

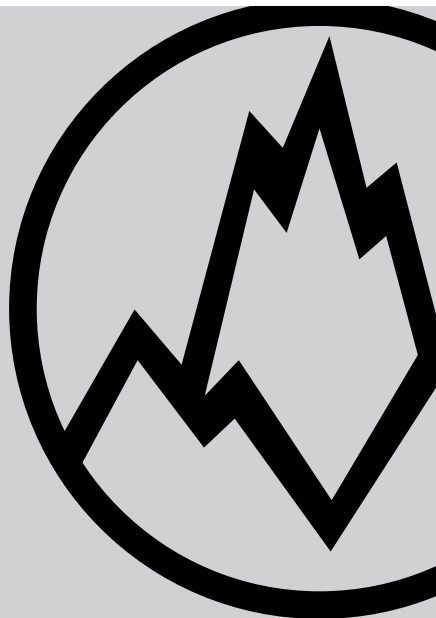
Natural Stone



SELECTION GUIDE

BEAUTIFY YOUR HOME WITH NATURAL STONE

Your comprehensive guide to selecting natural stone.



HILL  TOP[®]
Surfaces

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Nature's Legacy in every slab



Over 200 Million Years Old: Many natural stones used in buildings and countertops today began forming during the **Jurassic** period - older than dinosaurs!



From All Corners of the Earth: Stones like marble come from **Italy**, granite from **Brazil**, slate from **India**, and limestone from **Canada**.



Each Piece is Unique: No two slabs are identical. The veining, color, and pattern in natural stone are formed by minerals and pressure **deep within the earth**.



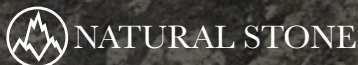
Granite Was Once Molten: Granite is an igneous rock, which means it was formed from **cooled magma** beneath Earth's surface.



A Living Material: Natural stone can subtly change over time - developing a "patina" that **adds character**.

"When you choose natural stone, you're not just decorating - you're preserving a piece of Earth's history."





Your Best Choice for Lasting Beauty

Natural stone has been the premium building material of choice since the beginning of time.

Quarried from rock beds formed over millions of years, natural stone used in residential and commercial settings comes from all parts of the world, including Italy, Spain, the U.S., Brazil, Canada, China, France, Israel, Greece, India, Mexico, Germany, Taiwan, and Turkey.

Marble and granite, two of the most popular stones among homeowners, are quarried in the form of huge blocks, some weighing up to 35 tons. These blocks are cut into slabs generally 3/4" or 1 1/2" thick and the faces polished to the specified finish. The slabs are then carefully crated and shipped to fabricators worldwide who process them into the final product.

Whether you're building a new home or remodeling, natural stone offers you unparalleled beauty, permanence, and uniqueness and adds true value to your home.

Because stone is a natural, not manufactured, product, no two pieces are exactly alike, which means each finished countertop, wall, floor, mantle, or sill is distinctive and matchless.



The Benefits of Natural Stone



Classic Beauty

Durability

Easy Maintenance

Superior Quality

Affordability

Increased Home Value



And, unlike synthetic imitations, natural stone can be three-dimensional and used as columns, statuary, balustrades, doorjambs, and even furniture pieces. When used in exterior applications, natural stone has also proven superior to manufactured or engineered stones in withstanding the effects of nature.

This guide has been developed to help you make an educated selection from among the many varieties of natural stone available. You'll also find assistance on choosing a qualified stone contractor/fabricator to design and/or install your natural stone project.



How to Choose the Right Stone for Your Home

You have many options when it comes to beautiful, long-lasting natural stone for your home's interior and exterior: Slate, granite, marble, quartz-based stone, soapstone, and limestone, just to name a few. Choosing a natural stone for your home is a very personal decision, much like selecting wallpaper or artwork. While there are scores of natural stones to consider, some are better suited than others to particular uses in and around the home. This guide, along with your architect and stone fabricator, can help you explore your options and offer guidance on the right stone for your home project.

Factors to Consider in Selecting a Natural Stone:

Color

Natural stones are available in a beautiful spectrum of colors. Colors in granite and marble, for instance, can range from soft beiges and pinks and classic black-and-whites to rich corals, greens, and multi-colors. Marble traditionally features swirls and "veins" of colors, while granite has a flecked or pebbled appearance.

Unlike the repetitive uniformity of materials produced by machine or assembly line, natural stone's varied appearance has wonderful character and creates a one-of-a-kind effect everywhere it is used.

Finish

Natural stone can be polished, honed, or flamed for a distinctive appearance:

A polished finish has a glossy surface that reflects light and emphasizes the color and marking of the stone. This finish is typically used on walls, furniture tops, and floor tiles.

A honed finish is a satin-smooth surface with relatively little light reflection. It is generally preferred for floors, stair treads, thresholds, and other areas where heavy traffic will wear off a polished finish.

A flamed finish is a rough-textured surface used frequently on granite floor tiles.

