

## Crafts, professions of excellence

### Tiles

#### Related professional – NINOSKA TRILLO

Workshop: Ceramist (Azulejos)



Figure 1 Original piece of tile by the artisan interviewed.

The Portuguese tile is one of the pieces that best represents the culture of Portugal. It is thin square ceramic plate, usually measuring 15x15 cm or less, and one of its sides is decorated and glazed, due to the cook of the enamel, becoming waterproof and shiny. It is also widely used in countries such as Spain, Italy, Turkey, Morocco, among others.

The manufacture of tiles in the Iberian Peninsula began in the 16th century, by the ceramics of Seville, and arrived in Portugal in 1498 through King D. Manuel I, after a trip to Spain. Since that date, Portugal has learned the method of manufacture and painting and currently the Portuguese tile is one of the main references of the culture of this country.

During the reign of King João V (1706-1750), tiles were influenced by Baroque characteristics and were used to cover entire wall surfaces, especially in churches, palaces, and bourgeois houses, both inside and in gardens. Thus, the tile was a reference to distinguish the social classes of that time.

The 1755 earthquake put Lisbon in an economically fragile situation, and it was necessary to rebuild the city, so the utilitarian and practical design of the tile contributed for its usage as an esthetical complement to buildings.

Portuguese tiles are nationally produced over 500 years, but it became more famous in the second half of XIX century. In the North of the country, it is more usual to find tiles with more reliefs, volume and contrast of light and shadow. In Lisbon, it is more usual to find tiles with smooth patterns of old memory and an ostentatious exterior application on the fronts of buildings.



Figure 2 Original piece of tile by the artisan interviewed.

What are the skills and expertise of professionals in this profession?

The professional that works with Portuguese tiles needs to develop skills in majolica technique - a technique that allowed painting directly on the glazed tile.



Figure 3 Ink used by the artisan to paint the tiles.

## Some materials used for tiles

The main materials used in the manufacture of tiles are: feldspar (particularly potassium), silica and clay. Portugal has abundant resources in clays, which translate into a long and important tradition of exploration and manufacture in Portugal, especially about ceramics. The ceramic sector represents an important industry in the economic and business fabric, being one of the main sectors of the Portuguese economy.

Having to make the tiles from scratch would take a lot of time. Therefore, at this moment, most of the artisans buy the tiles already made in a standard size. If you want works outside the standard size, then, it is possible to make an order. At this moment, there is more focus on the creative process, that is, on the design or technique with which the tiles will be painted.



Figure 4 Potassium Feldspar. Source of the picture:  
<https://commonminerals.esci.umn.edu/minerals-o-s/potassium-feldspar>



Figure 5 Silica. Source of the picture:  
<https://sqquimica.com/po-de-silica/>



Figure 4 Clay. Source of the picture: <https://www.infopedia.pt/dicionarios/portugues-estrangeiros/argila>

## What markets are related to this profession?

**Historic buildings.** The tiles were used to cover several fronts of buildings. Many of the Portuguese buildings and public spaces are ornamented and complemented with figures represented in shades of blue, illustrated in the tiles.

**Cultural Heritage.** Portugal is considered the tile capital of the world, so this is a craft that highlights the Portuguese culture. Several historical (and other) buildings are decorated with Portuguese tiles, so if this profession disappears, and thinking long-term periods, these materials may need to be repaired. With no professionals available to do this, several buildings would need a total reconstruction as they would not be able to have Portuguese tiles anymore.



Figure 5 Mother Church of Válega, Ovar. Source of the picture: <https://www.ovarnews.pt/igreja-matriz-de-valega-o-ceu-mora-aqui/>

## Where to learn the profession in Portugal

Casa do Azulejo (in English, "House of Tiles"): <https://acasadoazulejo.pt/>

### Sources:

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