

The Stone Doctor

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Natural Stone Maintenance and Restoration



Maintenance and restoration are undoubtedly meant to be the solution of a problem: keeping stone surfaces in pristine conditions (original-finish) for as long as possible through routine maintenance procedures. Bring them back as close as possible to its pristine conditions (original-finish, again) through mechanical intervention (restoration) when wear-and-tear and perhaps unforeseen accidents will eventually overwhelm the maintenance routine.

It seems pretty simple and straightforward, doesn't it? But is it really?

It seldom is, in reality. Why?

Because natural stone is an inherently complicated subject (science better defines it), physical and chemical characteristics needs to be understood; absorption, density, abrasion, weathering and hardness. Unfortunately, to many operators don't seem to be interested in learning the first thing about the stones that

they sell and because of this the majority of stone suppliers don't seem to care about advising their customers with a proper and effective maintenance regime. Instead it is easy to remember 'guideline' that have been dispensed to the industry for the 20 years by a whole army of stone ignorant marketing gurus to 'seal every stone in sight and then use a neutral cleaner to care for it' is not even close to being the answer. It hasn't been working for 20 years, it never will. This lack of knowledge has caused unrealistic expectations and confusion.

After many years involved in the stone industry, it has become clear to me that proper identification of natural stone substrate finish (polished, honed, or sandblasted) is of a paramount concern in the selection of appropriate cleaning products and restoration process. Distinguishing between light coloured sandstone and a fine-grained limestone may prove difficult for even the trained eye when surfaces are covered with dirt. Terracotta is frequently mistaken for natural stone, and masonries casually referred to as "marble" or "granite" may actually be one of a number of very different natural or man-made "stones".

It is necessary for persons involved with stone restoration to have a reasonable background in geology. It is important that they be able to distinguish between two very broad categories of masonry substrate: acid-resistant and acid-soluble masonries.

The truth of the matter is that, natural stone restoration business does (or at least should) represent the very pinnacle of all stone-related activities, because it is the only one that requires in-depth knowledge of stone, and consequently, the utmost professionalism.

It doesn't take a stone expert to buy and sell containers of stone and it doesn't take a stone expert to install containers of natural stone, but when the time comes to restore and

maintain stone, it takes a stone expert to know stone. In-fact, stone restoration is not a standard procedure. Different marbles coming from different corners of the planet will require different treatments. Sometimes, even the same marble – coming from a different area of the same quarry – will require, even if so slightly, a different restoration technique.

As the restoration industry expands, more and more professional consultants are offering their services. Some of these individuals have come from academic backgrounds, and some have come from the field. As with contactors and manufacturers, there are some excellent professional consultants and some charlatans'.

On many occasions cleaning contractors are engaged, rather than a stone expert. This often relates to a perceived reduction in cost that may actually turn out to be more expensive in the long run. If inappropriate cleaning process is used, the results could be disastrous. For instance, if a granite cleaning process was inadvertently specified and used on marble, the results would probably be irreparably damaged marble.

Properly cleaned stone should have a natural colour and hue, with no evidence of streaking or bleaching. The pores of the substrate must be free of any residual acidity or alkalinity that could cause the formation of damaging soluble salts. If the people who have the responsibility for cleaning natural stone take the proper steps and precautions when analysing their problems and selecting the appropriate process, the stone will once again have its own signature and showcase the original architect's design and intent.

How true and profound

MANKIND SHOULD MASTER MOTHER NATURE

BY UNDERSTANDING, NOT BY FORCE!

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