



“A tiled surface is designed with the intention to last for a long duration of time apart from being integrated to an aesthetic aspiration of an overall palette.”

## DESIGN AS IDENTITY CREATION

Dinesh Vyas, Senior Vice President (Marketing and Product Development), Prism Johnson Limited; on the design ethos of key brands as a process of generating an identity for the eventual products

Over the past six decades, H & R Johnson (India) has successfully established itself as a pioneer of key design developments and research in the tile industry. As the Senior Vice President who has been closely associated to the journey of the brand, Dinesh Vyas shares a fundamental understanding of the range of factors involved in the development of a brand or a product at H & R Johnson (India) through a ‘user-centric’ thought process.

[IN]SIDE: [IN] *What role does 'design' play in industrial ceramics and what core factors govern the 'design process'?*

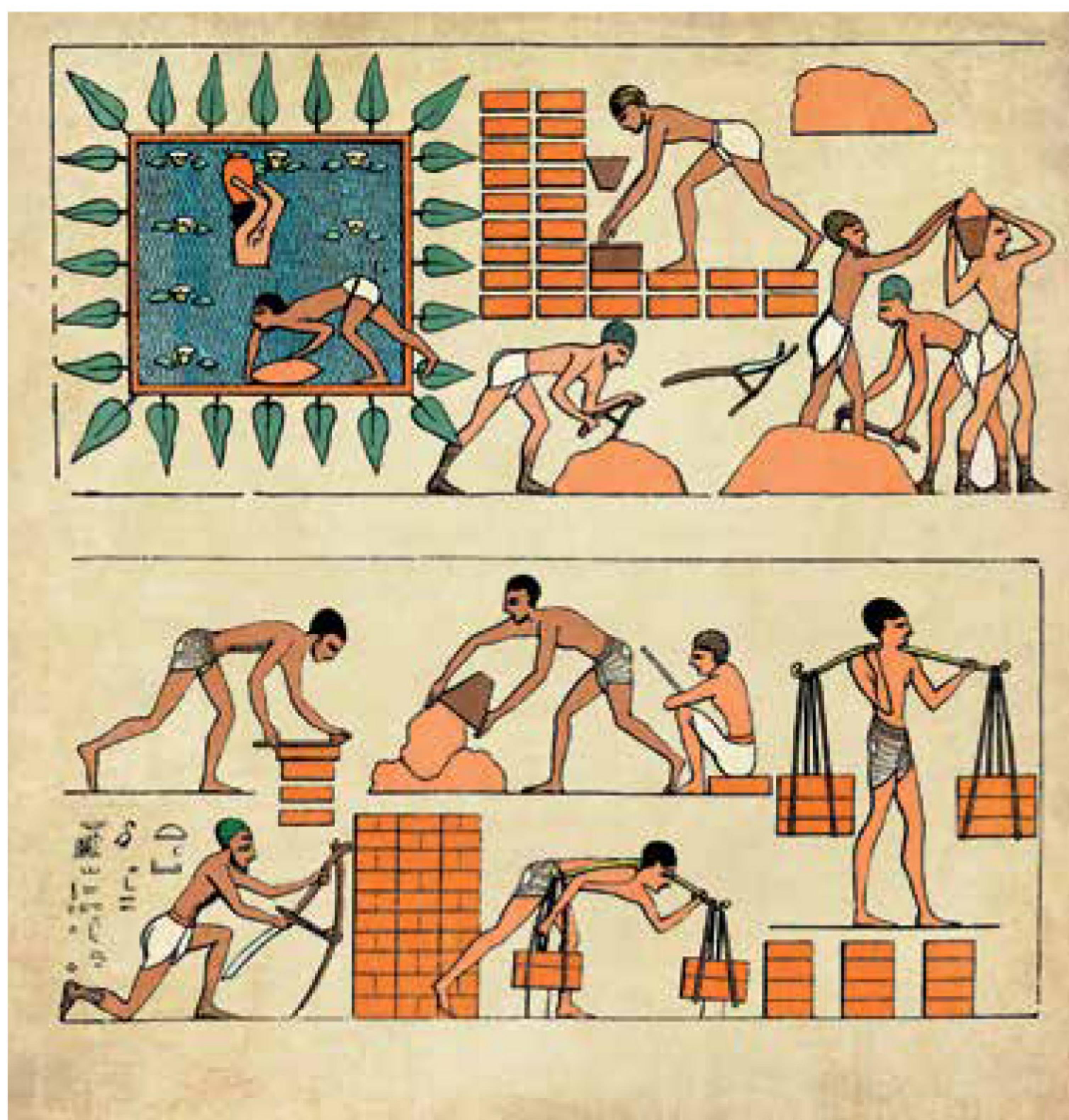
DINESH VYAS: DV Design is a very vast subject in itself and the definition changes with context. However, one thing that is common to any design process for us is that it must fulfil the ascribed purpose. Discussing industrial ceramics and ceramic tiles in particular, the purpose is defined by a three-fold objective: Durability, Aesthetics, and Functionality. If one were to elaborate these objectives - functionality refers to the performance of a surface in a familiar environment of usage. For instance, a technically correct tiled floor will require different surface characteristics depending upon its environment of usage. Not all tiles perform the same way in a given environment.

