

## Natural Stone Sealer or Stone Enhancer?

You've just had your gorgeous new countertops installed – now what? Before anything has a chance to stain or damage your new stone surfaces, you want to be sure to protect them. Although there is a ton of information out there, and as many products as there are options in the stone itself, it basically boils down to two choices: stone sealer or enhancer.

## Why and How to Protect Your Stone

Since stone occurs naturally, it is resilient and will last for generations if properly cared for. That care begins from the moment your stone is installed. While it will last for a very long time, spills and stains such as wine, coffee, fingernail polish, permanent marker, and candle wax can put a hurting on your natural stone surface. Proper care will extend the life of your stone, prevent staining and scratching, and help you maintain its beautiful appearance.

To care for your surfaces, you'll first want to enhance, seal, or both. Then you'll need to clean regularly with a non-acidic cleanser (avoid lemon and vinegar, as these have an acidic pH) like More™ Stone and Tile Cleaner, and a soft cleaning tool like a microfiber mop, rather than something abrasive like steel wool.

## To Seal, Enhance, or Both?

As the first step in a maintenance routine for your new stone, you'll need to enhance or seal it. But, before choosing your method, perhaps it's best to discuss the differences between the two. An enhancer is a product that seeps deep into the minerals of the stone to bring out or highlight color variations and shine. A stone sealer provides a protective barrier against rust, stains, and natural elements like humidity, and there are benefits to each of the types of sealers available. When used together, it's best to apply the enhancer before the sealer.

## Stone Sealers

Stone sealers come in two major varieties – penetrating (impregnating) and topical. As you might guess, a penetrating sealer goes deep into the stone to protect it from within. It works by leaving behind resins once the water or other solution has evaporated. These resins are what form the protective barrier against liquid stains. They work by increasing the time it takes for a liquid to soak into the stone, thus giving you plenty of time to wipe up a spill before it becomes a stain. A penetrating sealer lasts longer than its counterpart, and typically only needs to be reapplied every few years.

A topical sealer sits on top of the surface of your stone. While they don't last as long as penetrating sealers, topical sealers offer better protection against foot traffic and scrapes. They can also provide a slightly non-slip surface and can be buffed to a high shine. These applications are best suited to restaurants and outdoor living spaces, such as by a pool. Topical sealers can prevent the flow of water vapor, which can be harmful to your stone. Over time, water vapor will try to escape, and with no outlet, it may cause cracks in the stone's surface. Topical sealers are not generally used on countertops made of smooth, dense stones like marble or granite, as they need a rough surface to adhere to. This makes them perfect for concrete or stone flooring.

## Water or Solvent-Based Penetrating Sealer

When looking at what kind of sealer to use, it's good to keep in mind the location and purpose of the stone. As noted before, A topical sealer is great for the pool area, as it can be polished to a high shine, and has some light anti-slip properties. But for your kitchen countertops, you're going to want to go with a penetrating sealer. Penetrating sealers come in two basic types – water-based and solvent-based. A solvent-based sealer will penetrate deeper and offer protection against a broader range of spills, including oil-based accidents. It does, however, leave a lingering smell and may not be preferable in a kitchen.

A water-based sealer does not penetrate quite as deeply, but it's essentially odor-free, and it provides excellent protection against liquid spills. All penetrating sealers work basically the same way. The resins left behind in the application process prevent stains from soaking into the stone itself, so that they can be wiped away quickly and easily. Remember though, time is of the essence. Any spill still needs to be dealt with immediately, as it will cause a stain if left to sit on the surface for an extended period of time – regardless of the penetration depth of your sealer.

## Stone Enhancer

If you love the natural beauty of the stone you chose, you'll want to use an enhancer to intensify the naturally occurring differences in light – providing both a deepening of the colors in the stone and that “wet” look so many of us prefer. Enhancers work by seeping deep below the surface and binding with the minerals in the stone. When they do this, colors stand out more, as does marbling. Enhancers bring out the natural shine in a stone and give very light protection against stains.

## In Short

Enhancers and sealers serve different purposes when applied to natural stone. Enhancers sharpen and deepen color variances and lend a shine to natural stone. Enhancers help to bring out the natural beauty of your stone, but they aren't a necessary part of regular stone maintenance. Sealers, however, are not something you want to skip over.

There are impregnating (penetrating) sealers and topical sealers. Topical sealers act just as they sound – they lay on top of your stone's surface. They can be polished to a high shine, have mild anti-slip properties, and protect against scuffs and scrapes, but they do not protect against water vapor and the resulting cracks. This type of sealer is found most often poolside and in restaurants.

Penetrating sealers go deep inside the surface of a stone and adhere to the minerals to form a seal. Water-based penetrating sealers only provide protection against water-based spills, but they don't leave a lingering smell and are often preferable in kitchens. Oil-based sealers work for any number of spill types, and penetrate deeper. When used in conjunction with one another, enhancer should be applied before sealer.