

Marrakech Design Zellige

Product Description, Installation & Care

For handmade Zellige tiles from Marrakech Design. Please read the entire guide before installation and provide it to the responsible installer before work begins.

About the tiles

Zellige tiles are handmade clay tiles from Morocco. The clay is shaped, dried and fired before the tiles are glazed. As each tile is made by hand, natural variations in colour, size, thickness, flatness and surface are to be expected.

Uneven edges, small chips, pits, bubbles and crazing in the glaze – sometimes exposing the clay beneath – are natural characteristics of Zellige and part of its handmade appearance. A single sample can therefore not represent the full variation of a larger tiled surface. Colour and appearance may also vary between production batches. For this reason, we cannot guarantee that tiles from a later supplementary order will exactly match a previous delivery.

We recommend ordering extra tiles to allow for cutting, sorting and selecting the placement of individual tiles. Before installation, lay out several tiles together to assess the overall appearance and distribute the natural variations across the surface.

Before installation

Check the delivery, quantity, colour and condition of the tiles before installation begins. If you notice transport damage, cracks or anything else you are unsure about, photograph the tiles and contact Marrakech Design by email before installation. Please keep in mind that variations in colour, shape and glaze are natural characteristics of handmade Zellige and should be assessed based on the overall appearance of a larger tiled surface.

Open several boxes and mix the tiles to distribute variations in colour and appearance evenly across the surface. Decide on the layout, grout colour and placement of cut tiles before installation begins.

Choose tile adhesive, grout and other installation products according to the substrate and intended use. Always follow the respective manufacturer's instructions for mixing, application and drying times.

Use clean tools and brush away any loose dust from the back of the tiles before installation.

Zellige requires care during installation. We therefore recommend that installation is carried out by a professional installer with experience in handmade tiles.

Installation

The substrate must be stable, clean and level.

Evenly dampen the back of each tile using, for example, a spray bottle or roller before installation. The tiles do not need to be soaked or submerged in water. Adjust the amount of moisture according to the adhesive manufacturer's instructions and make sure there is no standing water on the back of the tile during installation.

Apply adhesive to both the substrate and the back of the tile to ensure good contact and coverage. Install one tile at a time and gently adjust it by hand. Avoid tapping or hammering the tiles into place.

Variations in thickness, shape and edges give the finished surface the lively and irregular appearance characteristic of Zellige. Maintain an even overall alignment while adapting the spacing between individual tiles to their edges and the requirements of the installation.

Cutting

Zellige can be cut and, if necessary, mitred using a diamond blade. We recommend using a water-cooled diamond blade for the cleanest possible cut. Make a test cut first and handle cut edges with care.

Grouting

Allow the adhesive to dry according to the manufacturer's instructions before grouting. Choose a grout suitable for the tiles and the environment in which they are installed. A grout colour close to the colour of the tile usually creates a calmer, more uniform appearance and makes small chips less noticeable. We recommend testing the grout colour on a small area first.

Zellige is often installed with narrow, naturally irregular grout joints. The grout must still be able to fill the spaces between the tiles and surround their uneven edges. On floors, a wider grout joint may be necessary to accommodate differences in level and sharp edges. Determine the appropriate grout width together with your installer based on tile format, intended use and chosen grout.

Grout small areas at a time and work the grout thoroughly into the joints so that gaps, uneven edges and smaller cavities are properly filled. Remove excess grout with a slightly damp sponge before it dries. Avoid vigorous scrubbing, as this may damage the glaze.

Wet areas

In showers and other wet areas, the substrate and waterproofing system must comply with applicable local regulations. Tiles and grout do not replace a waterproofing system. Use adhesive and grout suitable for the intended environment. Consult the responsible installer before installation.

Sealing

Glazed Zellige tiles do not need to be sealed, as the glazed surface provides the tile with its protective finish.

Raw Zellige is unglazed and does require sealing to reduce the material's absorbency and protect the surface against dirt and stains. Please contact Marrakech Design for advice on a suitable sealer and application method.

