



BY LIS KING

He'd have to cuddle with a chocolate lab instead of a barking dinosaur, but other than that Fred Flintstone would have loved to live in the 21st century. That's because here and now, stone is king, throughout the house and all around the yard.

Carol Creter, president of Curley Stone of Randolph, feels there are many reasons for stone's ever-growing popularity.

"First of all, stone is natural and it's permanent," she says. "Now that everybody wants to be 'green,' those are important attributes. Stone is also beautiful and versatile. There's stone for gorgeous interior surfaces, from floors and countertops to shower walls and fireplaces, and then there's stone for patios, walkways, retaining walls, mulches and much more for great gardens. Since we specialize in stone for exterior uses, homeowners even buy boulders from us. We get nice mossy ones from western New Jersey, and once in a while I see a boulder with a fossilized

fern imprint. I confess I put those aside for myself. They're so special."

Landscape designer and contractor Drew Madlinger of Branchburg points to the fact that even pre-cast concrete pavers now replicate the classic look of stone. Known for his creative use of stone in his projects, he nevertheless veers toward such pavers for driveways and walkways.

"Using de-icer on almost all natural stone is a no-no," he explains, "but on concrete pavers it's fine. So you get the best from two categories: the good looks of natural stone and the strength of natural stone and the strength of concrete."

STONE TYPES

Scientifically there are hundreds of stone-type identifications, but when classified for use as building and landscaping materials, only ten groups are acknowledged. The Marble Institute, a trade association for

Above, restoration work on on old farmhouse including a fireplace, courtesy of John Cortese Masons

stone fabricators and designers, lists these as granite, limestone, marble, onyx, quartzite, sandstone, serpentine, slate, soapstone and travertine.

This means some rocks wind up in the wrong groups, so don't be surprised if a geologist friend informs you that your new Paradisio granite bar top and your Absolute Black kitchen counters are actually gneiss and gabbro, respectively. Scientifically, he's correct. However, the key is performance, says the Institute. So a rock that performs like granite gets listed that way.

Is there such a thing as "a bad stone?" Spyro Katsianis of Aphrodite Marble & Granite in Forked River says no. "But, of course, you've got to choose the right type for the project you have in mind," he warns. "Homeowners' tastes differ. Some natural stones wear over time, and some people find this adds to their charm. Other people want their stone surface to stay pristine and 'as new.' There are stone types to suit either taste, but research is definitely in order."

GRANITE REMAINS KING

At Aphrodite, which specializes in custom stonework for kitchens, baths and fireplaces, granite's popularity keeps rising, and Katsianis isn't surprised. "It comes in a striking array of colors," he says, "and its durability and longevity make it ideal for kitchen countertops and other heavily used surfaces. It costs anywhere from \$48 to \$200 a square foot, and when you consider its longevity, that makes a granite countertop a very good buy. Of course, it hasn't escaped anybody's attention that in today's real estate market, granite counters help sell a house."

The Marble Institute points out another advantage of granite. Because of its low absorption rate, it harbors less bacteria than most countertop materials.

According to Katsianis, the most popular granites come from Brazil. He says there aren't many granite quarries in the U.S. because color choice here is limited. "From Brazil, on the other hand, we get a fantastic array of exotic patterns and colors," he says.



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MARBLE MAKES A COMEBACK

Before granite's rise in popularity, marble was the most important stone, and it appears to be making a strong comeback. Designers say marble's naturally random appearance and the patina it develops with wear have always appealed to traditionalists, but now its inherent warmth and sophistication are bringing in a new generation of admirers.

"The fact is that marble can be at home anywhere, from country to town settings, from Victorian to contemporary," notes Ramsey designer Maria Zampieri. "I specify it often."

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Barbara Carter, a Morristown home-owner, agrees. "I saw a marble floor in a historic building. It was a dark-gray and white checkerboard design, and after over a century's worth of use, it had a grace all its own. I plan to replicate it in my foyer."

