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FLORIDA FIND

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FIRED UP ABOUT TILES: Brenda Jean Lusher in front of her kaleidoscope of tile designs at her Fort Lauderdale studio.

FEATS OF CLAY



ONE TILE AT A TIME: Above, every one of Lusher's ceramic tiles is hand-painted and one-of-a-kind. Right, Lusher and artists at Mizner Industries' showroom and painting studio.



BY GAY BROCK

Special to The Herald

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then tile artisan Brenda Lusher is paying high homage to Addison Mizner, whose Mediterranean-style resort architecture colors the South Florida landscape.

Not only does Lusher duplicate Mizner's distinctive tile designs and embrace his passion for quality craftsmanship, but she also carries on the name Mizner Industries with her 11-year-old company.

The original Mizner Industries was one of Palm Beach's largest manufacturing companies in the 1920s. It closed that same decade when the area's land boom fizzled.

Lusher decided to revive the name. "He is all about quality," says Lusher, a former architectural student and realty agent. "My style is very much the same as his."

In a Fort Lauderdale studio, Lusher and two employees continue Mizner's practice of creating custom, hand-painted ceramic tile, supplying interior designers, builders and homeowners worldwide with historic replicas or designs of their choosing. Depending on the size and complexity of the design, tiles cost from \$20 to \$45 each.

"Handmade tile adds a lot of character and a lot of warmth. If you look at inexpensive tile made with a silk-screen process, you can see that every color is the same. It's uniform. On our tiles you will see the brush strokes," she says.

Many of the original Mizner tiles, used in places such as the Cloister Inn (now the Boca Raton Resort and Club), resembled tiles from old mosques in southern Spain. Gold, cobalt blue, terra cotta and green dominated the color palette.

Though classic never goes out of

style, Lusher notes that designers delight in tweaking tradition, substituting nouveau colors for standard colors. Turquoise is trendy now, Lusher says.

And while Spanish and Mediterranean tiles remain popular in South Florida, Islamic and Moorish tiles command center stage in the most *au courant* designs. Pools, fountains and loggias provide the most common backdrops for her work, but Lusher's portfolio includes unique projects as well.

Standing in the small showroom that fronts her workshop, where tiles form a kaleidoscopic display, Lusher points to an Islamic-patterned tile that she updated. She painted it a vibrant orange at the request of a client who wanted 3,000 of them for the walls of a South Florida home discotheque.

Turkish tiles popular in the mid-1500s formed the inspiration for tiles destined for a Palm Beach residence. An 1880s auction catalog was yet another source for a nautical mural. Farther from home, one of Lusher's clients in Saudi Arabia ordered 8,000 Spanish and Portuguese tiles.

Regardless of size, all projects begin from the clay Lusher presses into tile, one by one. Tile must air dry for 10 days before being fired, hand painted, twice glazed and fired again. The process can be tedious, but in typical Mizner fashion, Lusher enjoys the work.

"It's very therapeutic," she says.



A tile
artisan
carries
on the
passion of
Addison
Mizner



MIZNER INDUSTRIES

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