

Helpful Hints

ABOUT GLASS CLEANERS AND DISH-SOAP

IN THE CLEANING OF GRANITE COUNTERTOPS

An article by Maurizio Bertoli, the founder of the “marble cleaning” company

Quite often, proud owners of granite countertops report to me that their fabricator applied a stone sealer to their countertop and then suggested to use some glass-cleaner or a solution of water and dish soap, or other generic products, for the daily care of their stone.

As far as the application of a stone impregnator/sealer is concerned, it has become some sort of “religious cult!” Everything in sight that doesn’t move must be sealed, or else!

Is it true? Of course not! Many a commercial granite do not need to be sealed, and some shouldn't be at the risk of developing “mysterious problems” if sealed nonetheless. (See our other helpful hint: “ABOUT SEALING AT ANY COST”, and keep in mind that this writer manufactures what is arguably one of the best impregnator/sealers on the market today. “Education before any sale!” remember?)

Stone is a complicated subject and no general rule (i.e.: seal each and every one of them) can be considered as a substitute for knowledge and professionalism.

The proof that the members of the “sealing cult” all too often have no clue about proper maintenance of the stones they sell and install (and seal!), no matter how good craftsmen they might be, is further substantiated by the encouragement they give to their customers to use generic cleaners or home-brewed concoctions to care for their stone on a daily basis.

Let’s start with the glass-cleaner issue. First off, how many brands of glass-cleaners are available out there? Hundreds! And if you think that they are all formulated the same way, think again! Even what’s probably the most popular one, Windex™, comes in several formulations. Who did the testing of those chemicals to find out if they are safe on any possible stone surface? ... You fill the blanks!

Now, what’s even more important, how many different types of “granite” are available? Again, over two thousand and counting! Do you think they are all the same – besides the way they look? Once more, think again! The difference in chemical makeup between the vast arrays of stones sold as “granite” can be – and is – huge!

Now, assuming that one particular type of glass-cleaner is OK for, say, true geological granite, will it be safe also, on gneiss, or gabbro, or dolerite, or porphyry, and so on? How do you know what type of “granite” you actually have, beside the name given to you by your fabricator? Do you think they know for sure? I’ve got news for you: a good 95% of them do NOT. Their stone “education” comes from the invoice of the distributor, or from various “salesmen” who call on them. They actually believe it is ALL granite!

So, how do you feel about taking a chance with a glass cleaner for your daily maintenance chores?

As a restoration contractor I did witness my good share of permanent damages (mostly pitting or dulling) to “granite” allegedly due to the use of glass cleaners! They don’t happen right away, but they eventually will, if the combination is “right”!

What’s more, if your particular “granite” is a stone that does need to be sealed, the impregnator/sealer itself has a very good chance of interacting with cleaner and get damaged by it!

And, I don’t want even begin to mention marble, travertine, onyx and all other calcite-based stones!

How about a little dish soap and water? Could that damage “granite”?

No, it wouldn’t, but ... think about this:

Try to wash your hands with water and dish soap, then put them under running water and see how long it’ll take for them to rinse properly. To have such a thorough rinsing (which is the only one acceptable) on your countertop, you should be using a garden hose! So, what happens if you decide not to use a garden hose to rinse your countertop? It’s very simple: a very thin soap film will remain on the stone surface, even if you dry it with a towel. At the beginning you won’t be able to notice it, but as you keep “cleaning” your countertop in that way, it will build-up and, within a few months, your beautiful stone won’t be as shiny as it used to be anymore! Assuming that you can figure out what caused it (don’t expect any intelligence from the “expert” who suggested that you use such a home-brewed concoction!), you will have to remove all the soap scum, that is now caked on your countertop, by using a specialized strong chemical.

Then... it starts all over again!

Is this what you want?

There are companies out there that invest considerable amount of money to formulate specialty cleaning agents that are safe on all natural stone, and offer them to the market. Why do they do that if any glass-cleaner or dish soap could do the job?

You think about it.

The idea of having to buy specialty – and somehow expensive – cleaning products for your valuable natural stone installations may be annoying to a certain extent, but is your best bet if you care about your investment. After all, we’re talking about a few pennies a day and potentially huge savings down the road if it saves you just one restoration contract.

It took Mother Nature hundreds of thousands of years to make the things of beauty you proudly have in your home now. There is not one single piece of stone out there that can exactly match any of the stones you have. You have to respect and appreciate that, and not consider your stone like just another commodity. The way I see it, you didn’t actually buy your stone. You adopted it.

You have to consider it as your duty to give it the best care possible.

Ciao and good Luck

Maurizio Bertoli