

Stone Floor Care

A well-maintained stone floor provides visitors with the impression that they are inside a high-class facility. While stone presents a more sophisticated look than traditional hardwood or carpet, it can create some challenges when it comes to caring for it. Facility managers and owners often install stone floors the belief that the surfaces will last forever and will always look as lustrous as the day they were installed.

This is not the case. If stone is not properly cared for, it can become vulnerable to staining, lose its shine and even start to crack over time. However, an old stone floor is easy to restore with just a few basic steps and the proper equipment and maintenance practices.

Restoration

Even if a daily maintenance plan is in place, any stone floor will eventually begin to lose its polished finish due to wear and tear. The first step in restoring an older stone floor should be to strip away any buildup of old polish.

Stripping generally needs to be done every few months, depending on the amount of floor traffic. When preparing to strip the floor, check with manufacturers to make sure you are selecting an appropriate stripper because some stone types may react adversely to certain stripping products. Apply the stripper and let it sit for 10 minutes, then use a suitable machine to remove the dissolved polish.

Either a single-head machine or a planetary three-head machine will work well. Many single-head machines require extra balancing, which can be achieved by sweeping the machine back and forth to evenly cover the surface. Three-head machines are more aggressive in their stripping yet create less fatigue on the operator.

After stripping, neutralize the stripping solution by washing the floor with clean water, vacuum, and repeat if necessary. Before applying a new coat of polish, let the area dry for at least 12 hours.

Grinding and then polishing a stone floor may be required if the stripping doesn't remove all of the old polish. Grinding can also remove any scratches or deeper marks that may be present in the stone as well as removing lippage (the uneven edges or "lips" of adjacent tiles) and help provide a smoother surface for re-polishing.

The polishing in this system is done by using progressively higher grit diamond pads to remove scratches from the previous step and finally produce the finish desired. Grinding the top layer off the floor should only have to occur once every few years since stone floors only have so many layers.

When choosing a machine to grind off the top layer of the floor, a three-head machine is the better choice because a single-head machine can actually create more damage. Most three-head grinding machines can easily accommodate a floor's natural highs and lows. Hand grinders are also available to grind in harder-to-reach areas.

Grinding a floor can create a lot of dust. For this reason, some floor care professionals opt for a wet-grinding process. Wet grinding uses water to create a paste, reducing the amount of dust. However, there is the downside of dealing with the cleanup of the "slurry" produced by this method. When dry grinding, have a powerful vacuum attached to the grinder to remove dust. Diamond or honing powders can be used to produce extra shine during wet or dry grinding. See manufacturer recommendations on usage.

Polishing

After the floor has been stripped or ground down, the surface can be prepared for re-polishing. Many natural stone floors benefit from the application of polish so that the floor itself doesn't get ruined from day-to-day traffic. Re-polishing, like stripping, should be scheduled for every few months.

Before the polish is applied, some floor manufacturers may recommend the application of an impregnator. A proper impregnator protects the stone by penetrating the capillaries, keeping dirt, oil and water from seeping in. A good impregnator won't change the texture of the stone, nor should it change the stone's color. Some impregnators provide extra protection by allowing moisture to escape from the stone so that it can breathe easier.

Seals that trap moisture within the stone, increasing the risk for mold or mildew to develop, should be avoided. Select a polishing machine that can work around the stone's irregularities to ensure that the floor receives an even shine. Either a crystallizing or diamond polisher will work well in re-polishing. In the process of crystallization, heat is used to bond the polish to the stone for an extra shine. However, a diamond polisher, which uses actual diamond pads, is more commonly used.

When selecting a polish, make sure to choose a polish designed specifically for the stone type because some floor polish can damage certain types of stone. Apply the polish evenly to the floor and allow it to dry until it begins to look hazy. Then use either a single-head or three-head polisher to buff the polish. Repeat this process until the desired shine is achieved.

Daily Requirements

Stone floors require daily maintenance to make the most of their restored, polished finish. A stone floor's biggest enemies are sand and dirt, which can rapidly scratch the restored surface and reduce its shine. The more traffic a stone floor is exposed to the faster the shine can fade. Meet with cleaning staff to create a daily maintenance schedule that involves dust mopping or vacuuming the floor daily.

Also, plan to apply a neutral stone cleaner daily, weekly or bi-weekly, depending on the amount of foot traffic in the area. Always check to make sure the cleaner selected is intended for use on the stone type.

Show off your stone floors!

A stone floor can offer an extra touch of class to any building, with its smooth surface and shiny finish. But any floor can lose its luster if it is not properly cared for, making the building appear dirty as well. However, with the proper equipment and procedures, caring for stone floors can be easy and can result in beautiful, shiny floors.