



clé

trim
everything you need to know

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really? what gives?

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leave it to the pros

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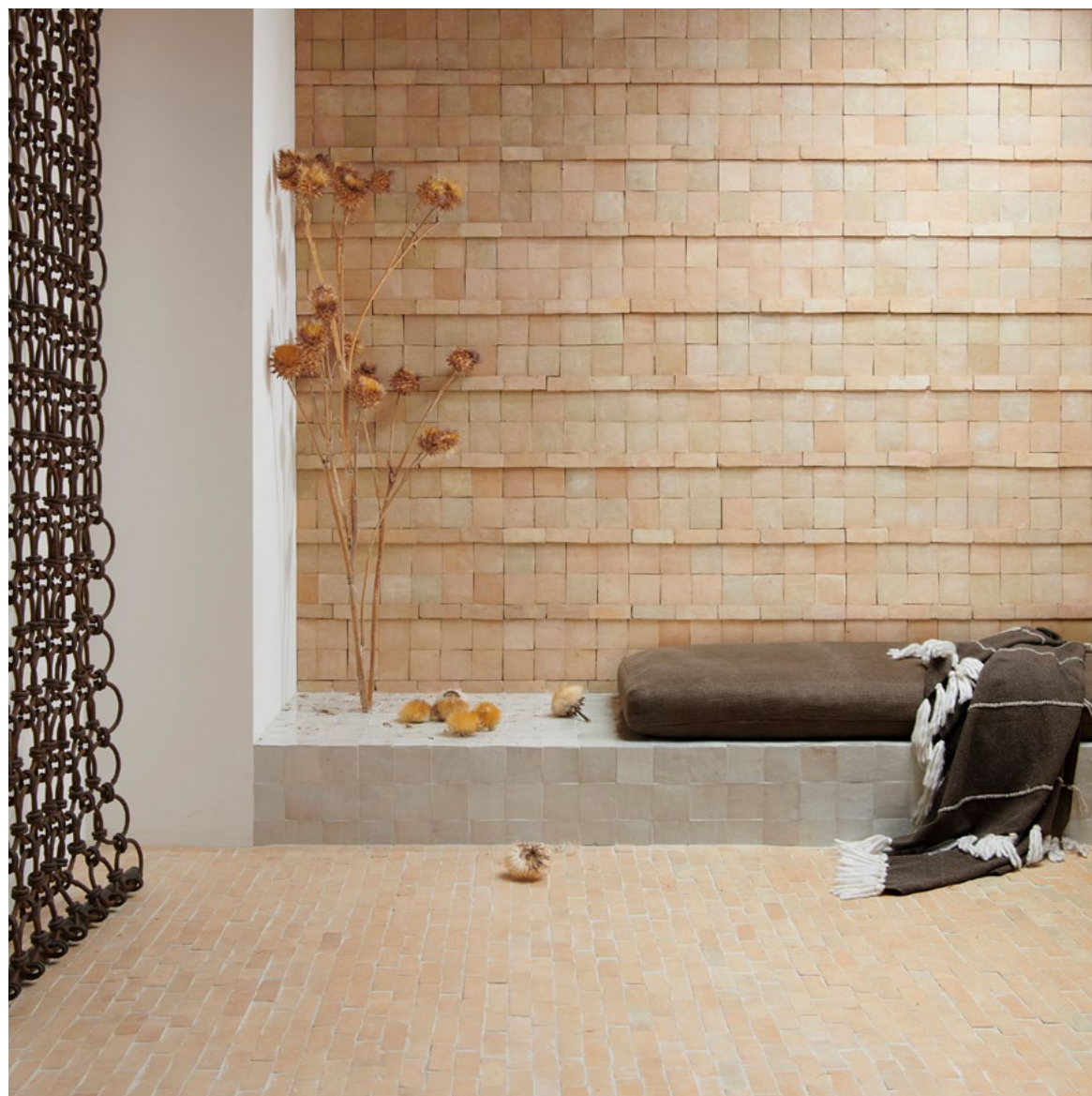


no trim?
really? what gives?

trim, for the most part, is a relatively recent american invention. in a country where the history of tile is relatively young, it was created as a convenience. however, most countries do not use specially created trim on tile installations.

in fact, most tiles made outside of the U.S. do not come with available tile trim. that said, we always opt for historical, centuries-old methods of finishing an installation, and always strongly recommend that our clients do the same.

yes, we mean no trim.



who's in charge of your tile installation?

leave it to the pros

we always advise working with an experienced installer. trim, in particular, is not a recommended DIY project.

your successful clé installation will heavily depend on your installer and their experience with non-uniform, artisan tiles.

