

Natural Wonders



THESE STONES ADD A DURABLE, UNIQUE, AND BEAUTIFUL
TOUCH TO ANY ROOM THEY'RE USED IN

The innate character, the unique graining, the colors that take their cue from the earth—there’s so much to love about natural stone. Using it throughout your home, whether iterated for countertops, walls, flooring, or accents adds a singular beauty that can’t be replicated. “No two pieces of stone will ever match completely, as veining and color are all made by Mother Nature,” says Gioi Tran, founder and principal designer of San Francisco-based design firm Applegate Tran Interiors.

Each type of stone has a distinctive range of natural patterns all its own. For a cleaner look, you’ll want stones with more uniform or solid backgrounds. For a complex appearance choose stones with scattered veining, says Mary Dimichino, senior designer at Bakes & Kropp cabinetry in New York. “The finish, whether polished or honed, also impacts the appearance of natural stone. It can transform a surface’s texture, color, and reflectivity,” she says.

And because of its inherent imperfections, natural stone is forgiving—the more flaws, the more interesting the look. But perhaps its most useful quality is durability. “Natural stone is hard-wearing and provides a durable surface for flooring, kitchens, and bathrooms while also relatively being easy to clean, hygienic, and nontoxic,” says Maneli Wilson of Maneli Wilson Interiors in New York. And it’s entirely environmentally friendly. “It does not require any artificial processes or chemicals for manufacturing, unlike many other man-made engineered building materials,” she says.

GRANITE

One of the strongest of all-natural stone varieties, granite is a low-maintenance option that's heat- and scratch-resistant, making it ideal for outdoor and high-traffic spaces such as laundry rooms, mudrooms, and kitchens, Wilson says. Many types of granite are speckled with flecks of color, while others have veining and swirls similar to marble.

Made of many types of crystals, each slab of granite has unique coloring and veining and is often sold in shades of white, beige, black, blue, green, or gray, Dimichino says.

It's great for kitchen counters and backsplashes, fireplace surrounds, and in tiles as a feature wall, Tran says.



Granite adds a nice touch to a fireplace designed by Maneli Wilson.

Photo Credit: Chandler Pierce Architecture

“While granite was looked down upon for decades, it is finally having a well-deserved comeback,” says Phillip Thomas, founder and principal of Phillip Thomas Inc., a design firm in New York City.

A kitchen designed by Phillip Thomas uses quartz.

Photo Credit: Eric Piasecki



“I have had a number of commissions lately that specifically ask for granite. New discoveries in granites that have the same qualities of quartz and marble are definitely driving this resurgence,” he says. “It has incredible depth and texture and is warm underfoot.”

Before working with natural stone, Wilson recommends obtaining stone samples to check for color, or actually visiting the stone yards themselves to see the stone in person. “Color, veining, and natural characteristics will vary from slab to slab,” she says. She also suggests having any stone surfaces resealed once every six months to ensure longevity.



This kitchen is also designed by Phillip Thomas, feels as luxe as can be.

Photo Credit: Michael Mundy

ONYX

A type of marble, onyx comes in varying degrees of patterns and a rainbow of colors, including popular hues like jade, mint, light pink, and warm tan.

Tran loves the glamour and translucency of the material and uses it for feature walls, bathrooms, counters, and even furniture.

“The veining, variety of colors, and vibrancy make this material genuinely spectacular; it’s perfect to be backlit as either a feature wall, powder room vanity, or even under a bar counter,” he says.

“A unique attribute of onyx is that it’s translucent and can be backlit for a wow effect,” Wilson says. “However, the downside is that it is also very soft and prone to cracking. It should be used selectively to ensure it stays away from areas of high traffic and frequent use,” she says.

It’s typically featured as an accent. “Its translucent quality, warm color tones, and beautiful veining can be stunning in the right application,” says Donna Mondri, founder and principal, Donna Mondri Interior Design in Chicago. It’s pricey, “but perfect for a floating vanity or accent wall insert.”

“It is so beautiful and unique that it’s almost like lining your home in jewelry,” Thomas says. “I love to use onyx in bathrooms because it gives the space a warm, luxurious glow

TRAVERTINE

A porous limestone sedimentary rock, travertine has a uniform look and feel with its characteristic pores and pits gracing its surface. Depending on the variety of travertine, these pits can be small and sporadic or very large and frequent. The colors of travertine are more neutral than other types of natural stone, and they range from ivories and creams to darker taupes or browns. “Color swirls and waves throughout [travertine] bring energy to a space and lend a more modern aesthetic,” says Young Huh, interior designer, Cosentino Design Alliance based in New York.

Travertine can also be iterated in various Finishes from honed and polished to brushed and tumbled. “It’s the most suitable material for damp or humid environments, cladding walls, Fireplaces, and bathrooms, since it’s naturally porous and breathable,” Wilson says. “It is also a great choice to use around swimming pools and bathrooms and shower doors, as unpolished travertine does not become slippery when wet,” she says.

TERRAZZO

Terrazzo is a composite material that uses chips of natural stones such as marble, granite, quartz, glass, or shell that are combined with epoxy or cement. And it’s extremely resilient and durable. “Typically poured in place for floors, the price tag is high, but you can find many options of premade terrazzo in tile formats which are a great way to incorporate it into bathrooms and kitchens,” Mondy says.

With its wide range of colors and patterns, terrazzo provides an abundance of design flexibility. “Terrazzo is low maintenance, nonporous, and incredibly durable, making it ideal for flooring applications in both residential and commercial spaces,” Wilson says. Since it’s made of recycled glass and stone chips, it also makes for a highly eco-friendly material option, she adds.

And it can be customized to fit any color plan and precast into a multitude of shapes to create furniture and cabinets, Tran says.

“Because it’s a composite material, you can mix in different colors and insert all sorts of stones and metals,” Thomas says.

“Based on 18th-century Venetian pavement, terrazzo has come a long way and can be custom poured, shaped, or even made into tiles that can be chic and elegant for inside pools and bathrooms,” Tran says.