Katsianis also finds marble beautiful, but explains that true marbles are vulnerable to attack by mild acids, including those commonly found in kitchens. "The homeowner should be aware of — and accept — the maintenance and patina involved in such applications," he warns.

Serpentine stone is often mistaken for marble, but its mineralogy provides greater acid and abrasion resistance than true marble, so it's often specified for kitchen counters and exterior projects.

Onyx is another stone confused with marble, but its composition is different. It's formed as stalactites and stalagmites in cave interiors, and its crystalline construction creates the transparency designers with a taste for luxury find exquisite.

OTHER STONES

Both slate and soapstone stand up well to chemicals, but they're among the softer stones, so they'll show scratches and wear. Soapstone is famous for its heat resistance and is used as fireplace surrounds.

Are you among the many admirers of travertine marble? Well, then you're in for a surprise. Travertine is not marble, but a type of limestone. The design community loves it anyway.

"Its soft earth-tones are pretty and easy to work with," notes Zampieri.

Sandstone is used mostly for building exteriors, but quartzite, a rock formed from sandstone, is extremely versatile. Exceptionally



Courtesy of Aphrodite Marble & Granite

strong, dense and hard, it wears and weathers well and can be considered for many applications.

VENEERS WORK

When a product becomes as trendy as stone, inevitably somebody will figure out a way to come up with a version that's more affordable. In this case, it's veneer stone, typically an inch thick and weighing less than 15 pounds per square foot. It's used for exterior and interior surfaces and Carol Creter says it comes in handy for second-story installations where weight could be a problem.

It's made from natural stone sawn to a consistent thickness and weight, but there are also manufactured stone veneers that mimic the real thing. The manufactured products consist of a lightweight concrete mix poured into molds of different styles and then colored to resemble real stone.

There's even a quarter-inch granite veneer that can be installed directly over an existing countertop or floor. It consists of 95 percent stone blended with a polymer for extra strength.



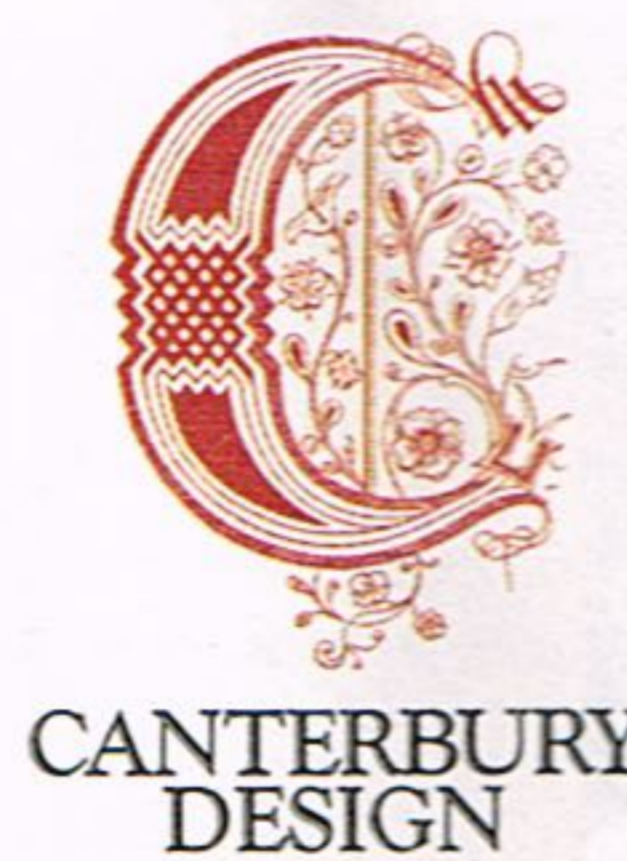
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ROCKS OF AGES

While countertop designers seem to prefer granites from faraway places, geologists insist that when it comes to rocks, New Jersey is special.

"You can see one quarter of the earth's history in New Jersey," explains Jonathan Husch, a geochemistry professor at Rider University in Lawrenceville. "You can find rocks here a billion years old. The trick is to listen to what the rocks are saying. Take granite, for example. It feels cold and hard, but it used to be as hot as 2,000 degrees. That's why geologists classify granite as an igneous rock, meaning fire-formed."