Usage

The harder the stone, the more it resists abrasion. One measure of natural stone's strength is the Measurement of Hardness (MOH) rating: 1 the softest and 10 the hardest. On the MOH scale, most marbles rate "3" and quartz-based granites rate "7." Using a softer stone simply requires the homeowner to use gentler cleansers and more frequent dusting to prevent scratching.

Marble

Ideal for foyers, bathrooms, floors, and hearths

Marble is found in the mountainous regions of many countries across the world. Because of its beauty and elegance, marble is a popular choice for countertops, floors, foyers, fireplace facings and hearths, walls, and windowsills.

Marble adds a sophisticated element to your home, and its wonderful appearance, superior engineering characteristics, and ease of maintenance make it a natural choice for floors, wall coverings, table tops, and bathroom walls, floors, vanity tops, tub decks, and showers.

Marble should be cared for as you would a fine wood finish. Using coasters on table tops and cleaning up spills immediately will preserve marble's natural beauty.

Another option for marble-loving homeowners is using serpentine for kitchen counters. Sometimes called the “green” marble, serpentine is not a true marble but offers a marble-like look. And, because it is magnesium-silicate based, it is not sensitive to citric acid and other kitchen spills.

Granite

An excellent choice for kitchen countertops, floors, and other heavily used surfaces

Granite, quarried from the mountains of Italy, the U.S., India, and dozens of other countries, is one of the most popular natural stones on the market.

Available in a striking array of colors, granite’s durability and longevity make it ideal for kitchen countertops and other heavily used surfaces, including table tops and floors.

While some synthetic surfaces scratch easily and melt under hot cookware, granite resists heat. Granite is also one of the most bacteria-resistant kitchen surfaces, and it is not affected by citric acid, coffee, tea, alcohol, or wine. It is also nearly impossible to scratch, and with proper cleaning, will not stain under normal use (ask your professional contractor/fabricator about sealants available to further improve resistance to staining).

A leading consumer magazine recently compared granite with engineered



stone, ceramic tile, laminate, butcher block, and other manufactured surfaces. Granite received the highest overall performance rating as a kitchen countertop material.

Because of its exceptional strength, granite is well suited for exterior applications such as cladding, paving, and curbing.

Travertine, Limestone, Soapstone, Sandstone & Slate

Beautiful enhancements for your home, inside and out

Travertine, limestone, soapstone, sandstone, and slate are other examples of natural stone frequently used in residential applications.



Travertine is a type of limestone and one of the most popular natural stones for interior and exterior wall cladding, interior and exterior paving, statuary, and curbing.

Limestone is widely used as a building stone because it is readily available and easy to

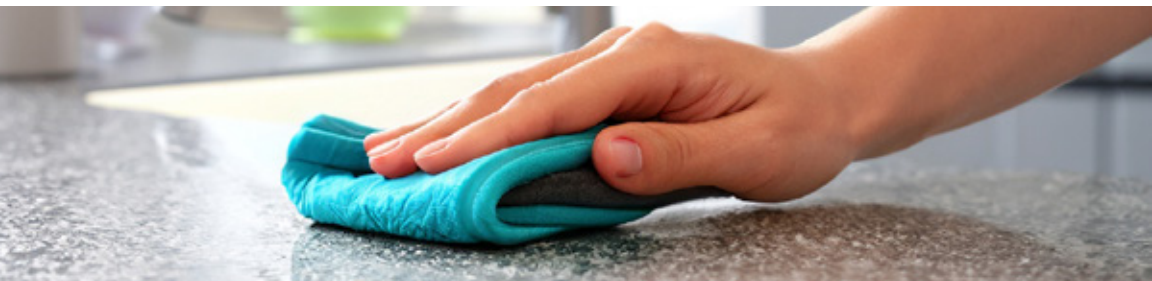
handle. Popular applications include countertops, flooring, interior and exterior wall cladding, and exterior paving.

Soapstone is growing in popularity. Popular uses include kitchen countertops, bathroom vanities, fireplace surrounds, stoves and stair treads.

Care and maintenance is easy, but different than other stone types. Contact your stone supplier for instructions.

Sandstone is frequently used for fireplace facings, chimneys, garden walls, patio benches, and at poolside.

Slate is a popular flooring material, sandstone and slate are often used for exterior paving or pavers. Other slate applications include kitchen countertops, fireplace facings, tabletops, and roofing.



Caring for your Natural Stone

You'll find caring for your natural stone is easy. Warm water, mild dishwashing liquid, and a soft, clean cloth are generally all that's needed to maintain most natural stone surfaces. Should a stain occur, it can usually be removed using a poultice available from your stone supplier.

More tips for preserving your natural stone's beauty:



- ◆ **Dust mop natural stone floors frequently and protect floor surfaces with non-slip mats or area rugs.**
- ◆ **Blot up spills immediately.**
- ◆ **Protect countertop surfaces with coasters, trivets, or placemats.**
- ◆ **Don't use vinegar, lemon juice, or other cleaners containing acids on marble or limestone.**
- ◆ **Don't use abrasive cleaners on polished natural stone surfaces.**

Additional information on caring for natural stone surfaces and stain removal can be found on the website, or in the Care & Cleaning for Natural Stone Surfaces brochure.

