducah Tile and Pottery Company. However, by 1909, seeking a more hospitable environment for his asthmatic condition, Bauer left his company in the hands of his brother and children and moved west.

The pottery was a successful business over the years producing arch mantels, embossed inserts and borders, bathroom accessories and a complete line of field tile and trim shapes. In 1923 the Bauers sold their interest to F. K. Pense, who changed the name to F. K. Pense Tile Works in 1929, closing in 1940. Among the published catalogs is "Paducah Faience Tiles" (undated), a reprint of which is available from Tile Heritage for \$14 (post included).

Special thanks to Nathan Lynn at the McCracken Public Library and Chris Black at Ray Black and Sons in Paducah, to the late Norman Karlson, *Encyclopedia of American Art Tiles*, and to Richard Mohr.



Rare Paducah tiles on the stairway off the lobby of the Hotel Irvin Cobb, now the Irvin Cobb Apartments (U.S. National Register of Historic Places).
Photo courtesy of Richard Mohr.

An Extraordinary Windfall from generation to generation

At Tile Heritage it is quite common to receive two or three inquiries a week from people seeking to identify the tiles in their homes. When we can't help, we have fellow tile historians who are willing to share their expertise. Just prior to New Years last year we heard from a woman in Northern California:

"I have a tile that belonged to my maternal grandmother..." and she was trying to decipher the marks on the tile's back. "My grandparents lived around Lompoc-San Luis Obispo-Arroyo Grande and retired in Summerland" just east of Santa Barbara. "If you can give me an idea of where it was made, and possibly its worth, I'd appreciate it... especially translating the back marks."

Puzzled by the marks themselves, we contacted Steve Soukup in Southern California, a highly respected authority on pre-WWII California tiles, and he responded:

"That is a marvelous tile and we see very very very few tiles from Arequipa Pottery - let alone an example with the early hand-applied mark. And then we have a date 1912 coinciding with Frederick Rhead's period at Arequipa. No wonder the tile is squeeze-bag decorated in Rhead's style! Just marvelous! "

In 1911 Frederick Hurten Rhead (1880-1942) was hired by Dr. Philip King Brown to establish a pottery providing a healthful artistic activity for female tubercular patients at the new Arequipa Sanatorium in rural Marin County, north of San Francisco. Heir to several generations of accomplished English ceramists, Rhead immigrated to the U.S. in 1902, managing to find work at five different potteries before arriving at Arequipa in October of 1911. His tenure there ended unceremoniously two years later.



Detail showing the marks on the reverse side of the Frederick Rhead tile (above) produced at Arequipa Pottery in 1912.

Photos courtesy Rago.

Rago presented the rare Rhead tile to the world in a live auction on 20 June 2020. Titled "American Art Pottery" the auction was dedicated entirely to pre-WWII ceramics from some of the most important private collections in the country.

The Rhead tile sold for \$9375!

Mantels arise!

Markoff Mosaic Tile Corporation (1926-1945) was located at 1105-07 E. Redondo Blvd. in Inglewood, California about a 15 minutes drive southwest of Leimert Park where this fireplace mantel is located. Little is known about the company other than the illustrations in the company's catalog: 15 "arches" and 12 hearths. Harold Swenson was the first president followed by Harold Markoff in 1929.



Markoff Mosaic, Arch #37, in the Leimert Park district just south of downtown Los Angeles.



Claycraft Potteries (1921-1939) was located at 3101 San Fernando Road in Los Angeles where two members of the renowned Robertson family of ceramists, Fred and his son George, took charge. Their forebears immigrated from Scotland in the late 19th century, initially establishing a pottery in the Boston area and from there branched out across the country. It's a fabulous story and their work ranks among the finest craftsmanship in the U.S. from that era.

Claycraft mantel, Design 2510, is illustrated in the "Claycraft Mantel Designs" catalog published in the '30s when the pottery had moved to 3025-27 Fletcher Drive, not far from the original factory.

