

Engineered Stone



One of the more interesting products to emerge in the last decade has been engineered stone. In fact, it's very much a hot ticket these days. Made from a mix of stone aggregates, usually marble and quartz mixed in with pigments and polyester resins, engineered stone offers the end user a durable high gloss or matt finish resistant to heat, scratching, chipping and staining while also being largely unaffected by chemical, acid or solvent attack. It's the ideal product for use in kitchen and bathroom benchtops, various countertops and custom made design features or indeed any demanding environment that requires a durable surface.

The popularity of engineered stone lies in two key factors: colours and consistency. Natural stone offers a uniqueness in colour and texture in that no two slabs are the same but engineered stone can offer a wider range of colours particularly the lighter creams and beige colours, with a colour consistency throughout each slab. This fits well with the demands of modern fashion in kitchen and bathroom design. It's a case of consistency in colour against the natural variations in stone. Pricing wise, it is up there with natural stone or thereabouts but the interesting thing has been the penetration of the product type from the upper through to the middle end of the market.

The product is manufactured overseas and imported by various distributors here in New Zealand. The one exception would be the brand Stonex that is made locally. The predominant technology used to make the product is the Breton brand of machinery from Spain. It is fabricated here using a wide range of sophisticated cutting and polishing machines largely imported from Europe. Technology plays a big part in the fabrication of engineered and natural stone. Being able to meet the demand to produce ever more intricate work is very much an issue in gaining that all important competitive edge. This is particularly so in the specialist markets such as making componentry for the superyacht industry.

Although most leading brands offer their product in 20 or 30mm thicknesses with a variety of different edgings, finishes and sizes, some offer other thicknesses as well, such as Stonex and RockSolid Granit which come in 6mm versions and are attached to a substrate. The other leading brands include Silestone from Parburys, Quantum Quartz from PSP Stonecraft, Quarella from The Tile Warehouse, CaesarStone from The Laminex Group and Stone Italiana from Absola Stone Ltd, some of which are featured in more detail in the following pages.



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CaesarStone

One of the most popular brands of engineered stone in New Zealand is CaesarStone imported by The Laminex Group. Made in Israel it consists of a blend of 94% quartz aggregates and 6% pigments and polyester resins, which gives it an extremely durable high gloss finish that is cool to touch and highly resistant to heat, scratching, chipping and staining and is largely unaffected by chemical, acid or solvent attack. Its popularity is reflected in its widespread use in a number of demanding environments that require a durable yet flexible surface and the increased number of companies who used to only supply natural stone and granite, now selling CaesarStone. JOINERS Magazine spoke to three such companies who fabricate CaesarStone for the local market.

SCE Stone & Design based in Ellerslie, Auckland have been selling natural stone benchtops and tile products into the New Zealand market for the past 25 years. "At the upper end of the market there has always been keen interest in the use of natural stone sourced from all over the world not only for benchtop surfaces but in other applications such as floors, vanities, various custom made design feature, even for swimming pools" comments General Manager John Richmond. "The emergence of engineered stone such as CaesarStone has dramatically increased the number of options available for countertops and surfaces. The success of this material is largely a reflection on the colours and consistency of the product. While each slab of natural stone is unique in appearance, the colours available are limited by nature. Granites for example are very durable but can be rather bold in colour and thus aesthetically less suitable for some applications. CaesarStone stone offers a product with similar technical charac-

teristics to a granite but in a wider variety of colours more commonly associated with softer materials such as marble or limestone (creams, taupes, off white and beige). This fits well with the demands of contemporary fashions particularly in kitchen and bathroom design. And the consistency of colour overall appeals to folk that are wary of the natural variations that occur in natural stone making CaesarStone a product that appeals to a very wide market in this very fashion conscious environment."

These are comments echoed by Graeme Thorne, a Director of Italian Stone Limited based in the Auckland suburb of New Lynn for the last 22 years. "Getting the right colour is an important part of the process. Natural stone offers that certain uniqueness yes but getting a guaranteed consistency as we can from CaesarStone meets the requirements of a marketplace in which this is now a growing trend. Engineered stone as a product type is

easily cut and polished and offers a bit more in flexibility with less breakages."

Bramco Granite and Marble based in Wellington also sell natural stone as well as CaesarStone. Established in 2002, Bramco like SCE and Italian Stone have found engineered stone to fill a gap in the market for an affordable alternative to natural stone. "Natural stone will always have its place for the upper end of the market, but a product like CaesarStone has a broader audience because of its pricing and of course because of its ability to meet the demands of fashion through its consistency of colour throughout any one slab." says Director Mark Bramwell.

