



MOVERS & SHAKERS

Rob Whitaker, creative director, and Tara Rees, head of design, at exciting new tile brand Claybrook

WORDS EMMA J PAGE PHOTOGRAPHS ALUN CALLENDER



Rob and Tara pore over a selection of new designs in their London studio.



Tile samples (from top): Navajo Sani, Mallawi and Navajo Yiska.

Our raison d'être is to celebrate craftsmanship by offering tiles that are design led and have a timeless appeal.' So says Rob Whitaker, creative director of Claybrook, the new brand shaking up the tile industry. 'We love to create pieces with a human story. To us, tiles are an underappreciated art form. What makes our products so special is that you can see the hand of the maker.'

Claybrook is a small company and, says Tara Rees, head of design: 'We're like a family, with a core team of just 13. We split our time between our Shoreditch studio and Midlands office and warehouse. Jemma, our head of buying, travels with Rob to source the next range of tiles and, more recently, oak flooring, while I design, art direct and manage photo shoots.'

Claybrook works with skilled artisans to produce beautiful glazed terracotta tiles, which feature subtle imperfections that make them unique. Other ranges include marble, stone, encaustic and porcelain pieces.

Inspiration comes from some unlikely places. 'Old films are brilliant for ideas, because set designers and cinematographers have a great eye,' says Rob. 'A recent movie, *The Post*, set in Seventies, was a great exercise in mid-century design. We also have an extensive archive of books on art and architecture, and love art exhibitions, travel and nature's textures and forms.'

Days at Claybrook start with strong coffee or a cup of tea, a chance to catch up on orders and social media, then perhaps a meeting with a supplier or an update on marketing plans. Rob might be in the studio with customers while Tara helps with sample requests in the warehouse, glue gun in hand.

The team, collectively, has more than 100 years' experience – many of them previously worked together at Fired Earth – and, recently, everyone has pooled their skills to branch out into bathroom design.

Their love of tiles extends beyond the business, too. Tara recently chose encaustic tiles for a small walk-in dressing room, while Rob's home features geometric kitchen wall tiles. 'They are an excellent way to add a little drama and architectural pizzazz,' Tara says.

■ Claybrook, 123 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3BX, 020 7052 1555, claybrookstudio.co.uk.

LIFESTYLE



Claybrook's new bathroom range, conceived by Lynda Phelan, includes a freestanding nickel bateau bath and shower/bath set in brushed stainless steel.