



Chanel Carrizosa



Angie Halford,  
photo credit  
Cannon Evans

## Passion and ability – not gender – make a stellar tile contractor

By Lesley Goddin

Tile contracting has expanded over the years to include more and more women who are able to infuse their sense of artistry, organization, precision, creativity, experience, style, color, fashion, passion, and hard work into a time-honored trade. To be sure, there are women present in all levels of our industry, but those who are getting in the trenches with their male counterparts and getting their hands dirty

*“Not every woman can do this kind of work, and not every man can either. It’s about passion, ability, talent, determination. None of those things relate to anatomy. All I know is that I love working in the tile industry and this is where I belong!”*  
– Angie Halford

making beautiful floor and wall coverings are a special breed.

Angie Halford of Unique Mosaics, LLC, West Valley City Utah ([www.facebook.com/uniquemosaics-byangie](http://www.facebook.com/uniquemosaics-byangie)), and Chanel Carrizosa of Icon Tile & Design, Kirkland, Wash. ([www.icontileanddesign.com](http://www.icontileanddesign.com)), are two of this special breed. Let’s learn more about how they came to pursue tile installation as a career.

## Angie Halford

Halford moved from her home state of North Carolina to Utah this year to begin her business of creating custom sheet mosaics “that are simpler to install without having to fuss or fuss at the material,” she said. Her custom sheets mean fewer adjustments and less of a chance of sheet lines.

“Everything I make is custom (unique) for my clients, each job being completely different from the last,” Halford said. “In a nutshell, I take an AutoCAD design, a designer/ architect drawing, or my own design and make sheet mosaics or inlays to the specified size. Being creative in my work is one of the things I love about my job, and each job poses its own exciting challenges.”

She credits her grandmother (Maw-Maw) with igniting a love of pattern that translated into a career in tile and mosaic, when she brought home small felt circles from the hosiery mill where she worked for little Angie to play with. “I remember placing them in certain patterns and making pictures with them,” Halford said. This led to an obsession with jigsaw puzzles and making art out of hundreds of tiny pieces, taking art classes from elementary through high school and entering “every art contest I found out about,” she said. She graduated college with a degree in advertising and graphic design, which evolved into a creative job in the tile industry, spurred by a home-



*Halford creates custom sheet mosaics “that are simpler to install without having to fuss or fuss at the material,” she said. Her custom sheets mean fewer adjustments and less of a chance of sheet lines.*



*Education is important to Angie Halford. Here she is with NTCA trainer/presenter Robb Roderick at the Salt Lake City NTCA workshop, sponsored by Marazzi USA and held at Rod Katwyk’s new shop.*



*Unique Mosaics winner Angie Halford wins a Global Tile Posse contest to show “ARDEX pride,” cooked up by Jason McDaniel. Entries had to use tile and stone and be done entirely by hand, no waterjet or CNC, and incorporate ARDEX in some way. Halford invested over 150 hours into her 26” x 26” mixed media self-portrait entry, installed with ARDEX FG-C Unsanded Grout in Black Licorice.*

school art project she worked on with her daughter. “After completing the project, I completely fell in love with mosaics and tile,” she said.

She dove into education hard, learning from professionals in online tile and mosaic forums, devouring books on the subjects and continuing to make mosaics. After a stint as a flooring helper at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, she became an installer of all types of flooring for two years. Over time her business evolved to full-time designing, building custom mosaic sheets and inserts for clients and partners.

### **Chanel Carrizosa**

For Chanel Carrizosa (see more about her business, with her husband Jamen, in the August 2017 *TileLetter*), a passion for fashion eventually became a thriving career in the tile business although she initially planned to work in makeup and fashion. At 17, “Nordstrom’s told me I needed theatrical makeup experience and would pay half of what I earned with my dad,” she said. She chose the family tile busi-



*Chanel Carrizosa of Icon Tile and Design conceives of her tile projects as “fashion you can live in.”*

ness, Alexander Marble & Tile in Port Orchard, Wash., learning from her dad, her mom – who also installed tile – and her uncle. When she was 18, she started installing tile on a big custom job, and “can do it all” now.

“I’m an industrious, artistic type of person – I have a natural eye for design,” she said, adding that having a “woman’s eye” gives her an advantage in discerning the best “finish” in the house and the things you will be seeing the most. I feel my projects come to life, and feel it is fashion that you get to live in.”