In each of these three companies engineered stone product makes up a considerable part of their sales attesting to its continued popularity. All import their natural stone from all over the world and cut and polish to the final ver-



Italian Stone use a Thibaut stone cutting and polishing machine from France.

sion at their respective factories. CaesarStone is imported by The Laminex Group and thus available locally which is a significant attraction. Another big factor in the stone business is technology. Each of these companies has imported sophisticated cutting and polishing machinery. "Having the best machinery is vital in keeping up with the demands of the marketplace to produce ever more complex work quickly and cost effectively." points out Mark Bramwell who have recently imported a CNC saw from Italian manufacturers GMM Litox that enables them to cut product faster. Again, it's a view also held by SCE and Italian Stone who both have European machinery in their operations: SCE with Denver from Italy and Italian Stone with Thibaut from France.

Specialist applications in the use of natural and engineered stone are now more common as these companies stretch their wings looking at new markets. The superyacht industry is one good example. John Richmond comments "This has been an expanding market in recent years for SCE both locally and internationally. It's an extremely demanding market that continually challenges us to develop technical solutions to provide for the increasingly intricate and complex details that are specified for these projects."

The future for engineered stone looks assured with demand for products like CaesarStone ever increasing. "Increasing volume and affordability to an even wider

market are the issues facing most of us these days." comments Graeme Thorne. "Keeping in touch with what fashion and colours are in at any given time are the day to day concern. When you are working in a tough, noisy, dirty, dusty environment let alone competitive business you have to have a certain passion for the game." John Richmond adds "Passion certainly is important. Its interesting to note that those who do get involved in the stone business seem to stay involved for a very long time."

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The surface is unaffected by sun and UV rays and can be placed in direct sunlight with no problems whatsoever in terms of discolouration or fading. It is genuinely heat resistant to 200°C, meaning dishes and pots can be placed on it straight from the oven or off the element. Add this the fact that it is chemical resistant and stain and scratch resistant and you have a truly 100% maintenance free product with a long life.

While predominantly used here in counters, benchtops and splashbacks the product is very versatile and is also used in showers and as a wall cladding. It has a very high consistency of colour and pattern, a point which often finds favour with the consumer and also simplifies any matching required in the manufacturing process.

Having proven it self in over 30 years of use around the world Rocksolid Granit comes in 6mm sheets and uses high resin content MDF as a substrate ensuring stability where it is needed on the benchtop. It can be bent for counter fronts to a 700mm radius making it one of the few bendable stone products available.

These qualities along with the service by New Zealand agents Granite Transformations mean it is a sought after product with designers and manufacturers.

Jenny Harris from Design In-Sink in Auckland has been designing kitchens for more than 10 years and has noticed a big trend towards

engineered stone especially in the last 5 years. She has a Rocksolid Granit benchtop in her own kitchen and loves it because it is 'everything proof'.

"I actually use a number of different engineered stones in kitchens I design and find it is often a colour choice by the client as to which brand they choose. Rocksolid Granit compares very well, it is a great product with a good range of colour and patterns and as it is available in 6mm sheets can be very cost effective and suits the budget of a lot of people. I have never had a problem with the product and any installation difficulties are quickly and easily handled by Granite Transformations who are always obliging to my clients and work well to agreed schedules."

Gwyneth Hand who designs kitchens for the Kitchen Studio in Albany has been using the product for 4 years and also likes it. "We have a Rocksolid Granit benchtop in our showroom and people seem drawn to it - they like its tactile nature and often select it on that basis and the fact that its consistency in colour and pattern suits their taste. I like working with the guys at Granite Transformations, they are always helpful and I like the way they treat my clients as if they were their own"

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The natural beauty of Silestone® together with its physical and mechanical features makes it the perfect material for use in a wide range of commercial and domestic applications from the obvious kitchen and bathroom tops to the more innovative stairs, bathtubs, floors, walls, bar rails, tables and desks.

Manufactured in Spain by Cosentino, Silestone is widely used in European countries and the USA. Silestone is one of the most environmentally sensitive materials for commercial or residential use. It is composed of 94% quartz and 6% resin and colour and is virtually maintenance free. Silestone is also a Greenguard certified product.

Silestone, is the first and only quartz surface available incorporating Microban active antibacterial protection. Its unique combination of quartz, glass, polymer resin and colour pigments creates a versatile surface for hospitals, hotel receptions, aged care and retail fitouts as well as kitchen and bathroom applications.

Microban antibacterial protection is built-in during the manufacturing process meaning it cannot wear away or wash off, so your Silestone worktop is protected for the life of the product. Microban will inhibit the growth of potentially harmful bacteria, such as salmonella, e-coli and listeria that can cause food poisoning.

Distributed in New Zealand by Parbury, Silestone has found favour with designers and manufacturers alike. "It is a product which is hard to go past," say Parbury's NZ Sales Manager Trevor Hayde. "It has the same advantages as other engineered stones - it doesn't require any initial or ongoing sealing as is the case with many granites, it has great consistency in colour and pattern and is scratch resistant, stain resistant, and heat resistant - as well as that with Silestone you have the added value of the Microban protection."

