

saltillo tiles

Q. Four years ago I had a saltillo floor installed in my kitchen. The tiles were not presealed. The kitchen design company and I sought advice from the tile company that supplied them as to how to install and seal them. Both are highly regarded companies but they had little to no experience with this type of floor. I believe they tried to remove the excess grout with muriatic acid. Then the tile company told the installer, to achieve the desired finish they needed to apply polyurethane. Once they did that they realized they had made a mistake and we decided to call in a professional with a little experience with saltillo. He tried to strip everything off and applied a few coats of Mira shine (I believe it is a water based sealer). Now, the floors are flaking in spots and there are quite a few stains that seem to have penetrated the sealer. Also, I am seeing some pitting and lime pops, some of which are quite large and deep. Is there anything that can be done to save my floor? Is it part of the imperfect beauty of saltillo? Does anyone ever have to tear their old floors out? Any advice and recommendations for products would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

A.

You've encountered a *very common but unfortunate situation* with Saltillo tile, and I can tell you as an expert in stone and tile restoration — your floor *can very likely be saved*, but it's going to require some careful, professional-level steps. Let's break it down.

? Understanding Saltillo's Nature

Saltillo is a handmade, highly porous terracotta tile. It's known for its rustic charm — but that charm comes with high maintenance needs and some inherent imperfections like pitting and lime pops. These are natural and somewhat expected, *but the flaking and deep staining are symptoms of*

improper sealing and chemical damage, not the intended "imperfect beauty."

? What Went Wrong

Let's identify the key missteps:

1. Using Muriatic Acid:

This is far too harsh for Saltillo and can **permanently damage the tile**, breaking down the surface layer and even contributing to pitting or soft spots. Acid eats away at the clay's surface, which is already fragile.

2. Applying Polyurethane:

Polyurethane (especially oil-based) is *not breathable* and can trap moisture, leading to flaking, whitening, and even encouraging tile degradation.

3. Stripping and Resealing with Mira Shine (water-based sealer):

Mira Shine is a *topical water-based finish*, which may work initially but will fail over time if applied over old, incompatible sealers or residues that weren't fully removed. It also doesn't protect against oil-based stains very well.

? What You're Seeing Now

- **Flaking:** Likely from sealer delamination — due to poor bonding, moisture entrapment, or incompatible layers.
- **Stains:** The water-based sealer wasn't sufficient to protect against spills and may have worn through in areas.
- **Pitting and Lime Pops:** These are *natural features* of Saltillo, but muriatic acid and moisture issues can make them worse.

? Can It Be Saved?

Yes — but it needs to be done right this time.

Step 1: Professional Stripping

You'll need to **fully strip off** all existing sealers — polyurethane and water-based — using a *solvent-based stripper* designed for Saltillo. This is labor-intensive and often requires several passes.

Recommended product:

- **Aqua Mix Sealer & Coating Remover**
- **Prosoco Fast Acting Stripper**

⚠️ This is NOT a DIY project unless you're experienced. You'll need good ventilation, proper safety gear, and maybe even mechanical agitation with a floor buffer and stripping pads.

Step 2: Deep Cleaning

Once stripped, clean thoroughly using an *alkaline tile cleaner* to remove any remaining residues or grime.

Example:

- **STAIN-PROOF Alkaline Cleaner**
- **Aqua Mix Heavy-Duty Tile & Grout Cleaner**

Step 3: Allow Tile to Dry

Let the floor dry **completely** — **48–72 hours** — especially if it's humid or the tile is deeply saturated.

Step 4: Re-seal with the Right Product

You have two directions depending on your aesthetic preference:

Option 1: Natural Finish with Penetrating Sealer

If you prefer a natural look and want breathability, use a **penetrating sealer** like:

- **STAIN-PROOF Original by Dry-Treat**
- **Aqua Mix Enrich 'N Seal** (enhancing look + protection)

These protect from stains without forming a film — better long-term performance.

Option 2: Glossy or Traditional Mexican Finish

If you want that classic Saltillo sheen, you can apply:

- **A high-quality water-based acrylic finish** (like Glaze 'N Seal's Saltillo Tile Sealer) *over a penetrating sealer*

This combo gives you protection *and* shine but requires occasional reapplication.

? Final Note: Do Saltillo Floors Ever Get Replaced?

Yes — but only when they've been severely damaged, are crumbling, or have been irreparably botched with things like epoxy, paint, or extreme acid damage. Based on your description, **your floor is restorable** with the right approach and patience.

? Summary of Recommendations:

- Professionally strip old sealers
- Deep clean and fully dry
- Reseal with breathable, compatible products
- Accept that minor imperfections (pits, color variation) are part of Saltillo's charm
- Avoid acids and non-breathable coatings going forward

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