

↑ Complex tile mosaics are created from the imaginative combination of simple geometric shapes such as triangles and squares.

From utilitarian objects, including tableware and storage vessels, to decorative tile mosaics, the ancient art of ceramics plays an important role in the daily life of Morocco.

With clay made from a mixture of earth, water, and other ingredients such as sand, urban ceramicists use a potter's wheel to form a variety of objects which are glazed and fired to prevent liquid from escaping. In rural areas, women typically make the pots and bowls needed for use in homes. Vessels are usually formed by coiling and smoothing the clay by hand. As is true of other art forms, including metalworking, men work either as independent artisans or as guild members to create most of the objects for sale in cities.

Today, with the availability of imported goods from around the world, there is less of a demand for utilitarian vessels, although

fine local ceramics are treasured in Moroccan homes.

Makers of tile mosaic, or *zillij* (zeh LEEJ), work in guilds. Zillij makers produce the complex wall designs that decorate houses and mosques throughout Morocco. To create their designs, Zillij makers first cut brightly colored ceramic tiles into simple shapes such as triangles, squares, and chevrons. Next, they combine these shapes into intricate and infinite patterns. Tile mosaics are used to cover the floors, walls, and fountains of Moroccan buildings, helping to keep them cool in the hot sun.

Because the tile mosaic tradition is one of the most beloved and distinctive of all Moroccan art forms, the government is working to preserve the guilds by commissioning zillij makers to decorate public buildings.



↑ Tile mosaics, or *zillij* are made by expert craftsmen who create complex designs from simple shapes.

Make a Tile Mosaic

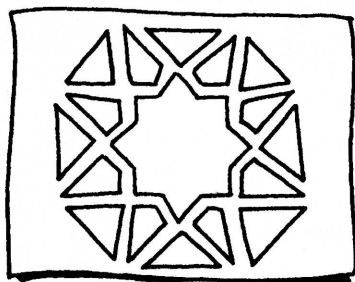
Tile mosaics decorate buildings throughout Morocco. Tile makers cut ceramic tile into a variety of shapes which they place together to form colorful patterns. Design your own patterns using the stencils in this book.

Materials

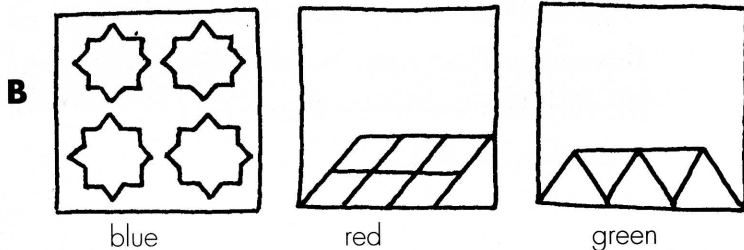
- stencils
- several different-colored squares of adhesive-backed, vinyl floor tile, about $\frac{1}{8}$ " thick, available at hardware stores
- tube of latex caulk (*be sure there is good ventilation where you're working*)
- scissors
- a piece of paper the size you want your finished mosaic to be
- a piece of heavy cardboard the same size as the paper
- paper towels

Directions

1. On the paper, design a geometric pattern using the stencils and the colors of the vinyl tiles. (A)



A



blue

red

green

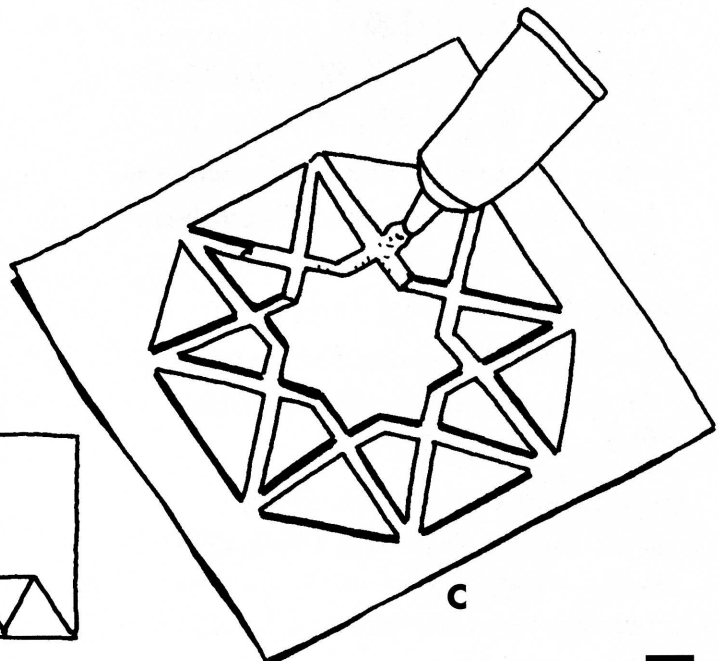
2. Trace the individual shapes needed on the different colors of vinyl tiles and cut them out. (B)

3. Peel the back paper off of the vinyl pieces and stick them onto the cardboard. Leave about $\frac{1}{8}$ " of space between the shapes. (C)

4. When you are finished with your mosaic, squeeze caulk between the vinyl shapes. Wipe off the excess caulk with a damp paper towel. Allow the caulk to dry and harden. (C)

Discovery Questions

- Tile mosaics decorate the walls of Moroccan buildings. How do other world cultures decorate their homes and public buildings?
- When you visit libraries, schools, and homes, look for different kinds of tiles. How do they differ from Moroccan tile mosaics?



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