



*(Figure 1) A custom stone mosaic is paired with polished crema marfil marble in 2- by 4-inch beveled brick like mosaics and granite countertops. Design by Antonella Romano, Stone and Tile Emporium, Inc., Wyckoff, NJ. Photography by Peter Rymwid.*

# Express Yourself

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When remodeling an urban apartment or a country home, there will always be one thing required, both need to be successfully paired with the owner's style, personality and expectations. Understanding the intricacies of the different materials that we are searching for will assure us that the environment we are looking to create will bring us lasting and enduring designs, with durability and elegance.

With all the products available to us today, the basic stone, tile and glass products will eternally remain in our tradition for durability and function for many years to come. Walking into a stone and tile showroom today brings back memories of childhood and walking into a candy store full of goodies to choose from. There are endless possibilities and so many styles to choose from. So many tiles, so little time. Looking back it wasn't too long ago that walking into a showroom offered you a selection of bland colors and unimaginative designs. There was little imagination, in terms of style, and little to no thought was given to comfort. Today we can have more than the cookie cutter homes of yesteryear that gave us the familiar 4-inch by 4-inch glazed ceramic tiles and the simple utilitarian kitchen and baths.

The transformation of an original space



*Floor to ceiling slate visually expands an updated master retreat. Honed limestone vanity top. Design by Christine S. Suzuki, ASID, Christine S. Suzuki & Assoc., Seattle, WA. Photography by Sam Van Fleet.*

requires a starting point. A new space must celebrate our views with pallets, hues and materials that interpret our world, while accommodating many diverse personalities. In new homes today, the rooms offer a compromise of surfaces with a kaleidoscope of colors. Each bathroom has taken on a different theme to address its purpose. The kitchen transforms itself as the

*Silestone's Leather Collection contains Microban (an antibacterial protection barrier). This quartz material has a similar texture to limestone and granite with an exotic twist.*

*I*n this day of high fashion trends and custom home building, being involved with a project that doesn't include stone or tile in one way or another is unheard of. Today's style savvy homeowners are searching for unique, exclusive and yet low maintenance building materials that will set them apart from the rest. Homeowners will stop at nothing to find that perfect color, texture or finish to complete their individual projects.





*No two Vivendi™ concrete countertops are exactly alike—choose from an extensive palette or have a color customized for your kitchen, bath or bar.*



central station and core of home activity. Many times porcelain tiles are paired with the shimmer of glass mosaics, slates with limestone, and granite tops with rich vivid colors of glass. Fireplaces that used to be done strictly with solid slabs of marble are now being embellished with decorative tiles, slates and porcelains. Outdoor spaces are being revamped with tile and stone. In some homes, basements are being turned into wine cellars with mosaics and stones that bring us back in time. The possibilities continue to grow with people's imaginations and the rediscovery of the home. Stone and tile create a sense of permanence like no other material. While we all have our familiar favorites with natural stone tops and floors, there are some new comers such as glass and metal that are being added to the mixture of choices.

Today there are many ceramic and porcelain tiles that give the look of stone, concrete and metal. Choosing such materials is only half the fun—you want to create versatility and mix the surfaces with the architectural elements in the home.

The best way to begin is to pick a style and chances are you will be able to find yourself reflected in one particular stone or tile. This will help set the theme for your project. For those that are afraid to commit themselves to such a permanent material, its imperative that you understand that both stone and tile have the ability to change with their surroundings.

With time, the use of colors and textures as well as the depth of the materials will become newly apparent to you and a greater appreciation will grow as time goes by, while adding strength and durability to the beauty and harmony, and let us not forget value to your home.

### *Countertops: Speeding Past Neutral*

While neutral colors are still very popular, today's countertops are sparking interest and bringing an additional much wanted energy to the room. They are being incorporated with other design elements to create an individual style. Once the decision has been made to use stone, one must focus on what type of stone.

Homeowners today are searching for new and different stones. Designers and architects also encourage the use of less typical materials today. The availability of such exotic stone, in marble, slate, granite, soapstone, limestone and travertine can be found in many different rooms in the home. Stone is not just used in kitchens and baths anymore; it has taken on a realm of its own.