Care & maintenance

Clean regularly using water and a mild, pH-neutral cleaning product or mild soap. For grease and greasy dirt, regular dishwashing liquid diluted with water can also be used together with a soft, non-abrasive sponge. Rinse away any cleaning product residue and dry with a soft cloth if necessary.

Avoid acidic or harsh cleaning products, bleach, solvents and hard or abrasive sponges. Wipe up strongly coloured liquids and grease as soon as possible. Always test new cleaning products on a small, inconspicuous area first.

Important to consider

Always inspect the tiles before installation. Variations in colour, shade, size, thickness, shape and glaze are natural characteristics of handmade Zellige and are part of the material's character.

If you notice any transport damage or anything else you are unsure about, photograph the tiles and contact Marrakech Design before installation.

Marrakech Design cannot be held responsible for damage or changes resulting from incorrect installation, unsuitable substrates, or the use of products or methods that are not suitable for Zellige.

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for adhesives, grout and any other products used during installation. If you are unsure, we recommend consulting the responsible tiler or contacting Marrakech Design before continuing with the installation.

This guide provides general recommendations for our Zellige tiles. Site-specific conditions and product instructions must always be assessed by the person responsible for the installation. Questions concerning the workmanship of an installed surface should also be discussed with the responsible installer.

Frequently Asked Questions

My Zellige tiles feel damp when I open the boxes – is this normal?

Yes. Zellige is made from clay and may retain some residual moisture from the manufacturing process, particularly when the tiles are relatively newly produced and have been tightly packed during transport. Unpack the tiles and allow them to air and dry in a dry, well-ventilated area before installation.

The tiles have a smell when I open the boxes – is this normal?

Yes. Newly produced Zellige tiles may contain residual moisture and have a natural earthy smell, particularly after being tightly packed during transport. The smell comes from the clay and moisture within the material and normally fades once the tiles are unpacked and allowed to dry and air.

Why do the tiles vary in colour and shape?

Zellige tiles are made and finished by hand. Variations in colour, shade, shape, thickness, flatness, edges and glaze are therefore natural and an important part of the material's character. Always mix tiles from several boxes before installation.

Are small chips and cracks in the glaze normal?

Yes. Small chips, pits, bubbles and crazing in the glaze are typical characteristics of handmade Zellige. On some tiles, the clay beneath the glaze may be visible in small areas.

Do Zellige tiles need to be sealed?

Glazed Zellige does not normally need to be sealed. Raw Zellige is unglazed and does require sealing. Please contact Marrakech Design for advice on a suitable product and application method.

Can Zellige be used in showers and wet areas?

Yes, provided that the substrate, waterproofing system, adhesive and grout are suitable for the intended use and that the installation complies with applicable local regulations. Zellige tiles and grout do not in themselves form a waterproof barrier.

There are white deposits on the tiles – what are they?

White or light-coloured deposits may occur when moisture carries naturally occurring salts and minerals through the clay. This can be particularly noticeable on damp or newly produced tiles and normally diminishes as the material dries. Once the tiles are dry, loose deposits can be gently brushed away with a soft, dry brush or wiped away with a dry cloth.

Which grout colour is recommended for Zellige?

We generally recommend choosing a grout colour close to the colour of the tile. This creates a calmer overall appearance and makes natural variations, uneven edges and small chips less noticeable. If you choose a strongly contrasting grout colour, we recommend testing it on a small area first, as the grout can affect the overall appearance of the tiled surface.

What grout width is recommended for Zellige?

We generally recommend a grout width of approximately 1–2 mm for both walls and floors. As Zellige is handmade and the tiles vary slightly in size, shape and edges, the grout width will naturally vary somewhat across the surface.

For floors with underfloor heating, we generally recommend a slightly wider grout joint of approximately 3–4 mm. Installation requirements can vary, so always consult the responsible installer regarding the appropriate grout width for your specific project.