Secondly, a tiled surface is designed with the intention to last for a long duration of time apart from being integrated to an aesthetic aspiration of an overall palette. This means that the functionality and aesthetics must have a much longer life without any objectionable decay or loss of sheen. In that sense, aesthetics, which is often considered to be an artistic endeavour - dealing with colour, design flow, touch etc - also needs to be a consideration of durable use. In other words, a good tile must endure wear and tear in the environment it is designed for such as: skid-resistance, ability to perform under different levels of static and dynamic loads and so on. So, 'durability' is not just with regard to the mechanical strength of tile but the aesthetics and functionality must also possess durability as an attribute.

Right: Johnsons's Tactiles used in public spaces such as bus stops to endure high traffic



In light of these factors, design in industrial ceramics involves multiple disciplines. The first one is ceramic engineering. It imparts desired mechanical strength and dimensional attributes to the tile body and the top, visible surface of the tile. Here is where one encounters the opportunity to employ and combine latest technologies and equipment in the process of design. The second aspect includes graphical combinations of shades, detailing and an overall visual appeal. Since surfaces are designed to be integrated with different environments of usage, it requires intuitive design expertise from architects, interior designers and other such professionals from diverse fields of design. In short, the meaning of 'design' with respect to tiled surfaces can be a very comprehensive and interesting subject.



“According to some sources, the oldest thing closely resembling a ceramic tile, so far found is aged more than 2000 years!”



[IN] *How has design of ceramic tiles evolved over time?*

DV The knowledge of ceramics is actually quite old as a subject. Over the last few centuries, ornamental ceramics for beautification and decoration have become immensely popular. According to some sources, the oldest thing closely resembling a ceramic tile, so far found is aged more than 2000 years! What has really changed is on two fronts: first is the technology which has gone through tremendous evolution and the second is a huge variety of affordable and easily accessible range of products. Beautiful, small-sized ceramic tiles which were once a luxury, available only to the elite of the society as decorative products, are now widely accessible to everyone. Modern-day tiles are large in size, mechanically very strong and have a wide variety of aesthetics and features to suite different environments of use.

