

GROUTING WOOD-LOOK PLANK TILES

The techniques for finishing grout in planked tiles has some challenges that are different compared to the average square or rectangular formatted Porcelain tiles. Taking care to address them before there is a problem could save callbacks with days/hours of cleaning, acid washes, grout staining and angry customers.

Plank tiles and other long rectangular formats produced in a traditional pressed tile manner are manufactured in a way to reduce warpage and remain within ANSI specifications. These methods typically include less firing timeframes with the result that the surface is less dense. As shown in the pictures below, when the tile surface is textured or polished afterwards, this process opens up the surface and creates even more porosity.



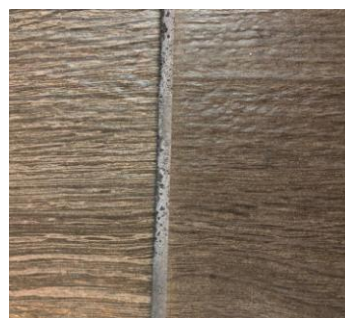
How a Porous Surface Affects Grout

When the surface is more porous, grout dries faster. This leads to a few scenarios that can ruin the final outcome. Consider the following:

1. A polished or textured tile like a typical plank will cause the grout to dry more quickly. This makes the tile contractor concerned that the grout will get stuck to the tile surface if washing doesn't begin right away. The problem is that the grout in the joint may not have set enough

to be washed. So the tile surface gets clean but the grout in the joint can end up soft because the binder or paste is washed out, or the sand or glass aggregate is now exposed and makes the grout look light, or the pigments are washed away and the grout is off-color or blotchy. In these cases, the grout will have to be stained or removed and replaced.

2. If the contractor tries to wait till the grout firms in the joint (as is done normally), the tile on the surface is difficult to remove due to extra scrubbing and added water. If the grout in the joints has the same problems listed above in scenario one – it becomes soft or discolored and again staining or replacement is required.
3. When the plank tile surface is profiled or clefted like a piece of hardwood, water pools on the tile surface. It slowly finds its way into the grout joint long after the contractor has left the project and the water softens the grout surface or causes mottling stains and discoloration. Depending on the extent of the water left on the surface, the grout will require an acid wash, staining or replacement of soft areas.
4. In some cases, the tile surfaces are sealed by the tile manufactures to reduce staining of these more porous surfaces. With aggressive scrubbing during grouting, these coatings can be removed in the grout cleaning process. In these cases, the tile is permanently discolored appearing blotchy or if it has a grout haze. Total replacement is the only solution.



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Preventing Problems

How can the tile contractor prevent these problems?

1. Sponge the tile surface with water and see if the surface varies in porosity. Check to see if water pools in low areas or in the profile.
2. Read the tile package or any instructions to see if it has a coating that could be affected by grouting or cleaning.
3. Do a small mockup leaving the grout on the tile as long as you would in the actual installation and slightly longer. Wash it as you normally would as this is the only way you'll know what the results will be.
4. If you see a potential problem or if you don't want to take any chances, use Aqua Mix® Grout Release on the tile before grouting. The time it takes to roll it on and dry and the pennies for the product in comparison to a call back can give you piece of mind and remove the risk of extra work and headaches later.
5. High tech, fired-on nano- and micro-textures make for beautiful and realistic tile selections. Learn to manage the differences and make the minor changes in the grouting process to ensure a beautiful and lasting installation.

For information about grouting plank tiles or using a grout release, contact the CUSTOM Technical Services Department at **800.282.8786**.

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