a good tile installer will always know everything there is to know about trim without requiring that their clients provide trim information for them.

your installer should be helping to guide you toward the best trim option for your vision — not the other way around.

our trim guidelines do not tell you what you should do. they only tell you what your project professionals will be deciding upon when helping you make your trim selection. this guide was only created to help inform you about trim options, how they are done, and general guidelines for trim selection.

based on the historic tradition of setting tiles without trim, as well as the improved aesthetic presentation, we prefer and recommend tiling without trim. that said, this guide will walk you through various perspectives on trim, as well as a more aesthetically pleasing presentation, to discuss with your professional team.



types of trim &
clé alternatives



surface bullnose
also known as “edge trim”

surface bullnose is recognizable in the U.S. by the curved finished edge on one side of a square tile or on either a long or short side of a rectangular tile. this trim is the most common tile trim used for wall tiles at the top edge or the side edge of a tile project. in this same trim category, you can also find edge trim that isn’t “bullnosed” but is simply a finished, glazed edge.

surface bullnose corner
surface bullnose is also sometimes available in corner pieces that allow the top edge and side edge of a project to be joined in a bullnosed manner at the “corner” of the installation.

clé alternative: surface bullnose
most other countries do not require this trim as tile projects rarely occupy only a portion of the wall space. the practice of tiling only a portion of a wall or floor was a feature utilized by U.S. builders to reduce the cost of the tile finish.

don't aim to finish your installation with as few tiles as possible, as this will leave the exposed spaces vulnerable to mold and moisture. go all in and consider tiling the whole surface from floor to ceiling. not only is it a design statement, but it allows the wall to be more sanitary as it is easily cleaned, and it will never need to be painted.

the following is the clé way to finish your project without using surface bullnose:

- fig a.** ensure your project is protected from floor to ceiling.
- fig b.** if you have a project that needs to turn a corner, neatly miter that edge to give it the cleanest, crafted finish without using a trim tile. have your contractor build-out a sheetrock surface to meet tile inset for one flush continuous surface.
- fig c.** easiest of all, run a bead of caulk or grout along an exposed tile edge, just like they do in europe.

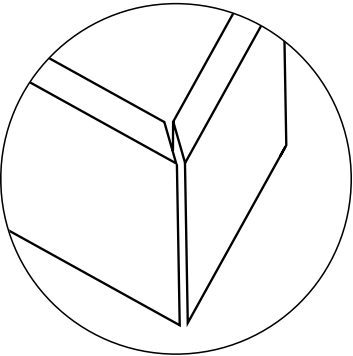


fig a.

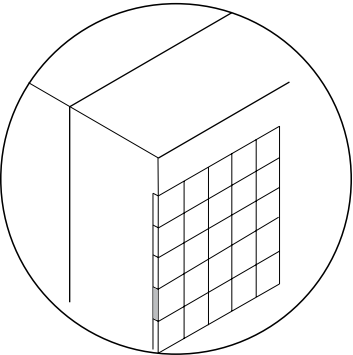


fig b.

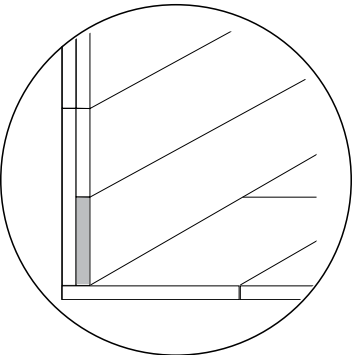


fig c.

the quarter round is as it sounds: 25% of a circle; it is ¼ of what would be a cylindrical tile. it gives a smooth, rounded edge to the top of the tile installation, softening the transition between the tile and wall.

quarter round corner

though quarter rounds can be easily mitered when an installation requires that the quarter round trim turn a corner (either horizontally or vertically), the U.S. tile industry makes a trim that enables the quarter round to easily turn this corner without requiring the tile contractor to miter the bead. this trim piece is called a quarter round corner, or “beak.” the unique shape of this trim piece resembles a bird’s beak.

clé alternative: quarter round

the same alternative to edge trimming with surface bullnose trim applies to using quarter rounds.

we never instruct that an installation take a cost-cutting effort that leaves adjacent walls

exposed to moisture. we instead recommend that the substrate used for a shower or other wet surface be applied to cover the entire wall surface in that area (floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall), thus forgoing the need for quarter rounds.

fig a. however, if one of your shower or wet walls shares a much larger wall of a given project, then we recommend that the installation be trimmed out by setting tile to the ceiling and mitering the edge tiles and finishing the other edge with another mitered edge tile strip that has been cut-to-size to cover the thickness of the installation.

fig b. have your contractor build out the sheetrock so the tile can be inset, making the sheet rock and tile flush. run a grout joint bead of caulk or grout along the exposed tile edge.

fig c. a clean alternative is to have your contractor build out the sheetrock so the tile is inset and the surface of the finished sheet rock is flush with the surface of the tile.

