



# Quintessentially Qualicer

By Richard Bowman

Qualicer, the biennial World Congress on Ceramic Tile Quality, is the most perfect embodiment of a ceramic tile conference. I'm proud to have been involved prior to the first Congress in 1990 and to be the only non-Spaniard to have attended them all. Qualicer offers invited keynote presentations, round table discussions, panel debates, and selected submitted oral and paper presentations.

Australia has been well represented in the past with Colin Cass, Gary Jones, Peter Hartog and Tony Stock all having made excellent contributions. Colin's work has been recognised by his membership of the International Technical Committee. As he says "This conference is the highlight of my calendar and this shows by my only missing one Congress since 1994".

Rather than writing too much myself, I chose to allow Colin, Peter Halliday (Decor8 Tiles), Richard Earp (Earp Bros) and Carl Strautins (Coffey Environments) to contribute. Peter, who had also attended the 2004 Congress, gave a concise summary, "Qualicer is a wonderful opportunity to interact with industry professionals from around the world. The impact of globalisation within our industry is becoming increasingly apparent. It is a great conference to compare industry experiences in different countries away from the sales pressures of a tile exhibition. Holding Qualicer immediately following Cevisama enables overseas visitors to see the latest product developments in a marvellous new exhibition centre, and then to participate in discussions about developments that will affect the industry for years to come. With the introduction of a specific marketing stream within the conference, papers presented now include topics for the technician as well as the commercial specifier, architect and business person. The opportunity to hear the views of direction setters within the ceramic industry is one not to be missed".

The Qualicer papers that have been selected for publication in this edition reflect the interest in global marketing (Mutelet), and particularly what is happening within the USA (Grosser) and China (Bao). It also reflects an architectural perspective (Avellaneda) and considers innovation (Sastre).

Colin found the two presentations by Patti Fasan (Professional Attention to Tile Installations, Canada) the most interesting papers. "In

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**Patti Fasan**

'A Vital Key To Industry Growth Is Education', she proposed a system that would provide the technical qualities of tiles without confusing the customers. Patti looked at the purchase of tiles from the viewpoint of the consumer. She outlined how to present enough information for an informed choice without overloading the sale with jargon and hyperbole. She made tile selection as simple as it could be, while still

presenting real options that related to the expected performance and appearance of the finished job. In 'Marketing To The North American Design Professional - Insights From Both Sides Of The Fence', Patti interacted with an Interior Designer (Céline Pitre, Céline Interiors, Canada) on how a design office operates and what turns designers on or off at the time of selection. Patti would be a great future presenter at Tilex".

Patti has such enthusiasm and is a great motivational speaker who inspires both tile merchants and consumers. Her seminars are individually tailored to each segment of the market in line with their different targets. As Patti said "To sell top end products you need to have staff who have been very well trained. This process should start with the tile companies' representatives and be applied to

every link in the distribution chain right down to the retailer who has daily contact with the end user. This is the key to creating a sense of trust amongst users of ceramic tiles".

Colin's own paper, 'Addressing The Shortage Of Skilled Tile Fixers', was also a highlight for many of the international delegates. As Richard Earp said "Tiles are useless without layers. Colin is very active in this area. His ripper of a presentation was well attended and very well done. I loved the Australian input to the global stage".

My personal favourite presentations were by Dale Kempster (Terrazzo, Tile and Marble Association of Canada), Universal Floor Tester: An opportunity for improved ceramic tile assembly evaluation, and by Gonzalo Silva (Institute for Ceramic Technology, Spain), Proposal of a standard method for determining the durability of flooring exposed to pedestrian traffic. This paper was presented in a session that otherwise focused on modelling and optimising the polishing process for porcelain tiles. At that time, Colin, Peter and Carl all attended Donato Grosser's invited paper and a panel debate on the challenges to the

growth of the U.S. ceramic market. This conference highlight was chaired by Bart Bettiga (Executive Director, National Tile Contractors Association, USA) and featured Eric Astrachan (Executive Director, Tile Council of North America), Patti Fasan and Donato Grosser. As Colin said "I had difficulty choosing which presentations to attend because of the great depth of quality speakers available at Qualicer".