The Spanish Colonial Revival bungalow in Los Angeles that houses this unusual fireplace surround was designed and built by Cecil A. Gale in 1928.



Calco in Oklahoma!



Wall fountain of Calco tiles



"Calco" mantel produced by California Clay Products Co. in 1927.

Sometime after Rufus Keeler, founder and superintendent of California Clay Products, left to organize Malibu Potteries in 1926, the company changed its formal name to Calco Tile Manufacturing Corp. The tiles are referred to as "Calco" regardless of when they were produced between 1923 and roughly 1932. Location: South Gate, California, directly south of downtown Los Angeles. Keeler is among a handful of the most respected and productive tile makers of the period. The "Mayan" fireplace and outdoor fountain are in pristine condition, thanks to the care of the current owners.



A 1927 Spanish Colonial design built by Ray Smiser in the Lincoln Terrace Neighborhood of Oklahoma City.

Ben's Mantel Restoration

"Your information was extremely helpful. Attached are some pics from beginning to end. I am extremely happy with the results. After 20 years of owning the house, I decided to strip off the many layers of paint on the fireplace that me and previous owners had painted. The first two pics are the stripping process.



"After the stripping, the tile was left with a very dull finish (below). Not sure if this was intentional or due to the chemicals used in the stripping process. Using your advice, I experimented using English oil, a tile sealer (a satin polyurethane), and finally a high gloss protectant.



PLEASE NOTE:
To date this tile has not been identified.
Can you help?

"This is the final results (above). It looks great. I am extremely happy with the results. I am not sure if I will need to follow up with the English oil on a monthly or yearly basis. But it's a 5-minute job and I don't mind. Again, thank you for your great advice."

Ben, thank you. It looks GREAT indeed!

The late Phyllis Pacin: An Artist's Talent Revealed



Phyllis Pacin, second from right, at a gathering of the Northern California Tile Artists group. Lincoln Park Steps, San Francisco, June 2015. (From the left: Colette Crutcher, Diane Winters, Susan Dannenfelser, Aileen Barr, Phyllis, Joe Taylor)

My lifelong love of both two-dimensional design and clay has manifested itself in my creating a new way to look at both ceramic art and painting. The result is fully realized paintings (that happen to be) fired in a raku kiln.

I design my work, arrangements of hand-rolled and textured raku fired tiles mounted on acrylic or wood, as free hanging pieces. While some are composed of square tiles, more often I work with parallelogram-shaped tiles, which I arrange into architectural compositions that have a *trompe l'oeil* illusion of three-dimensional form. Some pieces go one step further in tricking the eye by my "folding" the forms visually so that they look like actual three-dimensional objects existing in real space.

A synopsis of my tile making and firing processes: After I roll out large slabs of clay, I texture them with found objects. Then, when I cut the slabs into tiles, no two have the same textural designs. After the tiles are bisque fired, I lay them out for glazing in the piece's ultimate geometric shape, and I redraw my previously sketched design onto the tiles with pencil. The impressions in the tiles create a rich underlay for the glaze design.

After I apply the glazes, either by sponging or brushing, I fire the tiles in a small raku kiln, four tiles per batch, until the glazes melt. Then with tongs, I transfer the red-hot tiles into a lidded metal container. Before closing the lid, I strew the tiles with pine needles to start the smoking process. The smoldering pine needles create a reduction atmosphere that pulls oxygen out of the tiles, resulting in vibrant lustres, crackled glazes and velvety, smoke-blackened clay. For me, part of the magic of viewing my finished work is watching how the colors and lustre glazes catch the light, causing each piece to change as the light shifts.



My raku tile wall piece, "Drunken Bicycle," was included in the California Clay Competition exhibit at The Artery in Davis, California in conjunction with the annual CCACA conference in 1918.

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***Participating Artists:** Katia McGuirk Studio, Aileen Barr Studio, House-On-The-Hill Studio, Think Good Tiles Studio and Janet Ontko Clay Forms Studio.

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