**Granite** comes in an abundance of options today, both in exotic colors and finishes that years ago were considered rare and expensive have become much more cost effective to almost all

budgets. Granite is the perfect stone to assure timeless elegance for your countertop. Granite's ability to withstand any amount of abuse is unsurpassed. Originally granite was available only in a few colors and the cost was high. Today granite is a luxury that most homeowners can purchase. From earthy greens, to golden hues, to exotic blues, you will not have a problem finding a color that will inspire your design. Along with color comes the finish as well as the texture. In addition to the conventional polished slab of the past, are the

*The new generation of countertops by Think Glass.*





*Stone is the current popular choice for bathrooms. Design by Antonella Romano, Stone and Tile Emporium, Inc., Wyckoff, NJ. Photography by Peter Rymwid.*

new brushed, honed, hammered and flamed finishes. Each texture will create its own style statement. Usually polished granite countertops are looked upon as having more of an elegant feel, whereas the other finishes, having less shine are considered to have a more informal statement, and sometimes when used with square edges they create a more contemporary or modern style.

No matter what texture you choose, the finishing details that are put on the edges are what will create the dramatic effects you are searching for. The ogee edge will create a more elegant and formal look, where as the double ogee will give a more dramatic elegance. The polished or beveled finish will provide a simpler more contemporary feel to your tops. Consider putting the more dramatic edges, such as the double ogee on the island top, and keeping a single ogee or plainer

edge on the overall counters. When choosing your slab always remember the cardinal rule; less is more. Less seams, that is. Its natural that your stone slabs will have seams at some point or another, but if your slab size is similar to your counter size or larger, then you are going to have fewer seams.

Before committing to a slab or a fabricator on your project, take some notes that are extremely important to the outcome of your job. It's not uncommon to ask to see some references of local jobs that they have completed before handing over your deposit. Your overall job appearance will suffer greatly if the fabrication is done poorly. Always remember to request seam position with your estimate. Ask if seams can be placed on a side of the countertops that will make them less conspicuous. Make sure you will be getting the edges of your cutouts finished with the same edge as the rest of the tops. You always want the edges finished around the sink, especially when using a farm sink. It is advised that any type of sink be finished properly, using the correct ¼-inch overhang in order to cover the seam of the sink under the countertop. Therefore allowing water to run easily into your sink if there should be

a spill. Another tip is to make sure your island overhang has a polished finish, and finally make sure your tops are sealed before they are delivered to your home. You won't go wrong with your choice to use granite, as long as the fabrication is just right. Granite will add a permanent elegance and bring value to your home.



Another popular trend for tops is **soapstone**. This dense material can be found in colors ranging from blacks, to greens, to different shades of neutral beiges and grays. This material has a soft appearance, similar to the look of limestone and marble. Sometimes you will experience nicks or scratches that can be sanded out if needed. Even

though this material may seem easy to care for, you must anticipate the changing color of this stone, as it will become darker with time. Usually after a couple of years it will stop and remain that way for the rest of the life of the countertop. Suggested maintenance of this material is with oil based sealers. The same consideration should be taken to seams and finishes as with granite slabs.

Ivory **limestone** is one of my favorite stones. This clean and soft stone creates a soothing environment in any top or floor. In countertops, it's not only used to create a sleek Zen or minimalist style when fabricated for tops, but can easily bring us back in time, when used with the ever so popular ogee



*Giallo granite on the main island; Aubergine marble on the smaller island. Design by Michael De Giulio, De Giulio Kitchen Design, Chicago and Wilmette, IL. Photography by Paul Schlismann.*

edges, for bathroom vanities and tub decks. Limestone has a similar look to travertine, minus the holes. Colors range from light ivory to light greens, gold and even antique whites and grays.

When used on floors, limestone, because of its straight rectified edges can be used to create jobs with very small grout joints, to create more of a modern effect or create a timeless effect with the use of its matching mosaics and chair rails to bring dimension to the project. Limestone, in both 4-inch by 8-inch and 4-inch by 4-inch tiles with its matching chair rail and mosaics makes

a great statement on any backsplash.

In a bathroom, using this material with a polished mosaic accent will add dimension and color as a border on either floors or walls. Consider using limestone as a finished chair rail and mosaics with porcelain or ceramic tiles to add a more dramatic effect.