Apart from the mass-production technology introduced by Europe (with China emerging as a strong competitor today), few of the most remarkable changes brought about during this evolution include:

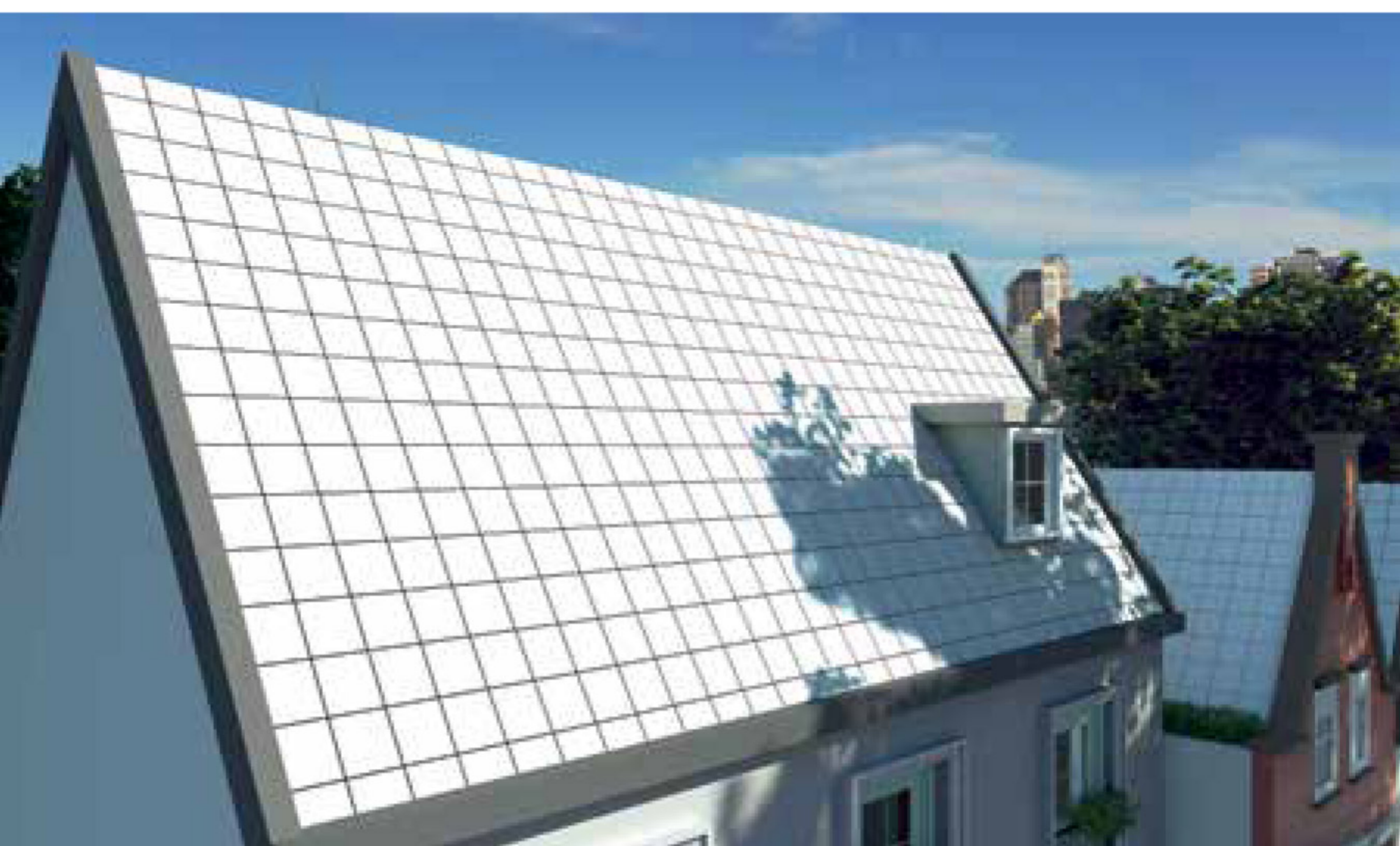
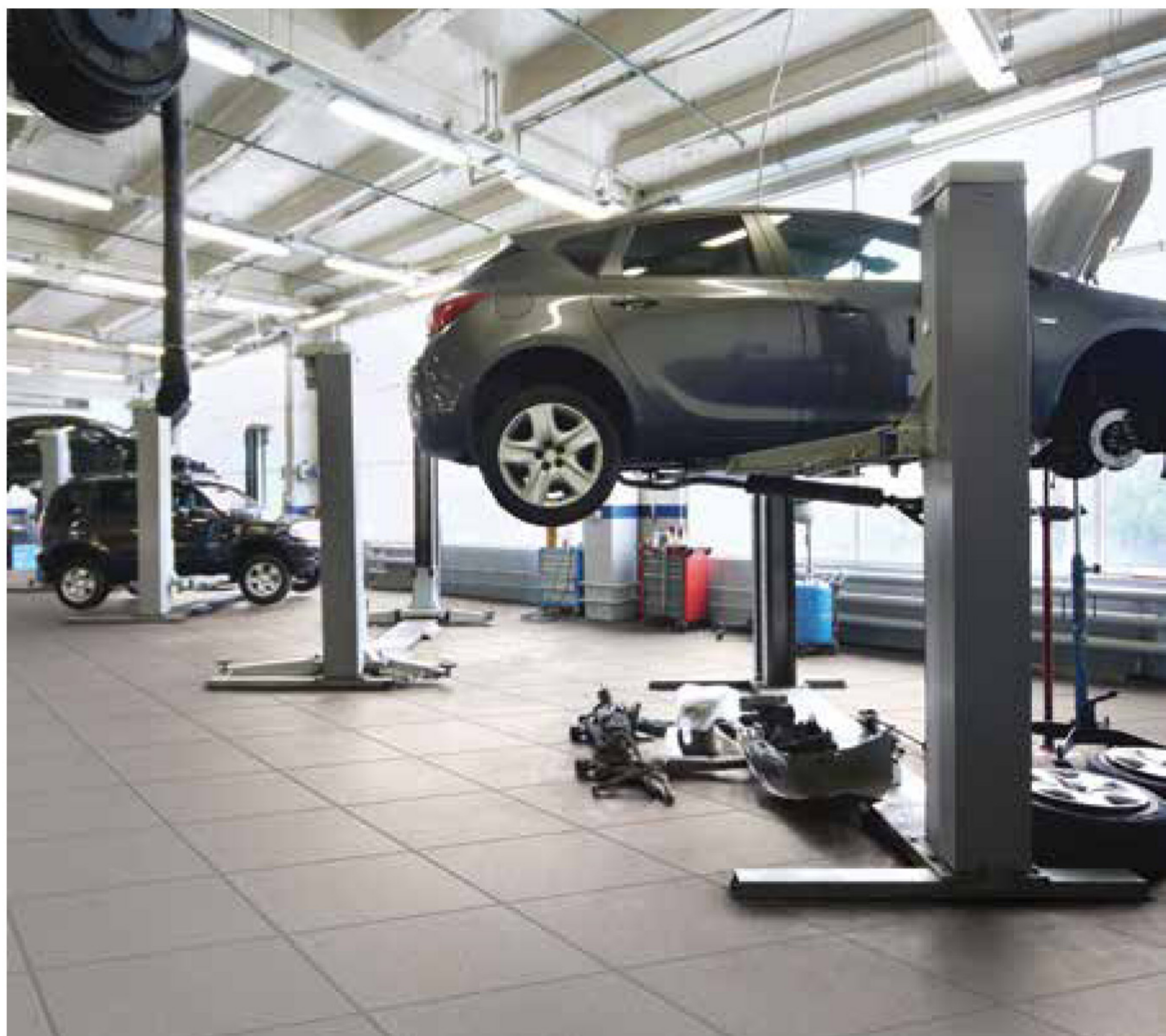
- High mechanical strength and thinner tiles for walls as well as floor applications.
- Multiple technologies creating a wide range of aesthetics.
- Creation of economical, polished porcelain (vitrified) tiles and large size glazed, versatile porcelain tiles in multiple surface finishes.
- From a simple coloured glaze and flat screen printing to a modern-day ink-jet digital printing and realistic textures.

