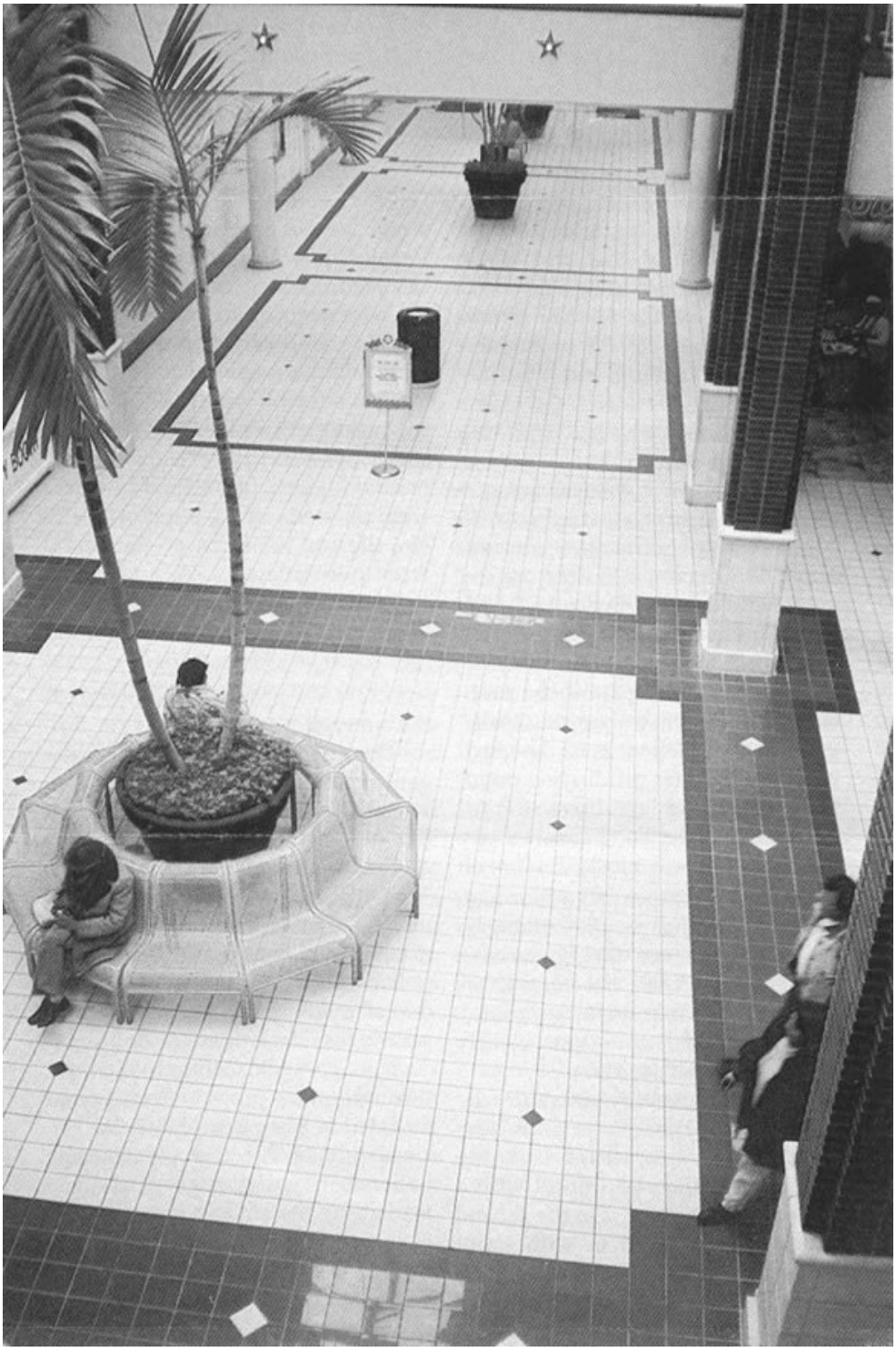
Huge mall re-tiled, while open, in ten weeks

by Joan Seguine-Levine



On a tight schedule with no overtime, Artisan's Mall Men re-tiled an entire shopping center, the equivalent of five football fields, with 200,000 square feet of tile.

Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound - it's Superman; no, it's Batman; no it's Mall Man to the rescue. The re- tiling of the 200,000-square-foot (19,000 sq. m) Newport Shopping Centre Mall, located in Jersey City, NJ, at the mouth of the Holland Tunnel, is a superhuman success story.

The special challenges of any tile renovation or installation in a shopping mall call for precision job management from an installer. "In addition to being a professional in this type of installation, you have to be concerned with the issues of safety and speed," said John J. Sekora, president of Artisan Tile and Marble Co. of New Jersey Inc. Artisan has a depth of experience in shopping malls. Newport marks Artisan's 28th main mall project completed in the last ten years. Princeton Market Fair in New Jersey and Willow Grove Mall in Willow Grove, P A, are among Artisan's most recent mall installations. Currently, the firm is working on the new Freehold Raceway Mall in New Jersey.

5 ***acres in 10 weeks***

Newport Centre was a unique situation. A renewal of the three levels of the shopping complex's tiled floors

Newport Shopping Centre, featuring 5 acres (2 hectares) of Crossville's ceramic tile, marks Artisan Tile and Marble Co's 28th mall installation in 10 years.

was needed. From the top floor of the mall's Food Court where vendors sell everything from Andy's Seafood to Nutcracker Sweets, to the second floor mix of apparel, jewelry, specialty shops, to the first floor which is anchored by Sears, Sterns, and J.C. Penney, the flooring ranged over the equivalent of 5 acres (2 hectares). Base and stair treads were to be replaced as well. All the work had to be completed within 12 weeks. The other requirement was that there be no overtime.

Artisan began work in August and worked, with the mall open, five days a week, seven hours a day, a normal union working day. The retiling was completed in 10 weeks. Artisan's early completion accommodated the October opening of J.C. Penney. In an industry where the expression "another day, another dollar" has real significance, Artisan's swift installation is considered impressive.

"It's unheard of. I would say it usually takes twice that time to do something of that magnitude. It's really a hard thing to say how much time it's going to take. On these jobs, they don't have a real good handle on what it's going to be," said Thomas F. McKeon, technical representative for Laticrete International, Inc., the company which supplied the installation materials. "They were able to do this job during the daytime so the owner didn't have to pay for time and a half or double time for work at night. So they were able to finish it during normal working hours which is also unheard of for mall-type jobs".

The Mall Men

Re-tiling is a disruptive process anywhere, but in a large shopping mall, the process taxes the patience of the tenants. Tenants had to be reassured the installers knew their craft and that the work would not interfere with their business operation. "We were real pleased," said Barbara Willis, area public relations director of the mall. "We were an operating center and did not want to impede business for our tenants."

Enter Artisan's Mall Men, supervisor Dave Senuto and 100 employees, who quickly became respected for their professional ability. Proudly identified as "Mall Men", they wore custom T-shirts with the Mall Man logo.

A two-person team of mechanic and helper formed a work crew. Each night the work crews were told where they would be working the next day. The system involved a lot of working closely with the mall owners, and working closely with the stores them- selves so that special needs of the tenants were also considered. The schedules of tenants, special mall events, and timetables of other trades - electricians, carpenters, and sub- flooring workers - were considered.

The October opening of J.C. Penney was planned for, and the work was completed at that end of the Centre in order not to interfere with the opening or the specific events planned around it. "It could have been very disturbing, but it did not prove to be so, and I think the tenants were very pleased with it as well," said Ms. Willis.

It was important to maintain access to shops; so a system of working two stores at a time was used, dividing each entrance so half the exits would be open one day, and the next day the other half would be open. Any given area was never totally blocked off.

