

## Antonella Romano, The Tile Oracle

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NORTH JERSEY HOMES

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QUESTION: I am renovating a 65-year-old house in Fair Lawn and doing most of the job myself to save money. Right now, I'm working on my kitchen floor and the two bathrooms. I've been selecting my tile on the Internet because it's a lot cheaper than buying it from a showroom, and I don't need help with the design, which I can do myself. Some of the tiles don't come with things I'll need, like a bullnose or a chair rail. How do I deal with that? I'm doing some of the designs on a diagonal and I'm not sure how to figure out the percentage of waste I'll need. And for the kitchen countertop, should I order it honed or polished?

— Gerard

ANSWER: When you buy tile on the Internet, you cannot see the surface and thickness and decide if it's right for you. And, as you've already experienced, many tiles don't come with essentials like a bullnose or a chair rail. Obviously, when you buy online there is no one to help you calculate how much waste you'll need. These are not minor issues — they're essential to your kitchen and bathroom coming out as you envision.

You also should know why tiles bought on the Internet can be so cheap.

Stone and tile are divided into categories. "First quality" is the best; it would be used in any installation intended to endure and almost always in a residential project.

This is followed by "second quality" down to "third quality," used in places like commercial bathrooms where beauty and perfection are not top-priority. When a factory makes a bad batch of tile that is not calibrated properly — the tiles don't match or won't be as durable as they should be — they are counted as second or third quality and sold at a discount. Internet vendors buy this material up and sell it online.

When you walk into a showroom, on the other hand, you can feel the tile, see the surface and thickness and decide if it is right for you. You often will be able to speak to a salesperson who can help you find what you want at a discounted price. The salesperson also can tell you why a particular tile is being discounted, so you don't compromise on quality.

If you purchase a tile that has no bullnose or chair rails, you have two options. Either choose something else or add a mosaic border as an accent, which will need to be capped with a matching chair rail. Natural stone mosaic and chair rails will authenticate the porcelain tile, especially if it is a porcelain that has a "stone look."

In regards to waste, with a diagonal floor you'll need to allow 5 percent if it's large space and 10 percent if it's a small area.

For your countertop, I recommend keeping the natural polish. If you remove the finish on either marble or granite, you open up all the pores, which can lead to future stains. A polished finish is always easier to care for.

If you are set on purchasing tile on the Internet, weigh the discounted rate against freight costs. Sometimes the shipping exceeds the material cost, which defeats the purpose.

When you take everything into consideration, there's no reason to buy tile on the Internet. If you prioritize cost and buy the cheapest thing you can find online, you will be redoing that kitchen and those bathrooms in just a few years. The point with stone and tile is to never have to — or want to — do it over again.