

by Gian Paolo Crasta

The aesthetic evolution of ceramic in Russia



Vadim Karin

walls and floors against damp, ceramic tiles have metamorphosed into a key furnishing component, that is often the linchpin around which the entire interior design concept revolves. As such, they have captured the attention of both trade professionals, who now take a close interest in their aesthetic evolution, and private buyers, especially at the top end of the market.

This evolution has been stimulated by the development of the local distribution market, the growth of the local ceramic industry and the invasion of imported products, which continue to spearhead the offering.

To get a snapshot of the local market and its evolution, we met

Vadim Karin, the proprietor of Novus, one of the biggest dealers in St Petersburg and one of the most important in the entire Russian Federation, operating in the top segments of the market.

Tile International: What products does the Novus range cover?

Vadim Karin: We offer products from the leading Italian and European manufacturers.

Our range includes a wide variety of ceramic tiles, mosaics, sanitaryware and bathroom furnishing elements, from the most classic collections to the most fashionable and innovative, in order to meet the needs of all the customers - mainly architects and interior designers - who buy

from us.

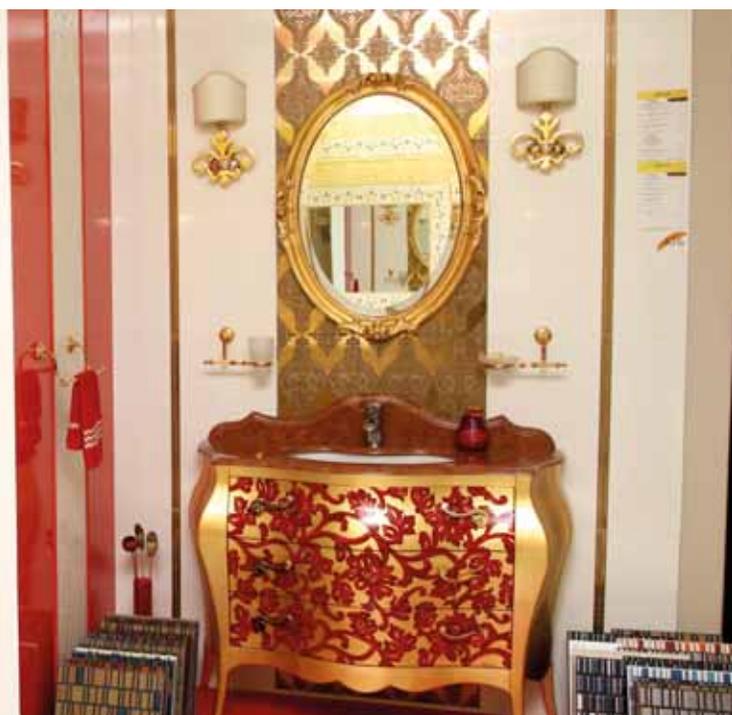
Tile International: What types of customer do you serve?

V. Karin: Our customers can be divided into two broad groups: private buyers and developers. The latter differ considerably from one to the next in terms of the type of product they choose.

Construction companies, for example, need products that meet precise technical specifications and price criteria, so that they can satisfy the necessary quality requirements, stay within budget and depend on reliable delivery times. Most supplies of this kind are for major public and private construction works such as shopping malls, office complexes, car dealerships, leisure venues, gov-



Interest in ceramic has grown exponentially in Russia over the past 15 years, to the extent that it has taken a sizeable market share away from other covering materials, such as parquet, carpet, natural stone and laminate. Once a strictly functional material for protecting



NOT ONLY *DESIGN*

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ernment buildings, libraries, hospitals, museums, hotels, restaurants, infrastructures and sports centres. In projects of this type, tiles are one of many materials that could potentially be used, so our knowledge of ceramic, its technical and aesthetic properties and its use and application benefits plays a key role in helping buyers opt for ceramic.

Tile International: And what sort of private customers do you serve?

V. Karin: They are wealthy people, who choose our products to embellish their city homes or their holiday properties. They either select the materials they want personally or they seek advice from architects and interior designers. This type of cli-

entele is looking for environments and finishes in keeping with their tastes, culture, mentality, character and individual preferences.

That is why we need to offer a sufficient variety of products to suit every requirement.

Tile International: Including those of architects and interior designers?

V. Karin: Certainly. Not least because we share the same mission: to supply customers with unique, fashionable solutions. Our offering, which differs enormously from the traditional Russian model of tiling, based on a light colour at the top, a decorative border and a dark colour underneath, is so varied that only a qualified specialist can appreci-

ate the various distinctions and produce a project tailor-made for the customer. Cooperation with architects and interior designers is therefore vital for Novus, because it helps final customers get their ideas straight and make the right choice.

