



PROJECT SHOWCASE

Taking Gauged Porcelain Tile Panels to New Heights: The DaVita Headquarters Lobby

DaVita reimagined its corporate headquarters lobby in Denver with clean sleek lines and bright, open space. Special features include two-story columns, a fireplace, open seating, a dramatic metal art curtain and a bistro. It offers an inviting, yet professional ambiance for visitors from across the U.S. and around the globe.

The spacious, fluid feel was created by balancing open areas with set features—such as a tiled reception desk with a dramatic two-story black tile logo wall behind it and a freestanding floor-to-ceiling column. These surfaces and many others

were covered in continuous gauged porcelain panels (GPPs). There are 350 porcelain tile panels, or approximately 9,280 square feet of tile on the walls, columns, reception and security desks, soffit and steps. Local tile master, Alberto Ortega owner of Domalbri, LLC, was awarded the intricate job of installing these immense panels.

Installing GPPs with a European Flair

Alberto Ortega of Domalbri is a Porcelain Slab Certified Fabricator and Installer, who originally trained in Europe nine years ago with porcelain tile manufacturer Kale Italia, making Alberto one of the

first in America to be certified on the installation of gauged porcelain tile. He is also certified through several American tile industry manufacturers. With his 6-man crew, Alberto tackled the job flawlessly. He and his team covered several areas of expertise: taking precise measurements, cutting the tiles with precision and carefully applying the mortar to the wall and tile.



Working with GPPs Has Special Challenges

The sheer size of Gauged Porcelain Panels—equal to or larger than 1 x 1 meter—means that extra care must be taken in their transport and installation to avoid putting stress on the material that can cause cracking.

“Large panels are difficult to install,” said Steve Besendorfer, Territory Manager for H.B. Fuller Construction Products. “With sizes that can span 5' x 10' and at only 3.5-6.5 mm thick, proper installation involves training and the use of special tools.” Alberto’s team used a specific aluminum extruded frame with suction cups that allowed safe

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transport of panels to their places without compromising the integrity of the material. During the installation, a leveling system helped to “ensure that every single joint was perfectly straight with no lippage.” Alberto and his crew were also

conscious of using a consistent amount of mortar, gauging the amount by eye and using a European Notch Trowel to spread the thin set.

On the entire project, the mortar of choice was TEC® Ultimate 6 Plus Polymer-Modified Mortar. Alberto said, “I fell in love with this product because Ultimate 6 Plus has more open time. It doesn’t dry up on you.” Alternatively, Alberto explained his frustration with products that developed lumps from drying too quickly, which made the material difficult to maneuver.

“Ultimate 6 Plus is designed specifically for gauged porcelain tile panels/slabs,” said Steve. “The tiles stay in place without sagging or slumping. It offers an exceptionally long open time and dries quickly throughout—even in the middle—allowing you to grout 6 hours after the tile is on the wall.”

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-Alberto Ortega

Compared to other mortars, Ultimate 6 Plus offers 4½ more hours of work time. That’s a big difference and offered Alberto’s team much more flexibility on the job site to get the tile placement exactly right. “If we needed to make adjustments to a slab when it was already set, we

could make adjustments,” said Alberto. “With other mortars once you’re set, you’re done.” Alberto said the mortar performed exactly as described on the spec sheet.



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Although the old adage is measure twice and cut once, Alberto's advice on GPPs was to be extra careful. "Measure five times and cut once," Alberto said with humor. The extra care paid off—a beautiful installation with no mishaps or breakage.



Unique Highlights for a Unique Space

Many separate elements all work together to make this lobby so welcoming. One element is the welcome desk itself—made using three key pieces of Lightning Polished Slabs/Countertops by Crossville—one for the top and two for the sides, and warmed up with wood. The logo wall behind the reception desk offers texture and drama through the use of separate pieces of black

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porcelain sheets called Pietra di Piombo, by Laminam. A complementary security desk uses a black tile called Dekton from Cosentino on the top and sides for a sleek, clean look.

The two-story column of Michelangelo tile in the entry seating area creates a subtle yet commanding center point. An open fireplace faced with porcelain panels seems to float in space, and offers a cozy space for relaxing

or conversation. And an iron art curtain with illuminated cut-outs adds both light and beauty.

Powering Through With Quality Grout

Throughout the project, TEC® Power Grout® was used on all elevator areas, the majority of columns, the fireplace, flowerpots and hallway before the artwork was hung.

“We were able to choose a color that was a great match to the actual porcelain—both the white color of the Michelangelo tile and the dark of the Pietra di Piombo.” In areas with transitions, such as three-panel Michelangelo porcelain tile columns near the elevators, Alberto and his team chose TEC AccuColor® Premium Sanded Grout. “AccuColor is more elastic to avoid breakage with metal and porcelain,” said Alberto. “It creates a good seal.” The team chose a standard color that matched the black aluminum perfectly.



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The mortar and grout materials were all provided by Florida Tile of Denver. “We heavily stock Ultimate 6

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Plus Mortar because it is so versatile,” said Weston Turnpaugh, Branch Manager of Florida Tile. “It is excellent for GPP projects, but also recommended on many different types of jobs -- ranging from large panels to small mosaics. Its versatility appeals to all types of installers, from professionals to weekend warriors. All

The People Make the Difference

Florida Tile has come to depend on TEC and its people for quality products and great support. “Any time I call with questions,

I get them answered, either directly through my territory manager, or through the professionals at the technical hotline,” said Weston. Carey Loftus, Sales Manager for Florida Tile, agreed. “I rely on their knowledge. And TEC does a great job of hands-on training,” states Carey. “In fact, it was during a class TEC hosted at our facility where Alberto first learned how Ultimate 6 Plus Mortar can make a GPP job easier. It’s now his thin set of choice.”



A Job Well Done

Alberto liked the fact that TEC products are easy to work with, perform as specified and are readily

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available. “Every time we needed a TEC product, it was there, without the need to special-order it and wait for delivery.” As far as working on the DaVita headquarters, Alberto continues, “We had a great experience working on this space. This was a project where everyone on the team can be proud of the completed installation.”



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Contact your local sales rep to request a demo.
Have a question? Visit TECQuestions.com.



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