

SIMONE FARRESIN AND ANDREA TRIMARCHI OF FORMAFANTASMA AND BRENT DZEKCIORIUS (ON FLOOR) OF DZEK IN THE FACTORY IN SASSUOLO, ITALY, THAT IS MAKING THEIR PORCELAIN AND VOLCANIC ASH 'EXCINERE' TILES

Milan  
Preview  
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# Lava lovers

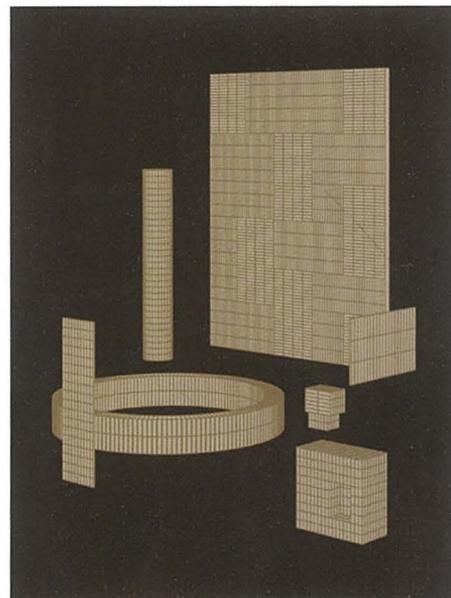
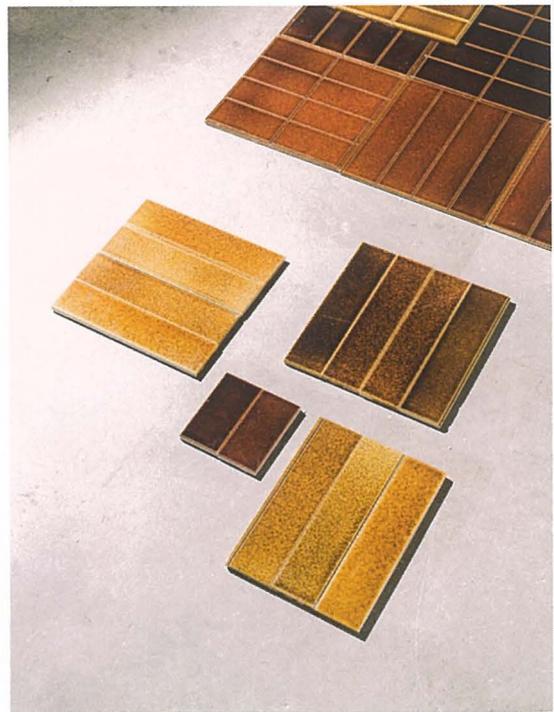
**Formafantasma's tiles rise from the ashes of a Sicilian volcano**

'This is a collaboration between Mount Etna and us,' says Simone Farresin, one half of Amsterdam-based design duo Formafantasma. He's in Sassuolo, Italy, with the other half Andrea Trimarchi, to wrap up a three-year project to transform ash from the Sicilian volcano into tiles for Dzek, the architectural materials company founded by Brent Dzekorius in London in 2013.

'We always think that, as designers, we have to decide things, but the world also decides things for us,' says Farresin. In this case, the ferrous colours and final tile format were determined by Mount Etna. Volcanic ash is the grainy aftermath of molten magma that has

erupted from under the planet's crust. Thrust through the volcano's crater into the atmosphere, the airborne lava cools into jagged particles of rock, minerals and obsidian glass that fall to earth. Whereas basalt and pumice, the rocky masses formed by igneous rivers of terrestrial lava, have been mined for centuries as building blocks, volcanic ash proved too non-uniform a material, but Formafantasma and Dzek saw a chance to expand the vocabulary of the volcano.

Chemical tests revealed that blowing glass from the volcanic ash would require introducing additives, contrary to their concept of a purely volcanic»



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, VOLCANIC ASH BEING SIEVED TO GIVE CONSISTENCY OF GRAIN SIZE; THE TILES' NON-UNIFORM RANGE OF BROWNS IS CAUSED BY THE VOLCANIC ASH'S HIGH IRON CONTENT; A SKETCH OF TILED ARCHITECTURAL FORMS IN THE MILAN INSTALLATION

## 'Failures lead you to places your ego never would have taken you'

obsidian, so they experimented instead with glass bricks, which proved too brittle, and then clay bricks coated in glass, installing a wall of them in Columbus, Indiana, and producing, in the process, a lot of broken bricks and cut hands. Finally, they created non-reactive porcelain tiles with a glaze of melted volcanic ash on top, the version they'll present in Milan this year. 'We're not the kind of designers that send drawings and that's it. We're deep into the process of developing the work,' says Trimarchi. 'The failures lead you to places your ego never would have taken you,' adds Farresin. 'And Brent understood that if something is more process-based, you have to have the patience for it.'

At the factory, amid the plastic buckets of pigment and trays of unfired biscuit, sits a botched batch of the Dzek tiles rolled out of the kiln, which have exploded into pieces because of a moisture imbalance. But to one side are the first successful tiles, the 'ExCinere' (Latin for 'from the ashes'), the gleaming burnished slats fluctuating from caramel to deep sienna, the surfaces flecked with unmelted ash particles.

For their Milan installation, the tiles will be produced in quantities to cover a section of walls,

ceiling and floor, along with columns, cubes, tables and other architectural forms. The high percentage of the ash's iron content creates a range of browns 'that make them very 1970s in a way,' says Farresin. 'But then sometimes process takes you to unexpected places. We'd been considering pastels and almost artificial colours, but these tones are more like life, and they bring back a quality that's disappearing in architecture, which is the non-uniformity of colour.'

'In the post-war buildings of Milan, you can still find rich glazes like this; not like today's digitally printed tiles,' says Trimarchi, noting that glazed tiles are the original self-cleaning technology, washed of pollution with each rainfall. The Dzek tiles, made for interior and exterior use, 'take back the understanding of surface in architecture which, since the 1990s has been very flat, very uniform, very sanitised,' says Farresin, running a hand over the granular face of a tile. 'Like traditional ceramics, this is more reactive, more mercurial, but we think that's the beauty.'\*  
*Formafantasma and Dzek's 'ExCinere' tile collection, 8-14 April, via Giulio e Corrado Venini 85, Milan, dzekdzekdzek.com; formafantasma.com*