

# TO SEAL OR NOT TO SEAL?

“Marble and travertine are very porous...you must seal them” and: “All granites must be sealed!!”

You’ve probably heard sentences like that from every single soul that’s been involved in your “stone adventure”. Are all these stone “gurus” right? How did they get their experience and stone education?

The answer to the first question is a big NO. They are not right. In fact, they are totally wrong!

The answer to the second question is: from various salesmen and importer/distributors invoices!

Let’s face it, natural stone is not simple. If one sells natural stone without having the slightest real education about it, that one will have to face problems coming in the form of complaints from his or her customers. Since it seems that nobody is interested at getting even a basic education about stone, it becomes natural, as an alternative, to gladly embrace any blanket rule that comes along, promoted in the form of some sort of a “miracle-in-a-bottle” by a whole army of salesmen who, of course, never even looked at the cover of a petrography book!

Blanket rules are an oxymoron when applied to a complex and so diverse material like natural stone. The exceptions are so many that the rules would lose any meaning. And, in fact, they do!

Let’s do a tiny bit of homework. “Marble and travertine are very porous...you must seal them!!” WRONG! Marble (especially all those mercantile marbles that are actually compact limestone) and travertine are NOT very porous. If you don’t believe me, try to spill a few drops of water, say, on a polished travertine tile and observe how long it will take to be absorbed (the area under the water would become darker). A long, long, loooong time! So, what’s the story with all those stains on polished marble and travertine? Very simple, they are not stain. They are, in fact, marks of corrosion (etch marks) that any acidic substance will leave behind when becoming in contact with the surface of the stone. They do not look like water stains, or water rings, but they’re neither stains, nor were they generated by water. The deriving (surface) damage has no related to its chemical makeup. No sealer in the entire world could do anything to prevent such kinds of damage.

“All granites must be sealed!!” TRUE. Granite is indeed more porous than marble and will stain if not protected with a good-quality impregnator-type stone sealer. So then, then the salesmen are right, after all!! What’s the problem? Well, only a small one: The vast majority of the stone traded as granite are, in fact, related to granite like a cat to a cow! Consequently, while it’s true that real granites need to be sealed, there are other “granites” – much denser than granite - that need no sealing. Some will even develop problems related to the sealer, if sealed nonetheless! At the other end of the spectrum, some other “granites” are so darn porous, that no sealer will do a satisfactory job at sealing them 100% and for a long time! Again, keep in mind that I’m NOT talking about a few samples, here: I’m talking about the VAST MAJORITY of the stones traded as granite! So, how good is the blanket rule to seal everything in sight that doesn’t move?

After some research, it leads me to one very sound conclusion: The more you leave the stone alone, the better! Let’s make no mistake, sealers are a good invention, and do help a great deal when applied in the right applications, but the way they are promoted and touted makes them one of the most overrated, oversold and over applied product in the history of mankind!

Sealers for stones, which are below surface, penetrating-type sealers (also referred to as “impregnators”), were designed to do one thing and one thing only: clog the pores of the stone

so that alien liquids will not be absorbed by it. Now ask to yourself: "What kind of chances there are that some coffee or cooking oil will be spilled on stone – and without realizing it (so that it's going to sit on it a long time) – to call for a sealing job?" The answer to that question will tell you exactly how much you actually need to have your stone sealed. If you conclude that the chances are minimal, and then for the sake of your stone, leave it alone! It makes no sense to seal, say, a Botticino Classico, or Travertine foyer or shower-recess: those two stone are not very absorbent to begin with, and the chances of staining (in a foyer, or inside a shower enclosure) are remote to say the least. As it makes no sense to seal a, say, larvikite or anorthosite kitchen countertop (both stones are traded as granite): the sealer itself has no chance to be adsorbed due to the density of the stone. Many a times, I witnessed problem in the form of etching occurring on black "granite" (gabbro, dolerite, etc) countertops. It turned out that the little residue of sealer left on the surface of the stone (nothing went inside it!) was actually etching, not certainly the stone! Once I professionally removed the sealer, everything was fine! Again, what sense would it make to seal walls clad with White Sardinia? The stone – a true granite – does need sealing if you use it as a kitchen countertop, because of the likelihood of staining agents being spilled onto it, but what kind of chances there are to spill some staining agent on a wall?!

Bottom line, no "miracle-in-a-bottle" promoted by the best salesmen can even vaguely be intended as a substitute to professionalism! Like I said before, sealers do help a great deal, but one must learn where and when to apply them.

I devised a little, easy test, to find out if your stone is the proper one for the application to begin with and if it needs sealing or not.

#### [The lemon Juice \(and oil\) test](#)

What to look for? Two things: Absorbency and acid sensitivity. You do NOT want a "granite" too darn absorbent, and you do NOT want a "granite" this is mixed with calcite (the main component of marble and limestone) And here comes my little "lemon juice (and oil) test" to the rescue! Since you can't get the true geological name of the stones you brought home with you (nor probably you care to!), what you want to know is which one is going to make you happy. Line your samples on a table or countertop, dust them thoroughly then spill a few drops of lemon juice and cooking oil on each one of them. If you notice that where the juice and the oil hit the stone its surface turns dark just about immediately, you take those scraps and dump them in the garbage can (where they belong) without a second thought! If you notice that the juice and the oil take a little time to get absorbed (a half a minute or better), then you have a stone whose absorbency can be effectively controlled with a good-quality impregnator like our MB-4. If you finally notice that some samples will not absorb anything within, say, half an hour or so, then you may have a winner right there! That stone will not even need to be sealed!

Now, how to eliminate the word may from the equation? The answer resides in another question: Why using lemon juice instead of, say plain water? Because, like I mentioned above, you're not just looking to determine the absorbency of the stones you're considering, but you also want to determine that your samples are 100% silicate rocks (whether true granite or not), opposed to some stones – still traded as granite – that are mixed with various percentages of calcite. If there's even a little calcite in the stone, it will react to the high acidity of the lemon juice (citric acid) and, when you wipe your spills dry, you will notice a dull spot of the same shape of the lemon drops. In such case, once again, off into the trash they go! If instead it's still nice and shiny under where the drops were, then you eliminated the may factor!

If, because of the type of stone, and of where it was installed you conclude that it needs to be sealed, then I recommend using "MB-4" Impregnator for Stone and More. It's very effective and comes with a 10 year warranty.

As a final consideration from a stone lover like myself, I would like to submit to your attention that it took Mother Nature up to a few hundreds of thousand of years to make that stone that you now proudly own and embellishes your surroundings. Think about it, each and every piece of stone you own has no match in the entire world! You must appreciate and respect that, Along with it unmatched beauty, however, you have also to accept its physical limitations. Don't consider and treat your stone like just another commodity. You have to feel responsible for its proper maintenance and care, because you did not just buy your stone. You actually adopted it.

NOT ALL STONES NEED TO BE SEALED,  
AND THAT WHEN A STONE DOESN'T NEED TO BE SEALED,  
SEALING IT ANYWAY IS NOT ONLY A TOTAL WASTE OF TIME  
AND MONEY, BUT PLAIN WRONG...

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