Silestone is available in 12, 20 and 30mm thicknesses and in a wide range of colours and patterns about 10 of which are available ex stock from Parbury. A new innovation with Silestone is the recent introduction of the Leather Range which has a matt as opposed to a gloss surface giving a unique effect, which is also proving popular with the design community.

For more information go to the Parbury website www.parbury.co.nz

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The process of sink insert installation in solid surface materials is not as simple as it sounds, it requires careful 'following of the instructions' as well as practical experience according to the situation. Dux Industries Ltd suppliers of the well known Oliveri range of sinkware provide information on installing their undermounted Oliveri MO70 insert into a granite benchtop.



The one thing that emerges from the installation instructions is that care must be taken to follow them precisely. Each Oliveri undermount sink is supplied with a full size cut out template which must be exactly positioned on the bench top which also allows for the installer to check that the tap location is suitable and sufficient space is allowed for connecting the tap and the underside of the cabinet will not foul the mounting flange of the sink.

The cutout should make an allowance for any additional polishing back after cutting. The bottom line is that the template must be the exact finished cutout size required. The granite bench top thickness in the installation shown is 20mm and the sink insert is designed for a bench top with a minimum width of 600mm.

The bench top here is in two parts being joined at the front and back with the tap hole being pre-drilled. The rear rail of the cupboard is removed to fit the tapware then the two sections of granite are joined - to be filled with epoxy and colour matched to the granite.

The sink edge is lined with masking to stop any sealant from marking the stainless steel as well as the granite cutout edge and then a trial fit is made to ensure the top flange is clear of the sink rim. The tapware is installed at this stage as well. Once a bridge and threaded rods is put in place the sink insert can be pulled up from beneath the granite surface and a sealant suitable for both granite and stainless steel applied to the sink rim. The sink is then aligned in the cutout and pulled up to the granite and the masking tape and surplus sealant removed. If an additional granite adhesive is used it should be used after the sealant applied to fix the sink to the bench top.



AN OLIVERI MO70 INTO A GRANITE TOP



Join at front & back of granite. Tap hole pre-drilled.



Sealant applied to rim of sink.



Tap hole/joint & rear rail removed to fit tapware.



Ready to pull up. Sink aligned in cut out.



Both sections in place. Ready to join granite.



Sink pulled up tight, masking tape & surplus sealant removed.



Granite joint filled with epoxy & color matched to granite.



Rim of sink pulled up tight.



Sink edge masked to stop sealant from marking the stainless steel.



Front corner of sink. Note fit of cut out to rim.



Granite cutout masked. Fit tap at this stage.



Tap pad shows oversize cut out. Sink wont align with granite edge.



Trial fit sink to ensure tap flange is clear of sink rim.



View underneath finished installation showing underside of granite and reinforcing rail to front of cabinet. Epoxy underside of sink rim.



Bridge & threaded rods in place to pull sink up to granite surface.



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The Master range from Biesse's Intermac

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A new comer to engineered stone bench top manufacture is Linea Stone. With the recent purchase of an Intermac 33 CNC stone cutting machine from Biesse New Zealand Linea Stone's managing director Adam Sharp has established a factory in Rosebank Rd in the Auckland suburb of Avondale to manufacture benchtops from engineered stone for the furniture and kitchen industries.



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While a new comer to bench top manufacture, Adam Sharp is not new to the industry having many years experience in furniture manufacturing. In fact, in part at least, the new business is a hedge against the vagrancies of the furniture business. "The positive aspect about the kitchen industry is that generally it requires people on the ground and is not as susceptible to competition from imports as the furniture industry," says Adam.

Perhaps more importantly though is a perception that the bench top industry is undergoing a significant change. "For a long time the market was dominated by laminate and in particular Formica but new technologies and the comparative reduction in the price of granite and engineered stone has meant they have become serious alternatives. Also what used to have to be done by hand can now be done by machinery much more effectively and more accurately. Add to this the fact that continually increasing house

prices mean the cost of kitchens are comparatively lower and people are willing to spend more on them and we have a sustainable market segment," says Adam.

The CNC machinery available today is also extremely accurate and calls for a skilled operator as opposed to a craftsman. "We are using computerised technology all the way from site measurement to finished product. Our laser measuring equipment is used on site to instantly provide pricing and quoting as well as providing accurate fitting."

Linea Stone will initially concentrate on engineered stone bench tops but Adam sees potential for expanding business in other associated areas such as fire surrounds and vanities and other products such as granite and natural stone.

"Our vision for this market is to offer an exceptionally well valued product that is of a high quality and is delivered within



Thanks to a large range of accessories the Master 33 CNC machine from Intermac is a multi functional work centre able to carry out a huge range of tasks from cutting to carving with exacting accuracy.

the customers time constraints. As new entrant to the market we look forward to offering an affordable alternative for kitchen stone bench tops," concludes Adam.

For more information contact
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