

TYJESKI TILE CO.

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

NEWSLETTER, SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2018

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, September 19, 6-7:30pm

*Book Talk at Milwaukee Public Library's Tippecanoe branch.
3912 South Howell Avenue*

Lecture will present striking, artistic examples of architectural terra cotta as seen in Milwaukee County. For those who have attended recent book talks, this one will be new. Also, it's a free event!

Saturday, September 22, 12pm-7pm

Fifth Street Fest, Artist Tent Sale

Tiles and small wall-hangable works will be available for purchase in the Var Gallery Tent at W Pierce & S 5th Street. [Click here for 5th Street Fest details.](#)

Sunday, September 23, 10am-11am

Walking Tour, Doors Open MKE, \$10

Begins inside Plankinton Arcade Building next to TJ MAXX. Tour will use major buildings in Westtown to describe the growth of the architectural terra-cotta trade. Event is a part of Historic Milwaukee Inc.'s: Doors Open. Tour is \$10. [Sign up here!](#)

RECENT PRESS

South Milwaukee's mayor, Erik Brooks, posted an article on his blog about the upcoming book on the Continental Faience and Tile Company. [Click here to read article.](#)

BLOG POSTS

The Sixth Street Bridge in Racine, Wisconsin, is a historic landmark of exceptional, artistic quality. Due to lack of funding, the bridge was unable to be maintained as necessary and now is in poor condition. Since 2015 discussion on how to rebuild the bridge and restore the architectural terra cotta and tile has concerned the community. [Click here for more information and photographs.](#)

STUDIO SNAPSHOT



View inside of a kiln while loading tiles and pieces for a tympanum.

FEATURED BUILDING



The Contour Apartments on Prospect Avenue is currently under-construction. It features architectural terra cotta from Germany. Check blog at end of Sept. for upcoming article.



TILE & TERRA COTTA NEWS: CONTEMPORARY TERRA COTTA: THE CONTOUR, MILWAUKEE'S NEW CLAY SPECTACLE

On Third Street and West Wisconsin Avenue in 1959 was the "Robinson Store" building. On its small store-building façade was architectural terra cotta manufactured by the American Terra Cotta and Ceramic Company (from Crystal Lake, Illinois). At this time architectural terra cotta was not experiencing the level of production it had in the 1920s, but the remaining companies were managing their business - barely. As for Milwaukee, this would be the last installation of such building material.

Since then, I have not been able to find any new installations. This excludes preservation work such as the installation of new terra cotta by Gladding McBean on the City Hall (finished in December 2014) and others.

However, now almost 60 years later, a new apartment building is being constructed with a product that works just like historic architectural terra cotta. Known as The Contour, it is located on the East Side of Milwaukee at 2214 North Prospect Avenue. The architects are Rinka Chung

Architecture, whose offices are downtown on Mason and Milwaukee Streets. Let's give them an applause!

The terra-cotta product is unlike anything that is seen with historical architectural terra cotta. Traditionally units can be anywhere from four inches to over a foot deep. This new product is different. It is thin, longer, and lighter. It is known as "NeaCera terra-cotta cladding solutions." It is manufactured in Germany, but distributed by Avenere Cladding from Baltimore, Maryland. The architects had a preference for hiring as local as possible, but this product supported both their design needs and budget.

As described on their [website](#), NeaCera is a "solid wall terra-cotta rainscreen." They also note that they take the lead in the world for that product. The specific item Rinka Chung Architecture uses is a "flat standard panel." This panel is unlike traditional terra-cotta units or ashlar terra cotta that have a cellular, hollow design. These five-foot panels are solid and thin. All the while, they carry a low

weight at under 50 pounds per panel, or about 7.5 pounds per square foot. This must be extremely great for builders, as handling these units is much less cumbersome than units made decades ago. The surface of the panels are "Gloss Black" and is the first time this finish has been used in North America. That is the first time for this NeaCera product. Amazingly, the black-glazed terra cotta is a motif that has strong heritage here, especially in the East Side. Local and celebrated architect Herbert Tullgren was no stranger to this material and its creative potential.

Tullgren practiced under the name Martin Tullgren & Sons. It was his father's company. He worked alongside with his brother, Minard. Unfortunately his brother passed in 1928. He continued practicing architecture and designed many buildings with black-glazed terra cotta. These surfaces were opaque, semi gloss, and smooth. They can be found on the Viking Apartments (1931), the Milwaukee-Western Fuel Company Office Building (1933), the Hathaway Tower (1931), and the Armory Courts Building (1931). While the Armory Courts Building is in Shorewood, the other three are only blocks from the Contour.

Black-glazed terra cotta also commonly appeared at this time, and can be found on other buildings, including the Grand Warner Theater (1930), the Park Lane Apartments (1930), and the Annason Apartments (1930).

With this in mind, it is as if the architects from Rinka Chung are picking up where we left off when terra cotta was last common in Milwaukee's architecture. The design of the building is contemporary, and the use of the terra cotta is pretty utilitarian. Their choices of surface, all the while, make it relevant to the city and its beautiful history.

Now... if Rinka Chung designs an apartment building terra-cotta panels of wolves, dragons, or eagles... I may lose myself! However, seriously, this is an amazing event for the practice of architectural terra cotta in Milwaukee. Thank you Rinka Chung Architecture!

(ENDNOTE - I'd like to mention that Rinka Chung has used this terra-cotta cladding in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, however, with a "white" finish. Stay tuned for future posts!)