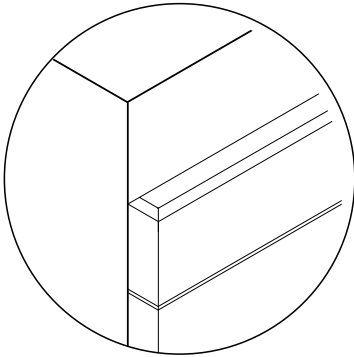


fig a.

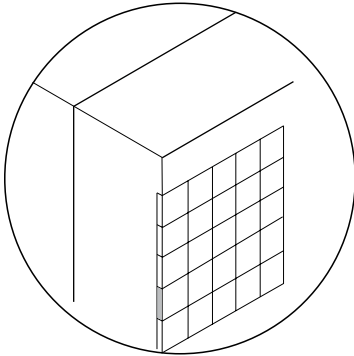


fig b.

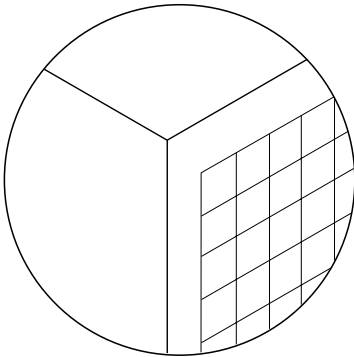


fig c.

quarter round trim
part of a circle

this specific trim was developed to form a front edge around a kitchen or bath counter and is often found in installations such as older tract homes and apartment units. we consider counter trim to be one of the more extreme types of tile trim developed. the shape of the profile is very rounded creating a visible and bulbous counter edge.

counter round corner

this piece is used to form a corner for counter trim, but it can also be created by mitering two pieces of the counter trim itself.

clé alternative: counter trim

we don’t recommend tile for kitchen counters in favor of surfaces that can avoid the use of grout (such as stone and quartzite slabs, poured concrete, etc). grout can be an issue for cleaning tiled kitchen countertops due to the porosity of the grout

and the indentation of the grout fill. crumbs, sauces, and more can get trapped in the grooves created by the grout lines, and the porosity of the grout itself can yield a dangerous environment for bacterial growth.

fig a. however, for bath vanities and other surfaces that do not support food-grade uses, tiled counters can not only be lovely, but useful. for these types of counter projects, we only recommend crafting your counter edges by mitering this finish. for this use, simply bevel your corner edges into a fully mitered corner piece.

fig b. or create a more artistic edge by crafting a bevel from field tiles. this is a particularly artful and defining feature as it showcases the craftsmanship of the installation.

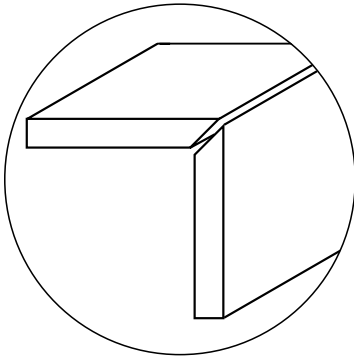


fig a.

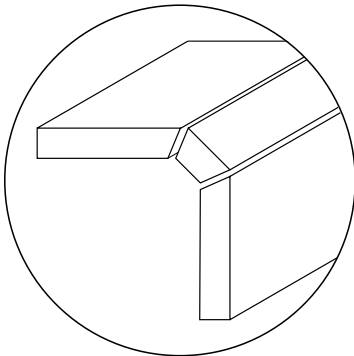


fig b.

counter trim
for that bulbous counter edge



in the tile world, baseboard is simply referred to as “base” — either standard base or cove base. for most floor applications, it is useful to have a baseboard in order to protect the wall area that abuts the floor from scuffing and damage caused by foot traffic.

standard base
standard base is like most wooden baseboards that you’ve seen for hardwood or other floor finishes. however, standard base, is usually 4" to 6" tall and there is typically a slight bevel or rounded edge at the top.

standard base corner
to create an inside corner or an outside corner, your installer can cut a vertical miter from the base to allow it to turn the corner.

clé alternative: standard base
many floor tiles don’t include a matching standard or cove base — because, as noted, trim isn’t commonly produced with most tiles made outside the U.S.

if your tile does not have its own coordinating baseboard, here are a few ways to accomplish a baseboard finish:

- fig a. use standard traditional or modern wood baseboard trim — the most popular way to finish a floor tile at the walls.
- fig b. cut the same tile that’s being used for the floor into a 4" or 6" base strip and finish off this edge with a caulk edge that’s applied like a bevel.

