

ArtfulivingByDesign

It's stone cold gorgeous

Selecting stone for your home remodeling or building project can be overwhelming and confusing, there are so many choices. Let's focus on countertop surfaces for the moment. Natural stone such as granite, marble, soapstone, quartzite, or basalt; and engineered stone like Caesarstone, HanStone or Silestone, which are natural quartz combined with high-quality polymer resin... all are beautiful in their own right. And the list goes on.

You are most likely concerned about durability, cost, aesthetics, maintenance, and in today's world the impact on our environment. No wonder this can be perplexing.

First, consider how you move through and use your space on a daily basis. If it is a kitchen surface, whether the countertop or floor, this room is prone to more substances that have the possibility for staining or burning. Your choice should be made in harmony with your lifestyle

and knowledge of the characteristics of each stone type you are considering. I personally have marble in my kitchen (not usually recommended by sales people) and many kitchens in Europe have had marble tops in their kitchens for many decades. My husband and I are aware of the issues around marble as a countertop and have found it to be not a problem. We think it's gorgeous and after five years of use, it still looks terrific.

Stone or stonelike surfaces can be utilized in a variety of creative ways in your interior design, including on floors and walls (interior or exterior). Imagine a beautiful, bush-hammered white quartzite in a niche, subtly bathed in light as a backdrop to a lovely objet d'art. Or perhaps chiseled limestone juxtaposed with brushed limestone set in a vertical running bond pattern as a surround for your soaking tub: GORGEOUS. The possibilities are limited only by your imagination.

Limestone of different shades combined with black slate could be used to create a dramatic floor in an entrance foyer. There is reclaimed floor material to consider as well; how about an aged limestone-tile floor planked along with richly colored hardwood? Simply stunning!

Real stone tiles, in my opinion, provide a level of obvious luxury in the home. Because it is natural, no two tiles are exactly the same. Stone is porous and must be finished with a penetrating sealer to prevent staining. A good rule of thumb is that honed surfaces wear better than polished surfaces, which can etch with juice, wine, or cleaning chemicals.

Architecturally, a fireplace is a great opportunity to design a marvelous focal point for a room, and using natural stone or engineered stone can be absolutely striking. Consider the grand statement made by a large hunk of natural sandstone as the mantle, surrounded by clay plaster or natural fissure fossil stone cladding.



LISA SAMUEL

The vast array of stone to choose from is phenomenal. My recommendation is to get some professional advice before making such a big decision because it is, after all, stone cold gorgeous!

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OurwaterQuality

Health issues related to water

I start this column with the disclaimer that I am neither a medical doctor nor a health professional. I searched the major public health sites to find succinct answers to the most frequently recurring health inquiries by our customers.

First, nitrate. Some consumers on private wells have questioned whether or not they should be concerned with nitrate because the current EPA standard (MCL or maximum contamination level) of 10 ppm nitrate for drinking water is specifically designed to protect infants less than six months old from acquired methemoglobinemia ("blue baby syndrome") caused by ingesting nitrate in drinking water.

The major sources of nitrates are erosion of natural deposits, runoff from fertilizer use in agricultural areas, sewage (proximity to the lots and pens of horses and other animals), and leaching from septic tanks. This latter cause is well documented in the Santa Fe area. We know from the 2009 Santa Fe Water Fair, in which 475 wells were sampled, that

most nitrate levels ranged from "Not Detected" to 3ppm, which is indicative of the local background level of nitrate that is naturally occurring. Nitrate is an excellent indicator of sewage and septic contamination. Elevated occurrences in nitrate levels, including several wells over the MCL and with nitrate as high as 31.9ppm, are believed to represent local occurrences of septic leakage.

In New Mexico, septic systems have contaminated more ground water and wells than all other sources combined. Coliform bacteria, including fecals, have been detected in some private domestic wells in areas contaminated by on-site septic systems. The EPA recommends that private water supplies be tested annually for nitrate and coliform bacteria. The agency also cautions consumers to be aware of activities in the local watershed that could affect well water.

Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral known to occur locally. It is considered a beneficial nutrient and is present in trace amounts in the body. At

low concentrations in drinking water, it helps strengthen teeth and bones. At concentrations above 2 mg/l (ppm), negative impacts can result. Long-term exposure to high levels of fluoride in water can result in coloration of the teeth (fluorosis). At levels above 4 ppm (the EPA's MCL) more severe impacts, including alteration of bone density resulting in arthritis and tooth damage, may occur. In some areas, including the City of Santa Fe, fluoride compounds are added to the water to strengthen teeth and reduce decay. This practice is not without controversy.

Arsenic occurs commonly in ground water in the Santa Fe area, particularly in the northwest quadrant. The MCL for arsenic was recently decreased to 0.01ppm. Long term (chronic) exposure to arsenic has been linked to cancer of the bladder, lungs, skin, kidneys, nasal passages, liver, and prostate. Health effects from short term (acute) exposure to high doses of arsenic can include damage to the liver and kidneys.



STEPHEN WIMAN

All these constituents are easily removed from drinking water, but their presence is only detectable through laboratory (and not onsite) testing. Nitrate, fluoride and arsenic are tasteless and odorless and their concentration, if present, can actually be increased by boiling.

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