At Johnson, with the help of our in-house R&D (Research & Development) team, we have been successful in combining the latest manufacturing technology to introduce some unique features that render ceramic tiles as a better alternative for surface covering. For instance, our range of Anti-Static tiles deal with static-charge in enclosed electronic environments and the high SRI (Surface Reflective Index) tiles keep the temperature below the roof much lesser than convention. Apart from these we introduced Germ-Free and Stain-Free tiles, ready to use Stair-case Tiles and many such other innovative products. To re-emphasise, design is perceived as an integral idea of a surface and not just limited to the aesthetics of a coloured graphic or finish type. It is a continuously evolving process in all the three aforementioned aspects: Durability, Functionality and Aesthetics.

Facing Page (Three Images):  
We live amongst a rich culture  
of architectural ceramics since  
almost 2000 years!

Below Right: Johnsons's Smart  
Slim Tiles, all of 5mm thickness  
used to clad interior surfaces,  
reducing wastage and bulk





“Apart from value-addition to aspects of durability and aesthetics, we are rigorously working towards developing ceramic tiles as an environmentally conscious product.”

Facing Page Clockwise:  
Johnson Tiles for different usage environments; Industrial Tiles for Server Rooms, Germ-Free and Stain-Free Tiles for Hospitals, 20 mm thick Meteor Series Industrial Tiles for Garages, Germ-Free Tiles for domestic use, Cool Roof Tiles for reduced heat gain used in domestic and commercial spaces

Right: R & D work in process at the laboratory in the Industrial Products & Natural Resources Division (IPNR) at H & R Johnson's Plant



[IN] *What skill-sets are required for the product-development process of a new range?*

DV Graphic designers, artists, interior designers, 3D space visualisers and ceramists - they all play important roles in the process of synchronisation. Marketing inputs and feedback mechanisms with the help of our sales team are also critical to the process. Personally, I feel that the nature of the working relationship between various skill-sets is at par with that of a football team. The team assembles into a set-formation as per the requirement of that stage and challenge at hand, and at the same time every player understands the goal and hence adds value to the team-effort.

[IN] *What other product ideas is Johnson contemplating on for the future?*

DV At the moment, we are immersed in ceramics R&D. Most of what we do as R&D also gets manifested into reality, including the creation of India's first and only Germ-Free tile. Apart from value-addition to aspects of durability and aesthetics, we are rigorously working towards developing ceramic tiles as an environmentally conscious product. For instance, we are presently working to create a unique sort of tile that can make the environment of X-Ray and MRI centres safe without using the conventional sheet of lead. Innovation is our aptitude and lot of our projects are at different stages of development. Overall, our effort is to design ceramic tiles that can push the envelope with their enhanced performance attributes and add value to the society in as many ways as possible. Personally, I see great opportunity in collaborating with architects, designers and technocrats to co-create interestingly customised products that are revolutionary in some sense, and well-ahead of their time.



Left (Three Photographs):  
Inside the H & R Johnson  
Manufacturing Unit; Raw  
Material Storage, Slip House-  
Ball Mill, the Glaze Line

Facing Page: Tiles passing  
through the quality check  
before they are packaged, Tiles  
passing through the Digital  
Printing Machine, Finished  
tiles straight out of the kiln and  
moving to the Rectification and  
Finishing process







Left and Below (Three Photographs): Co-Creating flooring ideas with Ar Swapnil Patil for a cricket pavilion

Facing Page: Designing industrial ceramics is an iterative process that involves much back-and-forth between design, production and marketing teams

“Every project has a unique thought process that informs the design decisions. In this premise, when a ceramist and a designer collaborate, the resulting output is far more informed.”



[IN] *Could you elaborate on some of these collaborative efforts?*

DV Collaborating with architects and designers on exclusive projects has been very rewarding for us as a company. Every project has a unique thought process that informs the design decisions. In this premise, when a ceramist and a designer collaborate, the resulting output is far more informed. The scale, however could be an issue as ours is a process involving mass-production. But with present-day technology, I think that a lot many projects could be customised where the requirement is of a few thousand square meters.