A few years back, we also launched an extensive communication and training programme specifically formulated for specifiers, which includes: seminars and presentations at our headquarters on the various products in our range, and touring seminars at the sites of our tile suppliers in Italy, Spain, Germany, UK and Portugal, known as Novus Design Travel. The programme, which started five years ago and has seen the participa-

tion of over 200 professionals from St Petersburg, enables Russian specifiers to improve their knowledge of ceramic products. To strengthen our links with architects and interior designers further, we are also developing a new initiative called Novus Design Promotion, which consists in providing promotional support for independent designers who are interested in raising their public profile but lack the means to do so on their own.

Tile International: What are some of the most interesting architectural projects you have been involved in recently in conjunction with design firms?

V. Karin: My list of favourites would certainly include the "Lake House" residential complex, and

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Sí, elegimos cerámica española, por su compromiso con el medio ambiente, su constante renovación tecnológica y la modernidad de su diseño. En un entorno cada vez más competitivo, la industria cerámica española se caracteriza por su incesante capacidad innovadora y pensamiento creativo.

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Terminal 4 of St Petersburg Sea Port, undertaken with the A. Len firm of architects; the "Linkor" and "Nevsky 38" business centres with the workshop of Studio-44 architects; the reconstruction of the Senate and Synod buildings and their conversion into the headquarters of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation; not to mention the "B.N. Yeltsin" library we worked on with the firm Mikhailov. I am also very satisfied to have been involved in the restoration of a number of historic buildings, such as the Mikailovski fortress, the Singer Building and the pavilion of the Hermitage in the Tsarskoye Selo state reserve.

Tile International: You've talked a lot about design: what does offering design products mean for Novus?

V. Karin: It means proposing innovative ideas and applications for tiles in interior design, with a view to providing customers with the best solutions currently available. That is why we deal chiefly in imported tiles. Despite its rapid growth, the local industry tends to offer only mass-market, standardised products that do not meet the requirements of our clientele. We like to think of ourselves as a bridge linking local consumers with the varied international offering, and as shapers of the local aesthetic evolution. Despite our propensity for the new, we also take a lively interest in original and traditional ceramics from Italy, Germany, Great Britain, and so on. In fact our prod-

uct range includes majolica and clinker, so that we can offer not only contemporary but also traditional, classic and rustic materials.

Tile International: How do you keep up to date with the latest developments?

V. Karin: We constantly monitor innovations in both the technological and aesthetic arenas, and we pay periodic visits to the production plants of our main suppliers.

We also go to the main trade fairs, such as Cersaie and Cevisama, which not only keep us up to date on the latest products, but are also an ideal opportunity to compare notes with colleagues from different countries and cities, assess which trends are most likely to take root on the Russian market and which innovations have already established a track-record. We obviously also go to Mosbuild in Moscow.

Tile International: How is the construction industry developing in St Petersburg?

V. Karin: The current situation is pretty complex, both in St Petersburg and in Russia as a whole. The boom years before the financial crisis spawned a large number of new buildings and restorations of various types. Certain categories of building almost reached the point of complete saturation, such as multi-purpose commercial centres and car dealerships. But the crisis has caused a massive reduction in investments across all sectors, in-

cluding those which could reasonably be expected to grow, such as the hotel and catering industry, sports infrastructures, etc. Unexpectedly, there has also been a drop in the income of our private clientele. So demand for tiles has dipped recently, and

I think we can expect a long period of recovery before we get back to the pre-crisis levels.

The upturn will be driven by investments from solid, mostly multinational companies. But we are also looking forward to an upswing in private demand. X

NOVUS, ID card

Founded in 1997 by Vadim Karin, Novus currently employs 40 people and has divided its activity into three business units corresponding to each type of customer: private buyers, developers and resellers.

For its private customers, Novus operates through the Elite showroom, which covers a surface area of 350 square metres, divided into nine display areas. As well as by sales staff, customers are assisted by two designers, who draft preliminary furnishing projects and prepare the necessary documentation for building contractors.

The services for developers and resellers are handled by highly qualified professionals, including market analysts, who are constantly updated by means of on-site training programmes, seminars on the latest products and visits to the production facilities of the manufacturers of the materials offered for sale.

Close attention is also paid to logistics, which are centralised in a warehouse capable of storing 25-30,000 square metres of tile and is soon to be further improved with an online ordering system.



Novus's business is chiefly focused on St Petersburg, but also extends to other regions of the Russian Federation. In 2010, the company was one of the three main suppliers of McDonalds Russia, to which it supplied materials for over 35 restaurants throughout the country.

