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Project: An Investigation of The Pattern And Printing Process - Islamic Tiling

Sophie Kozlowski

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Islamic Tiling
An Investigation of Islamic Tiling in the Altria Theater

Sophie Kozlowski - Pattern Research Project - IDES 231/251

History of the Altria Theater

The site of the Altria Theater was purchased in 1925 by Clinton C. Williams, who was founder of the Acca Shriners. Almost ten years of construction and 53 million dollars later, the building opened in 1932 as the “Mosque Theater.” It was designed by lead architect Maxwell Wright and associate architects Charles M. Robinson and Charles E. Robinson, and the monumental size was done by F. Bay. Of the Richmond Flats and Flats Works (Browne 1992). The original plans included a $4000 war theater, 42 hotel rooms, a pool and more.

The city of Richmond bought the Mosque Theater in 1994, but by the mid 1990s, it was in need of a restoration; the repair work carried out in 1994-96 by original architects Wright and the Robinson’s was mostly cosmetic. Once these restorations were complete, the building was returned to the city of Richmond.

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Craft Study

Grid Analysis

Pink - Indicates the vertical and horizontal lines that make up the grid.

Yellow - This shows the outline of the individual square, which are made up of the dark purple and burnt orange/red tesserae.

Blue - Indicates each of the squares with a star in its center.

Color Study

#1: Forest Green
#2: Dark Purple
#3: Bright, Royal Blue
#4: Burnt Orange/Red
#5: Cream/beige

Color

Islamic mosaic tiles, like the ones made up of small pieces of glass, stone, or in this case, natural clay which are referred to as “tesserae” to make three piece glass tiles first rolled out into slabs about the width of a pinky finger. Next, the tiles are installed into mosaics to make hundreds of individual pieces. The makers of this particular pattern would have used tile of threeteenth-century style and other geometric shapes. Next, the molds are fired in kilns at approximately 2000 degrees Fahrenheit. After the tiles were burned, the architects inserted them with a glass that will provide color and protection against the elements for walls or a building. Now, the pieces can be put together, chemically bonding the color to the clay.

Use

The original users of this facility were the Acca Shriners, who designed this building to look like a mosque, hence the grand design of this building and the tiling. Today, people from all over the country experience the luxury of the interior of the Altria.

History & Culture

Geometric patterns such as this one are closely associated with Islamic art, largely because of their aesthetic qualities. Although not officially prohibited, iconography was frowned upon in the Islamic religion. In Islam, are featured in the spiritual representation of objects and beings, and not their physical qualities (BBC, 2009). This particular pattern is a tile mosaic, which is defined as an arrangement of shapes closely fitted together, especially polygons in a repeated pattern without gaps or overlaps. This pattern is arranged on a basic grid which can easily be seen squares in any grid cell. All of the six-inch squares are outlined by vertical and horizontal elements that follow a diagonal and an eight-pointed star, highlighting the lines of the grid. Each of the tiles also has a green or burnt orange red star in its center making the squares and the pattern easily identifiable for the viewer.

Layout

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Craft & Materiality

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Pattern Repeat

This pattern repeats with every 60° square, as shown below outlined in red. Each of these squares alternates between a red or green central star.