

Award-winning tiler Jon Davies will soon be adding another accolade to his extensive collection – the City & Guilds Medal of Excellence for Wall and Floor Tiling.

A Royal recommendation

The first of its kind, Jon was nominated for the award by artist and educator at the Royal Academy of Arts, Dr Barbara Rae, who commented that his "dedication and constant ambition puts him among the finest craftsmen that make England the envy of Europe". Jon has also been nominated to win the City & Guilds Lions' Outstanding Achiever award, due to take place in April. Here, Jon answers Tile UK's key questions ...

What initially drew you into the tile industry?

I started tiling with my father. He is very skilled and his knowledge in construction is amazing. In the beginning, what fascinated was the finish and the accuracy of the work that he and his workers were producing on site.

When I started fixing, I seemed to pick it up fairly quickly and it wasn't long before neighbours were asking me to tile in their homes. I also wanted to be my own boss, and fixing was a vocation which would allow me that freedom.

As an award-winning tiler, what is your opinion on tile training courses – and do they provide the right level of training?

I feel that many training companies provide a basic knowledge of tiling. There are many different aspects to tiling each of which takes time to learn and understand, applying them correctly also takes time.

I don't feel you can become a competent tiler until you have a full understanding of substrates, construction and the types of tiles and materials required for a particular application.

I am certainly for updating skills and knowledge, and this should apply to any vocation. The BAL workshops certainly help with on-going product updates and material application. Many of these sessions are held for free in tile outlets, so they should be taken advantage of.

You've received many accolades for the quality of your work, but what is your ultimate goal?

I would like to get more involved with heritage restoration and teaching. Most of my family are teachers, so it would be a natural progression. My eldest son is my apprentice, hopefully my knowledge is already being passed on.

What is your proudest achievement to date?

Winning two Medals of Excellence – one in advanced computer engineering and the other in wall and floor tiling. Also, beating Turner prizewinner Martin Creed for Best Use of a Tile in a Small Construction at The Tile Association awards was an achievement, and being Tiler of the Year gives you credibility.

What advice would you give young people considering a career as a fixer?

Ensure you find a company that is willing to let you complete a full apprenticeship. Skilled workers are becoming harder to come by, soon a time-served tiler will be worth his or her weight in gold!

Do you have any idols in the tile industry, and if so who, and why?

One guy that stands out for me in the tile industry



is Michael Marsoun. He was a tiling contractor in Hawaii who went into natural stone restoration. His book, *Professional Stone Restoration Secrets*, is a revelation. His tried and tested methods are a must-read for anyone involved with natural stone.

Tiles, by their nature, are very interlinked with design disciplines. Do you have any interest in design and does this manifest itself in your fixing?

I like to use large profile tiles as much as I can when designing wetrooms and bathrooms. I prefer to cut the amount of grout lines down, giving the room a cleaner look and makes it far easier to maintain.

When tiling swimming pools, I much prefer to go down the mosaic route. It can often be tedious, especially when you have thousands of intricate cuts, and the epoxy grouting can also be a lot of hard work, but the end results are stunning.

What do you think is wrong with the tile industry, and how could it be remedied?

One major problem I have found is the standard of knowledge in tile outlets. Customers seem to be misled and confused by information being given out. I think there needs to be a lot more training given to the retail side of the tiling industry.

I also think the CSCS scheme has helped the fixing sector. The premise of 'you are not allowed on site unless you're qualified within your field'

can only be good for our side of the industry. The Government should also give more incentives to companies for taking on apprentices.

How can the industry make itself more attractive to young people considering their future careers?

It needs to be explained that once training is completed, a qualified tiler can earn a very reasonable wage. You also get to work in a variety of places – so one day you could be tiling a splashback, and the next a swimming pool.

It is this variety I enjoy – one day is rarely the same as the next. You also have the opportunity of being an employee or self-employed, with the potential of getting into the contract side of tiling and management.

What qualities make an award-winning fixer?

Presentation of your work is all important. I also think you need to be resourceful and able to overcome problems quickly and efficiently. Listening carefully to advice is another, and no matter what age you are, you are still on a learning curve.

Jon's Exeter-based company, JD Tiling, undertakes both commercial and domestic tiling projects. Jon has also incorporated natural stone restoration into his company's offering, and aims to expand in this area of his business in the future.

T 01392 461833

E jdtiling@btinternet.com

W jd-tiling.co.uk