LIST OF ALL BRANDS MARKETED AT NOVUS

Bianchini&Capponi	Doremail	Original Style
Bisazza	Etruria	Peronda
Casa dolce casa	Fap	Porcelanosa
Ceramiche Fioranese	Graniti Fiandre	Venis
Vallelunga	Horus Art	Settecento
Ceramiche Grazia	Klinker Sire	TopCer
Cottoveneto	Lithos	Zahna
Decoratori Bassanesi	Mainzu	

IT'S TIME FOR INNOVA- TION

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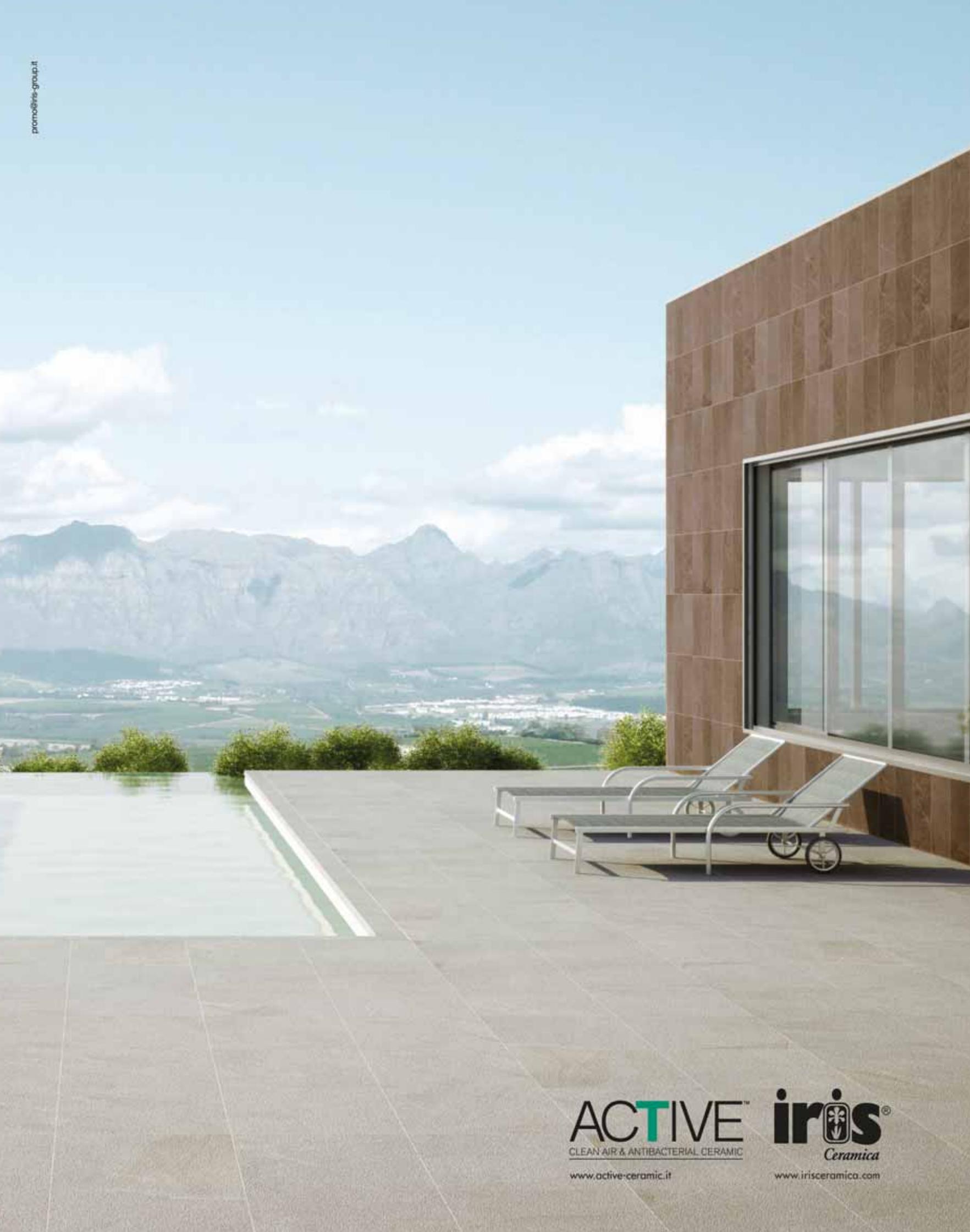
Yes, we choose Spanish ceramic tiles because of the industry's boundless creativity and ability to innovate. In an increasingly competitive marketplace the Spanish ceramic tile industry's distinguishing features are the modern designs, the constant technological innovation and the industry's commitment to the environment.

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