Though in the ‘90s, her family did not attend shows or pursue educational opportunities, for the



*Style, a clean install, and technical excellence are marks of an Icon Tile and Design project.*



*There’s a lot of support in the industry for female tile setters, including connections Carrizosa has made with NTCA members, like Erin Albrecht (r.) of J&R Tile in San Antonio.*

last three years her husband Jamen has jumped into the educational component with both feet, bringing new methods to their business and taking their company to a whole new level. “We thought we were doing it right,” Carrizosa said. “We’ve learned some things in last three to five years, and it opened our eyes; we have taken to new

methods and apply them to new jobs. We do it right to make things last.” This includes many manufacturer certification classes. “This year, I hope to take the CTI.”

In addition, her aptitude in organization translates into staying organized and keeping the jobsite clean and neat. “When I install I am very precise – perfectly, clean, level... When we work on remodel jobs – we end with customers loving us for that cleanliness.”

### Challenges along the way

Both Halford and Carrizosa have been well received by peers in the industry, though both have run into situations where they’ve been challenged to “prove themselves,” their knowledge and their skills “to earn respect,” Halford said, adding, “I expect men in the industry have to

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*Chanel Carrizosa started working with tile in her dad’s business when she was 17. After a few years, she could “do it all,” from design to a precise installation, and all the steps in between.*

prove themselves as well.

“That said, I have had situations of being placed under more of a microscope and also have experienced double standards,” she added. “If sexist or degrading comments are said – whether intentional or not – I have learned to speak up and handle it. Sometimes it takes one person’s perspective to show another what theirs looks like.

“I am not a woman on a mission to set tile with a point to prove,” she added. “I do it because I love it and it helps to support my family... I don’t look at men or women installers and say ‘Wow, I can’t believe he/she knows how to use a wet saw!’ But I have experienced this sort of attention. It’s not something you need special anatomy to do, so what’s the big deal really?”

Carrizosa added, “Once [men] see what I can do – my skill set, and once I start talking the lingo with some of the guys on the jobsite – they are ready to work with me.”

In fact, the industry has provided a lot of support, allowing for the development of friendships and partnerships. Halford credits Facebook groups like Tile Geeks, Global Tile Posse, Tile Love 2.0, and mosaic groups with providing education and support, as well as NTCA and its workshops, Coverings – and family and friends too.

Carrizosa said longstanding relationships with builders and working with their subs and superintendents have provided stability. She has

met and worked with Bart Bettiga and Jim Olson of NTCA and both have been supportive and helpful. Friendships made through NTCA also have bolstered Carrizosa’s career – including Erin Albrecht of J&R Tile in San Antonio, who reached out to her – as well as the support of Angie Halford herself.

“It’s amazing meeting other women who do what I do,” she said – “meeting them in person and seeing them at the show. I didn’t know that there were many other women who did what I did.

“There’s a lot of support out there,” she said. “We’ve only been on Tile Geeks for three years – women could use that to get into the mix of it all. People are very friendly. When I was first starting out, this kind of thing didn’t exist, but [online groups] allow you to ask questions and get support. For instance, William White at ARDEX – I can call him and it’s like talking to a friend.”

She also credits her husband Jamen with his support and encouragement for her to challenge her shyness and put herself more in the public eye. It’s worked! She was named one of the Coverings Rock Stars this past spring at the show – a celebration of up-and-coming young leaders in the industry. “I was totally shocked that I was nominated but it was amazing,” she said.

### **Women encouraging women**

Both contractors recommend the profession for other women.

Carrizosa said she'd like to see more women in the field and encourages those who might be reticent to jump in, to focus on the support and not perceived obstacles.

She advises building up as much knowledge as possible. "If you have the knowledge and stand up for yourself if needed, [others] would totally respect you and see you know what you are doing and you belong here and can do this," she said. "Women can do what men can do in the tile world as well or even better sometimes. This can be a growing community for women."

She also wouldn't mind seeing a line of tools that are fun for women. "Pink ear protection, random stuff in the tool world....pink tools," she mused.



*Nothing wrong with some girl power on a project – pink tools make Chanel smile.*

For Halford, "The novelty of being a woman installer wears off after a while," she said. "When all the compliments, jokes, comments are spoken, when all the grout dust settles, one of the most important things that matters is if you are good at your job and can do the work. Constantly learn and stay up to date with new techniques, tools, and education in the field. Figure out what works and what doesn't. Live life and make room for non-tile related activities!"

One of the things Halford has valued is working on fantastic projects with those she admires: Rod Katwyk in Utah; partnering with J&R Tile in San Antonio for a 5,500-sq.-ft. mural for that city's Riverwalk, and historic houses and the Capitol Building in Austin.

"I am thankful to God, and for all the events, the struggles, the education, my parents, my family and friends – and the little felt circles my Maw-Maw let me play with when I was a child," she said. "All of it matters, and I am humbled to be in this industry among such amazing people, and learning every day."

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