While Carl Strautins shared my interest in the technical papers that considered how processing variables affect the tile quality, methods of testing, manifestations of failure and their investigation, adhesive influences and slip resistance, he also enjoyed the opportunity to develop a greater appreciation of ceramic marketing, distribution systems, business strategies and the different types of management systems. "Whilst my reason for attending was for the technical manufacturing component of the conference, I must admit I was inspired and learned more through the marketing, managing and distribution topics. The seminar which I enjoyed the most was "The Opportunity for Innovation" by Javier Sastre Martin. This was truly a motivating experience, understanding that innovation isn't always the greatest technological breakthrough, but is usually the simple solutions (that satisfy the consumer's needs) that make you ponder, 'Why didn't I think of that'? That is why an event like this gives you an opportunity to network with experts from all corners of the globe in technical, marketing, distribution business and management. Everyone that I met was excited to talk and answer any questions I had for them. I met so many wonderful people that I can't wait to meet again at Qualicer 2008."

Apart from the excellent technical content, strong friendships were formed from the opening golf tournament, through the lavish welcoming reception, the appropriately lengthy coffee breaks and sumptuous working lunches, the wonderful dinners at the Casino Antiguo in Castellon and the El Corner restaurant at the Villareal Football Club, through to the closing luncheon at the Real Club Nautico de Castellon, where there were several tearful partings. As Colin said "Once again Qualicer was an outstanding event. The way people in the tile industry from all round the world are looked after in this part of Spain is fantastic". His personal highlights included the paella with 16 lobsters, and the private tour of the Villareal soccer stadium.

Carl was blown away by a visit to the ceramic engineering department at the Universitat Jaume I Castellon. "To see such a well equipped and highly focused department with 140 staff was hard to believe. Now I can better appreciate why the Spanish tile industry has evolved so successfully and is meeting the challenges of reduced environmental emissions. It also helps to make the amazing fully automated ten million square metre storage and distribution logistics centre at Porcelanosa a little bit more real". Carl has left CSIRO and is working as an OHS and property consultant at Coffey Environments. However, he'll be back at Qualicer 2008, even if he funds it all himself, because it will enable him to meet again with learned friends, as well as keeping up to date with all the important ceramic tiling developments.

Richard Earp found it an eye opening exercise. "You don't know what you don't know, until you learn otherwise. I frequently come to Spain and Cevisama. I didn't realise what I was missing out on by not attending Qualicer. There were some excellent panel debates, but I couldn't attend them all. It was useful to have the printed proceedings to help decide which presentations to attend, knowing that I could read the other papers later on. Enrique Forcada and the Organising Committees have to be congratulated not only on picking such a diverse range of high quality papers, but also on their fastidious attention to detail with respect to every aspect of the technical program and the social events".

"There are huge opportunities in the ceramic tile industry. The billions of Euros that have been ploughed into product development over the last decade are not always obvious when visiting a Cevisama or a



Cersaie exhibition. Understanding these advancements and being able to communicate them to the end user is one of the keys to the future. When compared with competing wall and floor finishes, the ceramic industry can offer tiles with such features and benefits that they provide a new world of opportunity to those wishing to challenge the status quo. Qualicer offers a global perspective".

Each delegate was given a copy of the 269 page book "Defects And Dysfunctions In Tiling And Paving: Diagnosis And Prevention" by Jose Luis Porcar Ramos. My only regret was that it was only available in Spanish. However, it has a profusion of illustrations and useful tables. It appears to be more comprehensive than the excellent "Ceramic floor and wall tile: Performance and Controversies" by the late Carlo Palmonari and Giorgio Timellini. It is always useful to have books and educational events such as Qualicer that help us appreciate how to avoid making costly mistakes.

Even in Olympic athletes, there is always room for improvement. Qualicer is no exception. It just gets better and better. As Patti Fasan says "When you know better, you do better". I'm eagerly anticipating the 10th World Congress on Ceramic Tile Quality in February 2008. I'm proposing to organise a panel debate on aspects of slip resistance, as well as a round table review that will highlight some of the best papers from the previous nine congresses. This will necessarily raise some unresolved issues of great importance to the tile industry that we can focus on. I'm having great difficulty in picking which of the world experts should participate, but that's a welcome luxury.

I hope that you enjoy the small sample of Qualicer papers in this issue, if not becoming better acquainted with future editions of Qualicer and the vibrant developments that are occurring in the booming Province of Castellon. **TTA**

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