Vignettes Make the Sale in Artistic Tile Showroom

From an ancient Chinese proverb comes the saying, "One picture is worth (a) thousand words." Nancy Epstein has certainly brought the concept to life in her ARTISTIC TILE showroom at Suite 105A of LuxeHome in the Chicago Merchandise Mart. When Ms. Epstein decided to expand her Manhattan showroom of 22 years to Chicago, she collaborated with New York-based architect Stephen A. Wanta to create more than 30 separate vignettes that occupy the 3200-square-foot display area on the ground floor of the iconic Merchandise Mart. Breaking up the showroom into square spaces separated by simple dividing walls (reminiscent of the food markets of Paris and Barcelona), Wanta and Epstein used portions of two walls and a corner in each space to present four distinctive vignettes.

To bring the vignettes to life, Epstein and Wanta overcame their initial trepidation at hiring a union tile contractor and agreed with IUBAC member Trostrud Mosaic & Tile Co. of Wood Dale, Illinois, to work on an open account basis. Trostrud demonstrated how the company's well-trained professional installers made a difference, bringing the project in on time and on budget. "This was one of the most exciting adventures in tile installation we ever embarked on," said Brad Trostrud.

The variety of tiles used gave each vignette its own distinct environment. Some tiles were made of art glass that was water-jet cut into complicated designs, parts of which were paper-face mounted. Some of the tiles were very modern and trendy, including the new ultrathin tiles recently developed in Italy. Others were hundreds of years old, giving some installers their first glimpse of hand-made antique tiles from Europe. Certain materials were a real challenge to install - from fake brick to trimmed stone veneers. The installation of glass mosaics on compound curves in specially-designed vignettes presented their own

unique challenges.

Strips of extruded steel separated the four vignettes in each space, while the spaces were separated from each other by five-inch-wide strips of limestone. Umbrella-shaped fabric canopies were suspended from the arched ceilings, dispersing the soft light from crystal chandeliers. Separate high-intensity task lighting, which enhanced accurate color definition in the tiles, also left no room for error in the installations. Trostrud placed the responsibility for a "perfect job" in the hands of Mike Miller, one of the company's most experienced and knowledgeable team leaders.

Artistic Tile's Retail Design Manager, Dana Borgerson, was on-site 24/7, and she got to see first-hand how well Miller's capabilities met the numerous issues that arose. There was a huge diversity of products, and they all arrived at different times. Each box of tile was checked against Nancy Epstein's guidelines and assigned to its particular vignette. Based on each individual crew member's abilities, Miller decided who should install that particular type of tile. His astute planning kept the labor to 2466 man hours of work over a three-month period. Depending on the needs of the job, he supervised a crew of up to 11 workers on any given day.

Since the tiles had to be easy to remove and replace as trends in the showroom changed, the crew began by lining each of the steel-framed floor spaces with an anti-fracture membrane. After that, the teams used *Primer*™ *L* and *Ultraplan*® *M20* for self-leveling in the vignettes, because the tiles ranged in thickness from ¾-inch thick stone to 1/8-inch thick glass tiles and customers had to be able to move seamlessly from one surface to another. Trostrud used *Planipatch*® as a reliable standby for patching small areas.

Trostrud selected MAPEI's *Ultraflex LFT* mortar for large format tile for the majority of the stone and tile installations. The installers felt it worked especially well with the peculiar and unique characteristics of the different tiles and that its non-sag properties simplified the

wall installations. For the glass tiles, the teams used MAPEI's *Adesilex P10* bright white mortar. "This is the most incredible product!" Brad Trostrud said. "It grabs and just stays there, making glass tile installation so much easier." All the tiles joints were grouted with MAPEI's *Ultracolor Plus* fast-drying, efflorescence-free grout.

Looking over the completed project, Brad Trostrud commented, "This showroom is in a category by itself. Nancy Epstein's creativity is boundless, and it shows in the great sales they have made in Chicago since the showroom opened. We have worked on jobs this year with their tile, and every installation has been beautiful. We're very glad Artistic Tile selected us to install their showroom and gave us the opportunity to show what a difference IUBAC contractors like Trostrud Mosaic & Tile can make to the quality of every job!"