Bluestone Flagging courtesy of Curley Stone

Husch say granite began as a molten material that rose from deep inside the earth. It may have rocketed upward explosively or oozed slowly. As it came to the surface, it cooled and hardened. The more crystals you see in a granite, the longer it took to cool, perhaps 10,000 years. The more slowly the rocks cool, the bigger the crystals.

BEDMINSTER ROCKS

Anthony Cortese, who represents the fourth generation of Basking Ridge masons famous for their stone artistry, is as partial to New Jersey rocks as Jonathan Husch. In fact, John Cortese Masons, where Anthony is operations manager, is partial to a stone called Bernardsville fieldstone. The company gets this bluish-gray stone from local quarries or the demolition of old buildings. With three large storage facilities, the firm has access to thousands of tons of natural stone collected over the years.

Using many methods, from hand-chiseling to grinding, the Cortese family's stone works can be found all over the state, in the form of patios, walkways, fireplaces, outdoor kitchens, retaining walls,



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steps, pool decks and retaining walls. The family particularly loves the challenge of historic restoration.

In one recent project, the Corteses came to the aid of a designer building an addition to the Stronghold Estate in Bernardsville. The original structure dated back to the late 1800s, and finding new stone to match the old façade wasn't possible.

But stones John Cortese III had collected when an old Newark church was demolished some 20 years earlier did match. The new addition wound up harmonizing perfectly with the old one.

"We're usually the first to know when an old building with valuable old stone is demolished," says Anthony. "We take it in, and sooner or later we find just the right use for it."

Another favorite restoration project was the Bedminster Library, where the Corteses matched not only the stones, but also the joints.

ADVICE FROM PROS

Most people have a pretty clear idea about the stonework they want inside their homes, but they're less surefooted when it comes to exterior projects, says Carol Creter and Drew Madlinger.

"Homeowners come in here not knowing what they want to do," she says. "It would be so good if they looked through magazines, took some pictures while on vacation, that sort of thing. Then we could help them plan their project and direct them to the right stone."

RESOURCES

Aphrodite Marble & Granite

Forked River, 609.693.4450
www.aphroditemarbleandgranite.com

AW Eurostile Tile & Stone

Ocean, 732.493.1883
www.aweurostile.com

Curley Stone

Randolph, 973.361.15668
www.curleystone.com

Drew Madlinger Exterior Design

Branchburg, 908.203.0080
www.MadlingerExteriorDesign.com

John Cortese Masons

Basking Ridge, 908.340.4700
www.cortesemasons.com

Monmouth St. Tile

Red Bank, 732.933.1760
www.monmouthsttile.com

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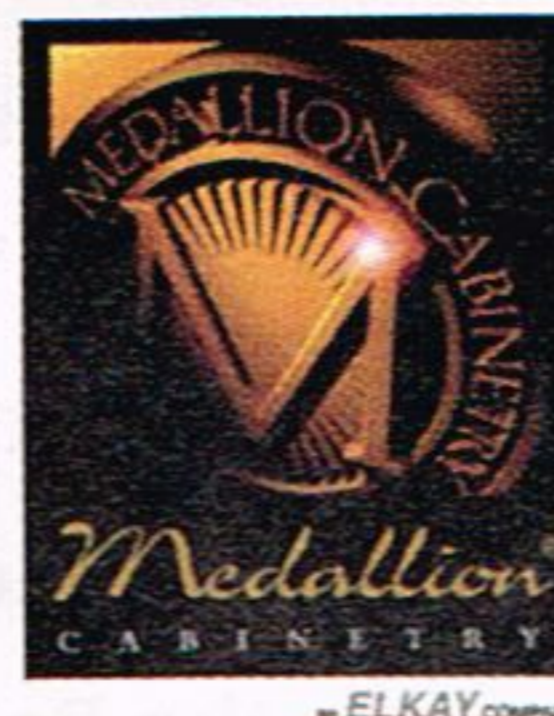
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