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REALTYSPEAK

Etched in stone

IT was the beauty of natural stones that enhanced the beauty of luxurious palaces. And just as natural stones added majestic splendour and extensive grace to the homes of rich, Indian consumers today desire to give an exotic and premium look to their beautiful homes.

Even in today's economic scenario, several projects are still being undertaken and their requirement of natural stone will be able to sustain the industry. The stone industry is also benefiting from the recent increase in applications of natural stone apart from the conventional use of flooring. Architects and consumers alike recognise the durability and low maintenance characteristics of natural stone and use it for cladding for exterior walls of projects, thus saving time and expense of regular maintenance by painting the exterior. The use of granite as a counter top in kitchens and bathrooms is a globally accepted best practice, as is the use of sandstone for landscaping artifacts for the garden. Cobbles used for pavements & walkways from Norway to New York, are now in India. Bars and hotels use backlit Onyx for their reception desks or bar tops. With such varied applications, the natural stone industry is poised for growth despite the economic slowdown. The growth also comes in the form of value and not just volume as Indian customers increasingly demand more exquisite natural stones sourced from all over the world.



Architects and consumers recognise the various characteristics of natural stone and its usage

The stone industry is benefiting from the recent increase in applications of natural stone apart from the conventional use of flooring, helping it sail through the tough times

Natural stone in its true form is stone extracted from earth and is distinguished into the broad categories of marble and limestone, granite, onyx, travertine and other decorative semi-precious stones. These varieties of natural stone are used for commercial or residential projects and account for around 10-20% of the total project cost depending on the choice of stone. This makes this decision a critical one.

The versatility of natural stones makes them suitable for flooring, wall cladding, counter tops, landscaping items, pillars, tubs, stair case steps, furniture, artifacts and even jewellery among numerous other uses.

Indian customers understand today that natural stone, like jewellery, is going to adorn their homes for years to come and are reluctant to compromise in this regard. The well-travelled customer today is well versed

and demanding when it comes to buying natural stone. They don't treat natural stone as a commodity but understand its importance. They are willing to pay for quality, distinguished on the parameters of thickness of the natural stone, aesthetics, quality grade and source of origin. Technically educated customers go deeper to understand the kind of machinery which has been used to process the natural stone, whether Italian, Indian or Chinese. Greater emphasis is also being placed on selection from a vast array of available natural stone from across the world. Customers also look for advice on the availability of the appropriate stones for a specified area.

It is now common for customers to ask, by name, for Antique Labrador Granite from Norway or for Fossil Stone from Morocco or even white Onyx from Italy, stones that till a few months back were unheard of in India. The industry is gearing towards fulfilling these demands of the customers by providing them variety, quality and expertise, moving away from the present format of being cluttered, unorganised and devoid of any knowledge. The market today is ripe for organised players to do for natural stone what Tanishq did for jewellery and gold or what various brands did for bathroom and sanitary fittings: make it organised.

The age old saying "etched in stone" truly summarises the permanence of natural stone to which Taj Mahal stands testimony.