

The Natural Stone Buyers' Guide

Types of Natural Stone

Slate Tile: Natural slate has beautiful color variations and exhibits clear cleaving along parallel planes which gives it a unique, streaming texture. Extremely durable, it's often used in outdoor areas like patios.

Granite Tile: Nearly as hard as a diamond, granite is frequently used for countertops. Like a diamond, it's praised for its beauty - its many striking colors exhibit distinctive structural characteristics.

Travertine Tile: Though famed structures like the Roman Coliseum and St. Peter's Basilica were constructed from this beautiful stone, it's often times used in entryways today because of its warm and welcoming nature.

Marble Tile: The smooth surface of marble takes a high polish and displays vivid, natural color patterns. Frequently found in bath areas, it is considered the archetype of classical elegance.

Limestone Tile: Used as a traditional building material for centuries because of its inherent beauty, Limestone is extremely versatile. It can be used for everything from floors in living areas to walls in baths.

Tumbled Stone Tile: Marble, travertine and other natural stones that are cobbled and distressed to capture the romantic look of stone from centuries past. Its weathered surface and seemingly timeworn edges enhance its color palette.

Types of Tile:

Field Tile: The primary tile used to cover a wall or floor.

Decorative Tile: Complimentary, specially formed or decorated tiles. Can be trim or inset pieces. Made from ceramic, porcelain, stone, glass or metal. Includes listellos, a narrow decorative tile.

Trim: Edges, corners and other finish pieces of ceramic, porcelain or stone used to complete the installation and typically made of the same materials as the main ceramic, porcelain or stone tile. (bullnose, out corners, v cap, etc.)

Application Choices:

Floors: Floors provide flow and consistency. To connect rooms with different looks, take advantage of the variety of colors, textures, and finishes tile offers!

Walls: Tiles take on a very different character when applied to walls, because you are looking straight-on at the design, texture and style. Unlike the expanse of the floor, walls and other vertical surfaces are smaller expanses and allow the focus to be on detail and artfulness.

Showers & Bathtubs: Although their main purpose is function, showers and bathtubs can be beautiful. Using tile on the walls and ceilings of a shower enclosure with the addition of decorative tiles can turn what was an otherwise dull shower or bathtub into a lasting piece of beauty in your bathroom decor.

Backsplashes: Backsplashes have become a fashionable aspect of the kitchen or bath. They once were a standard four inches high and were used primarily behind the stove and sink for protection from moisture and grease. Now they are used anywhere there is a counter and have become an important design feature. A variety of materials can be used for backsplashes: natural stone, metals, mosaics, glass, and ceramics.

Countertops: Countertops and backsplashes go hand-in-hand. Utilize the variety and endless design possibilities of tile to achieve an adhesive look.

Fireplaces: Tiling around a fireplace makes a statement. Fireplace tiles in all sizes and different colors mean endless redecorating opportunities for this focal point.

Patios: Tile makes an ideal surface for patios and spas - indoors or out. For areas that are exposed to the elements- especially in colder climates, think porcelain. Tile is perfect for the new trend toward “outdoor rooms” such as family rooms that flow to outdoor spaces.

Texture & Finish

Texture is a very important element for achieving an overall effect. Each tile has physical texture as well as virtual texture created by colors and patterns. A rough, uneven look will give a room a completely different look than one decorated with a smooth and crisper texture. Finish is an important factor that contributes to the overall look. A glass finish will brighten up a room where a matte finish helps to create a warm, cozy atmosphere.

Polished: Smooth-polished and glazed tiles proved a classic look that works with a variety of design schemes.

Matte: Matte finishes are softer and may be richer looking.

Clefted: Clefted finishes provide a rough and natural look.

Shade Variation

One of the distinctive qualities of tile is the fact that they vary in terms of color, shade and tone. The variation can be very low, for a more consistent look, or quite high, resulting in a random appearance.

- Low: Consistent color within each tile and from tile to tile

- Medium: Color variation exists within each tile
- High: Some variation from tile to tile, and within each tile
- Random: Considerable variation from tile to tile

Grout

Although the function of grout is to fill the joints between tiles, grout has a lot to contribute to the tile's design and impact. Whether you choose grout that contrasts or matches your tile (or anything in between) grout choice should be considered when contemplating the overall look of your project. Other things to consider are traffic and how the room is used. For example, light grout may not be a good choice in an entryway or busy kitchen.

Grout Width: Equally as essential to design, it is important to consider how wide or narrow to make the joints between tiles.

Wide Grout Joints: Wider grout lines, or spacing between tiles accentuate each individual tile. This style is considered a bit more casual and is popular for those who favor texture.

Tight Grout Joints: Tight (almost butted) joints allow for greater projection of the natural color and texture of the tiles themselves, and can appear nearly seamless. This look tends to be ideal for more elegant rooms.