In recent years this material was only available in one or two colors and primarily was available in 12-inch by 12-inch. Today this material is available in a large variety of mosaic sizes and shapes including the modular sizes for

floors creating timeless floors and bathrooms. Today other countries like Armenia and its neighbors are exporting these beautiful colors in a variety of shapes and sizes. When used properly this material will stand the test of time, and will become more beautiful as time goes by. Don't be afraid to use limestone in your countertops and floors. Just be careful to choose a more dense color that will allow you to be less concerned with stains and scratches. The consistent color of limestone creates a serene backdrop for any kitchen or bath haven.

Through the years, **marble** has been the medium used by artisans to create some of the most important works of art of our time. It has brought a sense of luxury and elegance to homes around the world. With its unmatched veins and colors ranging from light crème neutrals to dark greens with striking white veins, to its subtle gold tones to soothing browns. Marble offers a feeling of old world wealth and extravagance. Combining these colors with the right finishes and edges, adding in accents of mosaics and patterns, it offers endless possibilities of design options.

In spite of its obvious beauty, there are a few drawbacks that are important to note when using marble in areas such as a kitchen top or a busy floor area. It will

*Cafe International provides handcrafted premium solid wood countertops, offering natural beauty and hygiene. Studies by microbiologists prove that quality graded, solid wood tops (oak, pine, beech, and ash) destroy 99.9% of food bacteria.*





*A stainless steel peninsula and U-shaped glass island top fuse function and style in this modern design from Gina Ko of Küche + Cucina, Paramus, NJ. Pedini Cabinetry. Photography by Peter Rymwid.*

be very difficult to try and keep this stone polished and scratchproof at all times. If always keeping a polished look is your priority, then you need to know the basics before purchasing for your project.

Because of its tendency towards scratches and stains it is almost necessary to stay at a distance to maintain its original polished finish. Sealing marble will only protect it from absorbing nasty stains, it will not protect against scratches. In most cases after a few years of use the homeowner will need to hire a restoration professional to come in and restore the stone to its original polished finish.

If you love marble, maybe considering another finish, other than polished will work for your use. Try a honed marble floor, which can either be square cut or tumbled to create a softer serene appearance. You will be able to seal it once a year and maintain its original color and finish without too many headaches. Tumbled or honed marbles today are available in so many more colors and sizes then they were years ago.

For the backsplash I like to use polished crema marfil marble in 2- by 4-inch beveled brick like mosaics (*see figure 1*). They can be used with limestone accents, and matching mosaic sheets to add a bit of variety and interest to the splash. When reaching the range hood, there could be an element of color using polished marble basket weave with a colorful boarder in either limestone or marble to set off the space from the rest

of the splashes. This look can add a timeless elegance to any kitchen, and can be integrated into almost any style. Choose from a variety of different finishes such as antiquated, acid washed, brushed, hammered, flamed, mosaic, pillowed and of course tumbled. These finishes will keep you sane when being confronted with problem scratching and will ease your burden to maintain the floor. These finishes add Old World charm to your home, while creating a non-slip surface for your high traffic areas.

Marble remains today as one of the leading products for kitchen and baths today. It has stood the test of time through the centuries and will continue to dress our homes with a beauty and unmatched elegance in years to come.

One particular classic has been making a huge comeback in the recent year. **Slate** has resurfaced dramatically in both modern and rustic spaces. This material, although considered soft, takes on major roles in home designs today. As a floor material because of its varied color pallets and textures, it hides dirt and takes significant abuse in busy areas of the home, such as entrance foyers, powder rooms, kitchens and other areas of the home. It is a perfect non-slip surface.

Slate, which in the past was used primarily for walkways and foyers, is now available as mosaic borders, chair rail accents,

*A rich, elegant master bath features white onyx vanity tops and floor tile. Design by Peter Ross Salerno, CMKBD, Peter Salerno, Inc., Wyckoff, NJ. Salerno's Custom Cabinetry. Photography by Peter Rymwid.*



splash tiles and many more. It can change its appearance based on its surrounding, from a contemporary look to Old World warmth. Different finishes for this stone include a natural cleft, honed, calibrated to polished. Colors range from grays to golds to copper, to rust to greens and even violets. It's available from the smallest mosaic tiles to large slabs for tops. Slate can be incorporated with glimmering metal mosaics to add to its beauty for bathroom or splashes.