How to Select a Natural Stone Contractor/Fabricator

1. Ask family, friends, and neighbors for referrals and call local stone/tile suppliers for recommendations.
2. After you have identified several contractor/fabricators, schedule appointments for estimates. Most will be free but confirm in advance.
3. During your estimate, describe the “look” you’d like to achieve and ask questions.
4. Evaluate your quotes, request references, and check them. Ask to see examples of other projects recently completed by the contractor/fabricator.
5. Request proof of liability and workers’ compensation insurance.
6. Select a contractor/fabricator you believe is skilled and trustworthy, and with whom you feel comfortable. Make sure everything you and your contractor/fabricator agree to is included in your contract. Don’t sign anything until you understand and agree with all the terms.
7. Plan your project carefully, then keep the lines of communication open with your contractor/fabricator throughout the project. Keep a job file of all important documentation.
8. Ask your contractor/fabricator to estimate a time frame for the job and plan accordingly.
9. Schedule periodic inspections with your contractor/fabricator to achieve the end result you desire.



Questions and Answers

Q: We're remodeling our kitchen and installing new countertops. Synthetic countertops cost slightly less than granite, but how do they compare in the long run?

A: As the saying goes, imitation is the greatest form of flattery. Countertops made from acrylic and other manufactured materials may have the look of granite, but the similarities end there. For resistance to bacteria, heat, scratches, stains, and overall performance, granite is unsurpassed. Some marbles with honed or matte finishes also make high-quality kitchen countertops.



Q: We're building a new home and would love to put a marble floor in our foyer, but we're concerned about the heavy foot traffic it will receive. Any suggestions?

A: Marble has been used as a flooring material for more than 6,000 years and continues to be a popular choice for bringing beauty to entry foyers and other areas of the home. You need only take some simple precautions to protect your investment. Use a non-slip mat outside the foyer entrance and a carpet or area rug inside to capture the abrasive grit and dirt tracked in from outdoors. Dust mop your marble floor frequently to remove dirt and dust particles that can scratch the surface. Use warm water and a small amount of mild detergent to wash. Then rinse and dry thoroughly.

Q: Is there any truth to the rumor that granite emits dangerous levels of radon gas?

A: No, this is completely unfounded. Not a single instance of radon has been reported to the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. Nevertheless, the Marble Institute of America consulted several of the nation's leading in geology and geochemistry scientists to evaluate the issue, and spoke with the major granite quarriers and producers in the U.S. Research has shown that actual levels of radon gas emissions from granites are insignificant and generally represent no threat to the health and well-being of people who live or work in buildings with granite countertops, floor or wall tiles, or any other granite furnishings.

Q: After a recent party, we discovered a dark red stain, possibly red wine, on our sandstone hearth. What can we do to remove the stain?

A: Because all natural stone is porous, it tends to absorb stains. But it is this same porosity that gives homeowners an edge in stain removal—you simply reverse the process by applying a chemical poultice, which re-absorbs the spill. The choice of poultice materials will vary depending on the type of stone and the spill. When thoroughly dry, the poultice is removed, as is the stain. Consult a stone restoration expert or your stone supplier for more information.



Myths Dispellled

Here are the facts about natural stone:

- Granite ranked #1 in cleanability when compared to six other countertop surfaces including stainless steel. (Based on a 1999 study by the Hospitality Institute of Technology and Management.)
- Natural stone is competitively priced with quartz surface products and often priced lower.
- Marble and Granite have the same level of cleanability as engineered stone. (Based on a 2006 study by the Hospitality Institute of Technology and Management.)
- Natural stone is low maintenance often only requiring warm water, mild dishwashing liquid and a soft cloth to maintain its beauty.



- Granite countertops have never been known to emit dangerous levels of radon gas. Environmental Health and Engineering (EHE) recently conducted one of the largest studies of granite countertops, in which no stone was identified as a health risk when used as a countertop surface. EHE also conducted a global review of published studies, and these data show that radon emissions from granite countertops pose no health threat. For more information on these studies, go to www.marble-institute.com and click the "Radon Information" tab.
- Many varieties of natural stone do not need to be sealed, although many are for customer peace of mind.
- Stone is a product of nature and has its own unique qualities that distinguish it from quartz surface materials. The wonderful character that is offered by vein patterns, color variations, and other design characteristics of stone should be taken into consideration when selecting the perfect stone for your project. Discuss these characteristics with your natural stone supplier.



Beautify your home
with Natural Stone!

About Our Natural Stone Selection Guide

At Hilltop Surfaces, we are passionate about helping you select the right stone for your home or project. This guide is adapted from *Beautify Your Home with Natural Stone*, issued by the Natural Stone Institute (NSI), ensuring you receive trusted, industry-leading advice. Explore more about selecting natural stone at: www.naturalstoneinstitute.org or www.hilltopsurfaces.com/faq.



Natural Stones are an enduring symbol of **strength, beauty, and timelessness.** With just a little care, your surfaces will last a **lifetime and beyond.**

Questions? Visit our FAQ:

hilltops-surfaces.com/faq

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