[IN] The tag line of Johnson reads: 'Not just tiles, Lifestyles'. How do you correlate your designs with lifestyles?

DV 'Lifestyle' is a constantly changing attribute of our society, and with every change there are certain unconventional nuances that gain prominence. It is widely known but not well-accepted that lifestyle, in a way, is also a reflection of wealth and power. In modern terms, we think that 'lifestyle' has a few important aspects - health & hygiene, safety, concern for the environment, freedom to choose from a wide range of options and an ability to make an informed choice.

In this context, having our positioning as 'Not just tiles, Lifestyles', we have launched Stain-Free and Germ-Free tiles which cater to 'health & hygiene', Anti-Static and Anti-Skid tiles for concerns of 'safety', slimmer but stronger tiles and cool-roof tiles that address the concern for our fast-depleting resources and the urban heat islands respectively - in short, our 'concern for the environment'. Apart from this, we have over 3000 products across over twenty categories - ensuring a 'freedom of choice' for every type of customer for any need that they may have. We believe in empowering people for 'making informed decisions'. To sustain these efforts, we have introduced House of Johnson Experience Centres across the country where our trained staff can help and guide every customer – even if unaided by a qualified architect or designer - about the best options to suit their needs, budgets and aesthetic requirements.

Facing Page: 'Lifestyle' and the constantly changing definitions: H & R Johnson proposes an alternate understanding that basis itself in well-being

Right: The essential components of a contemporary lifestyle - the foundational ideas for design at H & R Johnson

"We believe in empowering people for 'making informed decisions'. To sustain these efforts, we have introduced House of Johnson Experience Centres across the country where our trained staff can help and guide every customer."





“There is constant effort from our end to positively influence the fraternity by way of having a physical and digital presence.”



**SUPPOSE YOU HAVE A WAREHOUSE...**  
Objects by Aziz Karmali, Designer and Maker, Mumbai



With over twenty years of experience in the product, industrial and interior design space, Aziz Karmali runs a practice around experimentation with materials and forms, working with fine craftsmanship. The studio is focused on delivering high-quality, functional, and aesthetically pleasing products for other architects, designers and makers of design.

[IN] *How would you like to collaborate with the fraternity of architects and designers to develop something interesting in the field of ceramics?*

DV We are part of an industry where design is driven by architects and interior designers. In this way, we consider ourselves as co-creators within the same fraternity - thus trying to involve ourselves beyond just 'a product' as a deliverable. In my personal interactions with different architects and designers over the years, the one thing that poses a common concern for all of us is the knowledge about the right kind of workmanship in the tiling process. There is constant effort from our end to positively influence the fraternity by way of having a physical and digital presence.

Facing Page (Two Images):  
[IN]SIDE is a Print + Digital content initiative by H & R Johnson and Matter for the fraternity of architects and designers in India

Below: "We are immersed in R & D: research at H & R Johnson is the springboard for product-development

We are also associated with a few design institutions and architecture bodies apart from encouraging and promoting good publications and design conclaves on contemporary architecture and design such as the [IN]SIDE journal and the Frame Conclave on 'Modern Heritage' in Goa. In the near future, we are also looking to launch an online design-content platform in association with the Goa-based Matter Studio. Our ultimate aim is to qualify as a collaborator in design with the very diverse architecture and design community of our country, therein helping us enrich our conversations and thus, products ■



DINESH VYAS is the Senior Vice President, Marketing at H & R Johnson (India) where he leads brand and marketing initiatives across all product verticals. With over 25 years of experience in the industry, Dinesh Vyas has worked with Ambuja Cement, Larsen & Tubro and Shell prior to his long engagement with H & R Johnson. Dinesh has lead retail, brand and marketing initiatives at H & R Johnson (India) including some of the companies' landmark product development initiatives. He has been recognised amongst the '50 most talented brand leaders in India' by the 12<sup>th</sup> Indira Awards for Marketing Excellence.