"Distraction is part of the problem in working in a shopping mall," explained Mr. Sekora as he described how he got better production out of his workers and less distraction for people using the Food Court areas. Small areas were blocked off with yellow caution tapes and 6-foot -high (2 m) tarps so that people walking by couldn't even see the contractors working nor could the contractors see all the people walking around. Blue-logo Artisan signs clearly marked the work areas.

A unique three-day procedure developed by Artisan over a 25-year- period was implemented. On the first day the tile was thinset with a pre-bagged mixture. On the second day it was grouted in with grout smeared all over the floor. On the third day it got a cleansing acid wash which left the floor immaculate.

An untenanted first floor store space was used as a staging area for storage of supplies and cutting and mixing. Laticrete 211 Crete Filler Powder, a pre-blended sand and cement mixture designed for large commercial projects such as Newport Centre, was used to give better quality control on the job and to give the contractor the ease of not having to mix his own sand and cement.

The work began on the mall's third-floor Food Court. By constantly moving the work in a circular direction around the raised skylit area, the installers did not interfere with food vendors in this especially critical area.

Using a marine theme, the Food Court captures the spirit of a time when the sea and navigation made Jersey City's location an important one for transportation. The tile colors borrow from the sea's influence.

Speckled white and blue diamonds in a mingled Sea Mist high- light a field of very white Glacier Matte and are bordered by strips of a solid blue Windsurf. The distinctive handmade dots and clipped corners were all made of 4 x 8-inch (10 x 20 cm) tile and hand cut on the job by Artisan installers.

In order to have variation, different kinds of joints were used. A broken joint butts up against a straight joint that fans out to a clipped joint at the curve of a corner.

The mall's second floor is an elegant expanse of white 8 x 8-inch (20 x 20 cm) Glacier bordered by 8 x 8-inch (20 x 20 cm) Onyx, a mingled black and platinum grey.

On the first floor,. diamonds of matte Onyx in a setting of Glacier dramatically contrast with a band of polished Burgundy Smoke. A border of matte Onyx becomes a rich setting for Glacier diamonds.

The Crossville Ceramics tile used throughout the project was supplied by Garden State Tile of Roselle, NJ. Garden State Tile also supplied the Laticrete natural grey grout used. In explaining the smooth coordination of so many factors at Newport, Steve Fischer, vice president of Garden State Tile, cited his company's longevity.

"This is one of the smoothest projects we've seen in the 32 years Garden State has been in business. A project of this magnitude was handled so smoothly because of the strong relationship and excellent communication between Garden State Tile and Artisan Tile and Marble.

During the installation, shopping was allowed to continue and the mall remained open five days a week, seven hours a day.

Trend is to renovate

"Tile lasts forever, but people change their minds," said Mr. Sekora, as he forecast a trend toward mall renovation and use of tile to change the ambience and create environments that capture the imagination and attention of shoppers.

Mr. McKeon of Laticrete agrees that renovation is a trend. "I think it brings more shoppers out there, and it's good for the tenants as well. That's where most of the business is going now because everybody's holding up on new construction, at least in the northeast. To keep the tenants, they have to do something to brighten up the buildings to make them more attractive."

The tile industry has not slowed, observes Mr. McKeon. "Whereas everybody in the construction industry feels that business is way off, we're at least able to stay level. Renovations have kept the tile industry busy. It has shifted in three years from all new construction. When things slow down you find big contractors who would never consider renovation work doing it."

Laticrete has responded to the trend in renovation by producing a video, "A Remodeling Case Study" in a "This Old House" format, which demonstrates step by step how to install marble tile floors and borders over an existing tile floor. It gives instruction on how to apply and finish over previously installed materials.

The company also publishes the "Remodeling" brochure for people who are remodeling with tile. It describes tile over tile, tile over linoleum, and tile over vinyl and shows all the different ways of laying tile.

They didn't wear capes or change clothes in telephone booths, but they did accomplish a feat that would make the editor of the Daily Planet sit up and take notice. In ten weeks, Artisan's Mall Men installed the equivalent of five football fields of tile.

TW

REPRINTED FROM TILE WORLD MARCH/APRIL 1990