If you love the rich colors that jump up at you from a slate sample, remember, rugged cleft finishes can be rough on your feet, instead ask for a honed finish. It will give you the feel without the problematic chips that happen once in a while with the natural cleft finish. The honed finish will give an even surface while still offering you the earthlike colors that will come up and redefine your styles and colors.

**Natural quartz** and **quartz composite** materials make durable and beautiful countertops, available in a wide range of colors and patterns. Quartz countertop material has a similar texture to limestone and granite. It has the ultimate combination of beauty and practicality, while offering textures that make it difficult to detect whether it is a natural stone or a man-made product. This material has strength against scratching and staining, mold and mildew. The result is a

*Glass tiles bring a shimmer of sophistication to a bar design by Antonella Romano, Stone and Tile Emporium, Inc., Wyckoff, NJ. Photography by Peter Rymwid.*



product that delivers peace of mind and enduring beauty. These slabs can be cut and fabricated just like granite with similar edges and can be applied to kitchen tops as well as bathroom vanity tops and tub surrounds.

The first and most important step when selecting **porcelain tiles**, regardless of the project is to determine the purpose. If its durability you are concerned with for your kitchen floor, foyer, or bathroom floor then you have come to the right place. Porcelain tiles are your best bet when searching for strength and also when looking for aesthetic values for your floors.

After determining the look and feel you are searching for in your space, consider choosing a floor that will add harmony to the appearance when it's mixed in with your granite or marble color, as well as your cabinets and colors throughout your space. Porcelain tiles will add function and balance to your rooms.

What is real porcelain? There are many kinds of porcelain tiles to choose from. At one time porcelain was commonly used in an unglazed finish for commercial applications. Today porcelain is not just considered for its reputation of strength and durability, but due to new technology, it's now being considered for its aesthetic principles as well. This development has created an array of more realistic looking porcelain tiles to mimic limestone, tumbled marble, slate and other stones. With varied colors and non-repetitive patterns, adding chiseled edges, these tiles create an almost perfect look alike to natural materials. Sometimes it is impossible to tell which sample is stone and which is porcelain. Contributing to this variety is textures, these different finishes that are being applied to the finish add to the realistic look and feel of these tiles.

Modular patterns and mixing a variety of sizes to create dimension have grown in popularity. Where a few years ago only one or two lines carried this look, now it's available from almost all the manufacturers. These changing sizes add to creating a more realistic stone, limestone or slate looking floor. In addition to chiseled edges some porcelains are rectified, therefore allowing for a virtually invisible grout joint. A rectified edge, which means that the tiles are cut exactly the same size, is achieved by re-cutting the tiles after they have been manufactured, allowing for a perfect fit to happen during installation, therefore guaranteeing the tiniest of grout joints. Because of this procedure the cost of rectified porcelain styles are going to be higher than other porcelain tiles.

Not all porcelain tiles are all the same. There are glazed porcelains and there are "all through" body porcelains. A traditional glazed porcelain is not as durable. Glazed porcelain

has only a surface finish, so the color does not go all the way through. This process is similar to the process used when making ceramic tiles. In this case it's the glaze that creates and specifies the suitability of the floor. But don't misunderstand, today's glazed porcelain are being made much stronger and much more durable than in the past, and are available in all the designs and textures mentioned above.

The glazed all through body porcelain on the other hand has a slightly higher advantage. In this case the body of the tile is the same color as the glaze, with is applied separately. In the event that the material is chipped, or worn, the color below matches and makes the damage unnoticeable. In the past this through body porcelain was only used for retail or commercial spaces, but today with all the textures, edges and colors applied with these methods we are able to achieve much more realistic looking floors that offer unsurpassed strength and beauty to our floors.

### *The Outdoor Kitchen*

The growing amount of outdoor kitchens have increased dramatically in the last few years as homeowners are rediscovering their homes and rooting themselves away from the hectic bothers of travel during the vacation months. These kitchens are being created with complete granite countertops and matching bars for entertainment. Both porcelain and granite make a perfect combination for the outdoor kitchen.