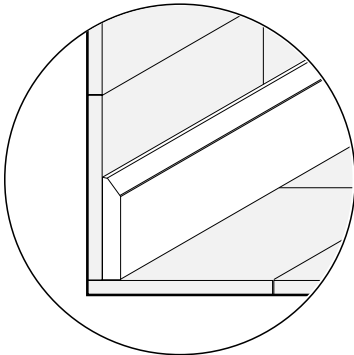


fig a.

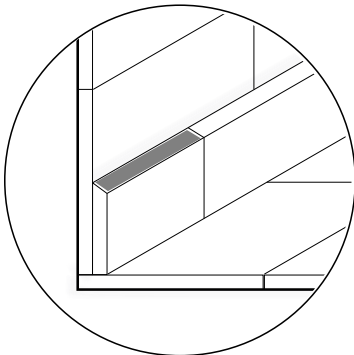


fig b.

standard base
it's baseboard for tile

for cove base, the difference from standard base seems slight but is actually quite substantial — there is a curve where the cove base meets the floor. this cove is known in the industry as a “sanitary cove” and was standardized as a feature in sanitary applications (commercial kitchens, bathrooms, etc.) to prevent bacteria from developing in the 90 degree corner where the base would typically meet the floor.

cove base corner
as with standard base, in order to create an inside corner or an outside corner, your installer can cut a vertical miter from the base to allow it to turn the corner.

clé alternative: cove base
even less tile has base trim available for cove base. if there is both wall and floor tile in the application, be sure to check both for a matching cove base trim (fig a). since cove base can be a requirement for many commercial floor applications, there are a

number of resolutions when a cove base is not available:
fig a. as with standard base, the installer can cut the floor tiles into a base strip, finishing the top edge with caulk. however, at the base the installer would then need to add a curved trim, aka finger cove, between the wall and floor joint.

fig b. if both wall and floor tiles are being installed, a finger cove may be used directly between the wall and floor tiles without a base strip.

fig c. if there is wall tile in the application and the project calls for a more “organic” finish to the cove requirement, some codes will allow an inward bevel at the coved joint. this application utilizes a much thinner strip of the floor or the wall tile to be cut and inserted into the cove joint area. by doing this, it allows for a cohesive look with the tiles (either utilizing the wall tiles for this beveled piece or the floor tiles).

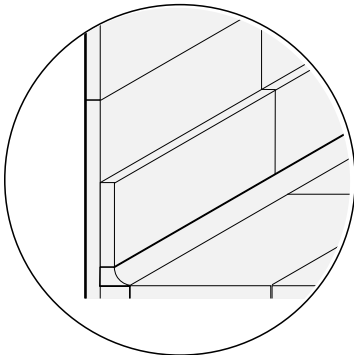


fig a.

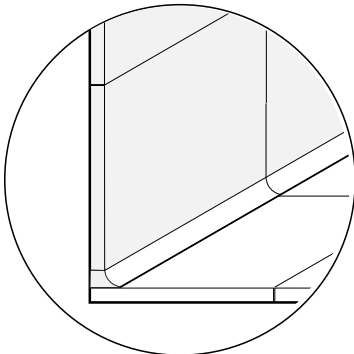


fig b.

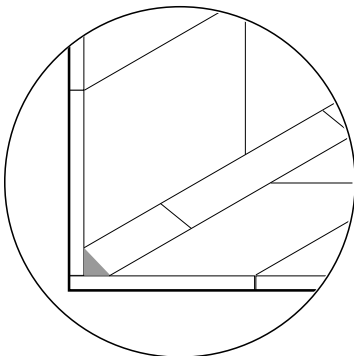


fig c.

cove base
it's curved baseboard for tile



wainscoting trim
but make it fashion

wainscoting — tile that clads only a portion of a wall, typically the lower half — is a popular application in both residential and commercial interiors. however, like other partial wall tile installations, it often raises questions about how to finish the exposed top edge. by skipping the trim, you gain a more architectural, intentional look — one that elevates the craftsmanship of your tilework and keeps your walls free of visual clutter.

clé alternative: wainscoting trim

we encourage a more refined, trim-free approach to wainscoting finishes. rather than relying on prefabricated bullnose or surface trims, we recommend the following for a clean and elevated final result:

- fig a.** create a crisp transition at the top of the wainscoting by mitering the top tile edge. this forms a seamless cap without adding extraneous trim pieces.
- fig b.** have your contractor create a slim, custom ledge from plaster, wood or stone. this can visually frame the tile while providing a functional resting point for accessories.
- fig c.** finish the exposed wall above the tile with a narrow painted band to delineate the shift in materials. this technique, used widely in european interiors, offers visual polish without the use of trim.
- fig d.** for the simplest approach, apply a clean bead of grout or caulk in your color palette along the top edge.

