



Subway (Tile) Is Leaving the Station: 8 Cooler New Looks for the Kitchen, Bathroom, and Beyond

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When a design detail works, homeowners tend to stick with it. Such is the case with subway tiles, those ubiquitous, affordable, 3-by-6-inch glazed ceramics that started off in actual tunnels beneath New York City and then migrated to every single kitchen and bathroom in America.

This classic, neutral pick might never go out of style. But that doesn't mean it isn't starting to feel a little *tired*.



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"You'll know that a tile has run its course when it becomes the least expensive option at Home Depot," notes **Justin Riordan** of Spade and Archer Design Agency in Seattle. "I can't tell you how many flips I've walked into over the past year and said, 'Oh look, white subway tile.'"

So what now? Designers say it's time to change things up—and homeowners are getting on board.

There's a whole wide world of tile out there—beyond the subway—just waiting to be installed. Here are eight trending tile designs that'll shake up your aesthetic.

1. Moroccan flair



Moroccan designs can transport you a world away.

Fired Earth

[Moroccan design](#) is having a moment, thanks to homeowners who are tired of playing it safe, reports **Darla DeMorrow**, author of "Organizing Your Home With Sort and Succeed."

Known for its trellis or ironwork patterns, colorful Moroccan tile can [spice up your bland bathroom](#) or vanilla kitchen, adding an exotic flair that makes you feel like you've been whisked away to a foreign land.

"This is usually an all-over repeating tile that features the lightness and curves of decorative ironwork," DeMorrow explains. "And it's a design that works well when it's painted on a backsplash or on stair risers, as well as an all-over treatment on walls and floors."

2. Square tile with darker grout



[Photo by Amsted Design-Build](#)

Riordan has kicked rectangular, all-white subway tile to the curb in favor of white squares with darker grout. It's a look he says can be used anywhere and can stand the test of time.

His pick: a simple 4-by-4-inch tile. But instead of the common straight installation with corners matched up, Riordan uses a 1- or 2-inch offset lay on the horizontal or vertical rows.

"This tile, combined with dark grout, becomes interesting and playful while also avoiding the usual brick-laid subway look," he explains.

3. Geometric design



[Photo by Optimise Design](#)

Bold interlocking shapes are the hallmark of geometric tiles—and they're trending in the interior design world, says **Drew Henry** of Design Dudes.

"If you want this style, I'd go with painted concrete tiles in a big pattern for an updated look," he says.

Can't part with subway tiles completely? Just throw in a few geometrics to refresh your design.

"For example, you could cover the floor with this pattern but keep the subway tile in the shower—they go together perfectly," Henry says.

4. Cement tiles



[Photo by Cement Tile Shop](#)

Have you seen these on bathroom floors, showers, patios, and backsplashes lately? You can thank **Joanna Gaines** and the "Fixer Upper" team for their increasing popularity, says **Liz Toombs**, president of PDR Interiors.

But cement tiles aren't new—in fact, they've been around since the 1800s. Today, color-craving homeowners are loving the look of these vibrant tiles, which are made by hand-pouring pigmented concrete into decorative molds.

"Cement tiles create a large-scale pattern and an eye-catching visual," Toombs says.

But she offers a word of caution: They will need to be sealed. (Applying sealer isn't hard—it just takes some time. Head to the store to pick up the type that matches your tile and grout, and then sponge it on according to the instructions.)

Cement tiles can also be pricey, clocking in at \$6 a piece for basic patterns at [Home Depot](#) to \$12 or more for colorful versions. Want the same look for less? Try [porcelain tiles that mimic cement](#)—they also require less maintenance.

If this tile is too wild for you, cement does come in quieter designs.

"A more classic cement choice paired with a pedestal sink can have an enduring quality," notes **Carole Marcotte** of Form & Function.

5. Herringbone patterns



[Photo by The Masonry Center, Inc.](#)

Herringbone has been popular for centuries as a pattern on brick patios and inside fireplace boxes.

But don't confuse this design with now-overused chevron, the experts warn. A chevron pattern is more casual—a zigzag that has each piece

meeting at the V point. A herringbone pattern is staggered, without the V, and looks like a broken zigzag.

It's a subtle distinction, but in design, that difference is huge.

"Chevron was a hot flash in the pan," DeMorrow notes.

6. Metallics



[Photo by Superior Woodcraft, Inc.](#)

Want to add some shine? Metal tiles are riding a wave.

"Large metallic tiles have a handmade look to them, and because they're glazed, they're super easy to clean and ideal on a backsplash," says **Sara Chiarilli** of Artful Conceptions in Tampa, FL.

DeMorrow also votes for metal, especially if it's copper.

"Real pennies as tiles are beautiful, and they give you the snazziness of copper," she says.

7. Harlequin patterns



This vintage look is back and better than ever.

AB Design Elements, llc

You no doubt recall those black and white harlequin floor patterns of yore, but today's diamond-stacked tiles are making their way to the kitchen backsplash.

"We're in love with graphic touches in the tile world—and harlequin is trending because it adds a graphic element while not being too much," says Chiarilli.

These designs can be as oversized as you remember them, she notes, but there are also versions that skew traditional and contemporary, made from marble or cement.

8. Fish scale



[Photo by Jamie Keskin Design](#)

Finally, if you're truly tired of the boxy, symmetrical look of subway tile, try a fish scale design. Swooping curves make this scallop tile sing, and it's rapidly gaining appeal in bathrooms *and* kitchens.

"I love the soft curves that it offers, which are such a contrast to the traditional angles we've been seeing," Toombs says.

Of course, this piscine pick also works well if you live by the water or want to decorate an outdoor living space, like a pool house or patio grill station. You'll might just feel like you're living under the sea.