Floors that allow versatility and enhance the outdoor spaces should be practical and aesthetically pleasing to our outdoor requirements. Porcelain has a certain quality that makes it the number one solution for the outdoors. It can withstand the sun's rays, which can cause a change of color to other materials. Porcelain is fire resistant, and is chemically protected to withstand mold and mildew as well as fungus. Water absorption needs to be



*Atlantic Green granite countertops and Indian Copper slate create a First Place award-winning design by Jim Meloy, CKD of Kitchen & Bath Concepts, Roswell, GA. Co-designers: Martha Rogers and Lisa Shepherd. Photography by John Umberger*

considered. The less water a tile absorbs the more frost proof it will be and the more vitreous it becomes. The lower water absorption indicates a more compact tile and a higher strength. This is crucial when using in a cold climate region where tiles can absorb water, frost and later crack when freezing temperatures occur. For this purpose a glazed or through body porcelain is an ideal choice.

**Glass and Metals:** As designers and homeowners become more and more creative in choosing materials these days, the popularity of non-tile products

have been on the rise. In particular the demand for glass tiles and mosaics has increased dramatically. At first glass mosaics were just being used as decorative accents and borders adding a shimmering pizzazz to any tile or stone.

As homeowners become more adventurous, mosaic tiles in all shapes and sizes are being used in applications such as splashes, tub surrounds as well as shower walls, and ceilings and other residential and commercial applications. Today we are going beyond just mosaics, available sizes have expanded from 4-inch by 4-inch tiles to 12-inch by



*Bear Creek Glass handmade glass tiles add colorful impact to the bathroom or kitchen. Shown with Splash bowl.*

12-inch to even 24-inch by 24-inch panels. Regardless of your budget there is a glass tile or mosaic that will compliment your design and taste.

With the interest in glass tiles reaching peaks in the recent years, it's only natural that it has come full circle to countertops. Glass helps to add spice to any design. Glass countertops are created from tempered glass, generally between 3/4- to 1-inch. The edges are highly polished for safety. These countertops can be made in almost any shape and size much like stone. When creating a cantilevered look, stainless steel or brass brackets are used for support. In the bathroom, glass countertops are available with integrated sinks or can be utilized with a complimenting glass or vessel sink.

In the kitchen, installing a glass countertop usually suggests that there is a contemporary design in mind. Although glass tops are ideal for putting down hot pots or dishes. They are not recommended for use as the primary sink top, but work great for a wet bar. Glass tops can be a challenge to maintain, due to scratching, watermarks and fingerprints. It is important to avoid

abrasive cleaners when cleaning glass tops, also acidic liquids may mark these tops permanently. When used with complimentary materials such as wood or stainless steel, glass tops will add a sharp statement and a sense of fun to any room

#### **Decorative and Accent Tiles:**

Decorative tiles have always been used to enhance and add a unique touch to tiles. We have seen them in an abundance of applications, creating borders in bathrooms, and in backsplash designs. When tiling a backsplash, searching for that signature style can be tiring and overwhelming. The backsplash design often features the focal point, under the hood and behind the stove. Once your countertop material

has been carefully chosen, take a sample of your stone with you and begin your quest for the one of a kind piece that will enable your splash to carefully balance your color scheme, while adding a sense of personal style to your kitchen. If your space is at least 22-inches high and at least 30-inches wide, you can begin to consider a picture framed design to finish off your kitchen remodel. Picture frames can be done also in smaller spaces but should be kept small in size, using thinner borders. Many times, mixing natural stones with tile can add an element of interest, while balancing your materials. I like to take pieces from the countertops and use them in small mosaic accent pieces to implement the colors in the granite into the backsplash. Check with your local fabricator for this custom look.

If you are searching for embellishments that are other than ceramic when working with accenting natural stone, you may want to consider metals or glass accents. These materials add an extra touch of elegance to your natural stone. Many showrooms offer an array of concept boards that provide ideas on how to mix these materials.

There is no end to the possibilities of what you can do to add dramatic effects to your space. So go ahead, go out and see what these stores have to offer. Soon, you can begin your journey to discover your own personal style and express yourself! ●



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