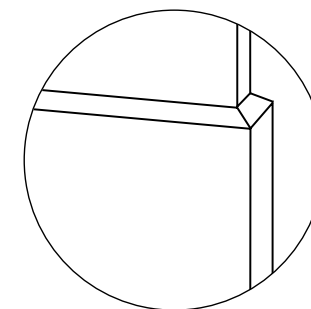


fig a.

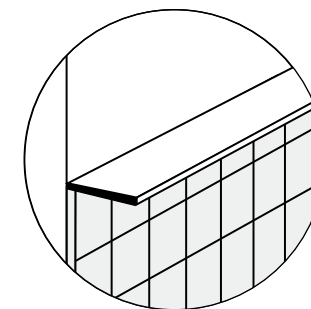


fig b.

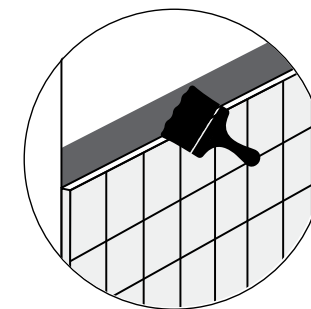


fig c.

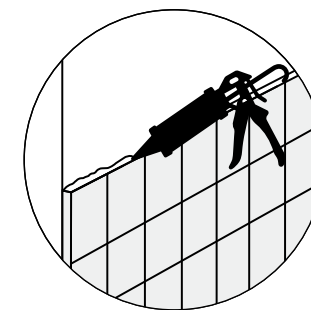


fig d.



exposed edge finishes
behind the scenes

when a tile installation ends with an exposed edge — at a corner, niche, backsplash, or wall termination — how you choose to finish it plays a critical role in both the visual impact and the longevity of the installation. these finishing details are especially important in areas exposed to moisture or humidity.

clé alternative: exposed edges

we encourage a trim-free approach wherever possible. in both dry and wet spaces, the key is craftsmanship — choosing an edge solution that complements the material, honors the design, and protects the installation from wear over time.

dry applications

- a clean bevel or miter brings an elevated, tailored finish that enhances the artistry of the installation — especially effective for handmade or ceramic tiles.

fig a. if the space calls for a more decorative finish (think bathrooms, powder

rooms, or dining niches), a coordinating rail or pencil molding can create a defined visual frame.

- for simple installations or when working with zellige or unglazed tile, run a bead of grout or caulk along the edge in a matching tone. this softens the transition and keeps the design minimal.

wet applications

- still the clé gold standard, mitering in wet areas creates a crisp, professional finish. just be sure it's properly sealed.

fig b. while not our go-to for aesthetic reasons, schluter-style edge trims may be necessary in commercial or heavy-use applications. available in a range of finishes, they offer durability and waterproofing at corners, floors, or curbs.

fig c. especially for edge transitions between vertical and horizontal planes, a carefully applied bead of waterproof caulk keeps moisture out and the look intact.

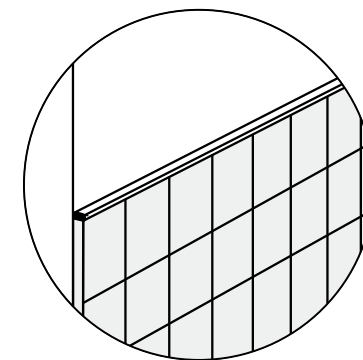


fig a.

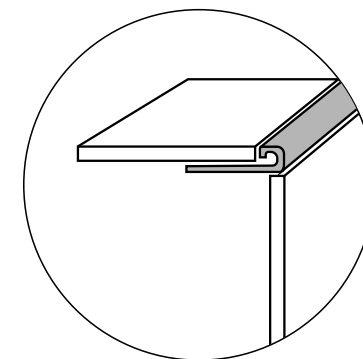


fig b.

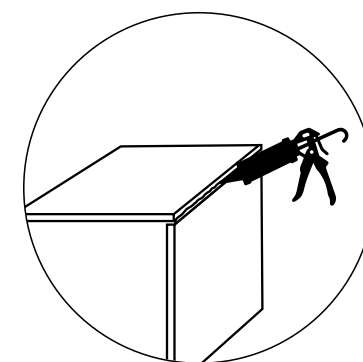


fig c.



clé

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