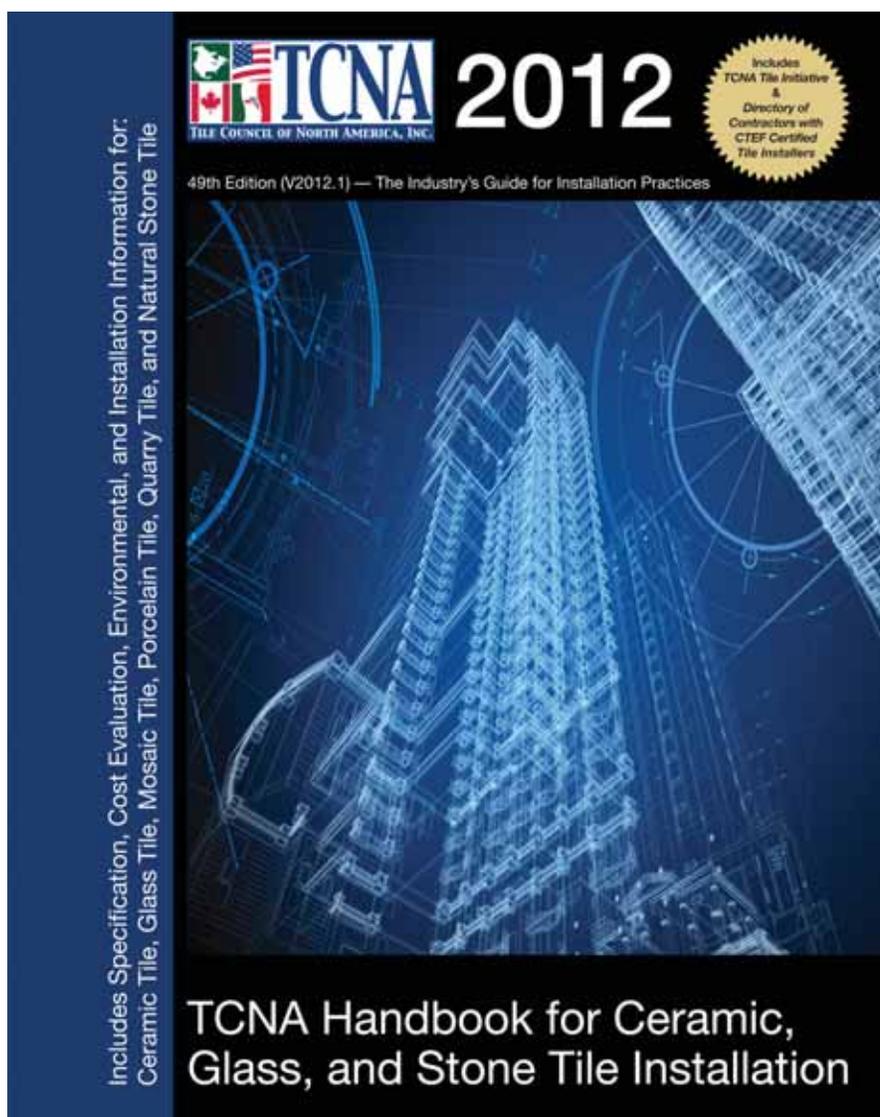

2012 TCNA Handbook highlights labor qualifications

In this Q & A, the Tile Council of North America discusses the importance of using a qualified contractor for tile installations

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A new section about the importance of using a qualified tile contractor was added to the 2012 TCNA Handbook.

Q: Were any changes made to the 2012 TCNA Handbook?

A: Yes, a new section about the importance of using a qualified tile contractor was added. Although this may seem like an obvious recommendation, this is the first time the *TCNA Handbook* has addressed the question of who is doing the installation. This was added because of the critical role the tile contractor plays in the quality and longevity of an installation. With few requirements for ceramic tile finishes in local building codes, the common practice of using the low bidder means quality contractors are always competing against contractors that cut corners on materials and likely have less-skilled installers. The new language aims to encourage apples-to-apples bid comparisons and avoid the low-quality installations that can send consumers to other finish materials in the future.



Ceramic Tile Education Foundation evaluators carefully inspect test modules to determine if the installer will be certified.

The new section states: “A home or any building today is one of the few things still made entirely ‘by hand’ and every aspect of a tile installation relies on the tile contracting company and its installers. How good the finished installation looks, how well it performs and how long it lasts are in their hands. It is for this reason that the *Handbook* Committee and the Tile Council of North America (TCNA) strongly recommend using installers who have demonstrated their commitment to their craft and have taken the time to stay current with the latest materials and methods. Because tile is a permanent finish, the lowest bid should not be the driving factor, but rather who is the most qualified to perform the scope of the work specified.”

Q: So how can someone make sure a contractor is qualified?

A: To find a qualified contractor, the *Handbook* recommends requiring a portfolio and references that reflect



Competition pools require precision mortar bed work.
Photo courtesy of the International Masonry Institute

the contractor's/installer's experience along with a bid or estimate "to ensure work of similar size, scope and complexity has been completed." This is because of the wide array of skills that might be needed for any given tile installation. On one job, the tile installers might be putting in shower pans or other waterproofing that ties into the plumbing system to ensure water is evacuated and does not leak and damage surrounding building materials. On another project, tile installers working on a competition swimming pool need precision mud skills to make sure each swimming lane is exactly the same length. These are very different skill sets.

Included in the new *Handbook* section is a list of national programs offered by non-profit organizations to help design professionals, general contractors and consumers identify contractors

that run reputable businesses and have skilled installers. These are the industry-recognized training and certification programs that "pre-qualify" contractors and/or installers to help ensure only qualified companies are being considered in the first place. Of course, a program cannot guarantee the quality of an installation by a recognized company or individual, so the contractor/installer selection process still involves the legwork of checking references and qualifications in the required skill set. The more complex the project, the more this is true.

Q: So does this new language really make a difference?

A: As an industry-wide consensus, the importance of labor qualifications has been widely received and supported -- so much so that the updated MasterSpec master guide specifications have

already incorporated it. Additionally, more and more manufacturers are referencing this language in their national account specifications and warranty programs. **TILE**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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(CTEF). Her tile career began in 1999 as a tile layer apprentice with BAC Local 32 in Detroit, where she worked mainly on commercial installations for Shores Tile Co. Now with TCNA and CTEF, Stephanie works on industry standards as well as knowledge and installation curricula for training and certification programs.