A Heart of STONE

Why top designers are falling for bold, bright and boisterous marble.

By ERIN MCLAUGHLIN
any creatives wax lyrical when discussing their passion projects, but interior designers and architects can be downright emotional about choosing a material for a space. “It stopped me in my tracks,” remarks style and lifestyle guru Athena Calderone of EyeSwoon. “I liked the movement and stormy feel,” says award-winning London-based architect Jake Moulson wistfully. Calderone and Moulson aren’t referring to an expansive panorama or the beauty of a historic structure but rather individual slabs of extravagantly coloured and patterned marble.

For the past few decades, Carrara and Calacatta marbles, both cloud grey with soft veining, have been the obvious choices for residential spaces. Their subtle tones bring natural texture and ambience to otherwise neutral rooms. In contrast, cutting-edge designers like Moulson and Calderone are now pushing colour boundaries by using larger-than-life marble in intense hues for everything from countertop to wall cladding. “People want to take risks and engage the unexpected, weird and unorthodox a bit more now,” says Calderone. “Strong, contrasting and saturated hues are suddenly beloved across all materiality.”

Perhaps, as a reaction to our frantic made-today-sold-tomorrow approach to consumption, designers are drawn to the fact that these stones’ natural intensity took up to 200 million years to form, as pressure and extreme heat worked their magic on calcite and dolomite crystals. (And marble is a geological baby compared to diamond, which can take up to 3.3 billion years.)

The use of coloured marble isn’t uniquely modern—after all, the ancient Roman Pantheon’s oculus looks down on a dramatically patterned floor of red and amber marble slabs. But the look does have renewed appeal, especially for Jenna Lyons, a designer with inimitable style. In fact, the former creative director for J.Crew always looks to history when she renovates. Lyons’ jaw-dropping SoHo loft is featured in Calderone’s upcoming book, Live Beautiful. In the master bathroom, a thickly skirted marble vanity balances on delicate baroque-style bronze legs that Lyons patinated herself by spritzing them with saltwater spray to accelerate the oxidization. The stone Lyons chose has bold and distinctive dark-green and purple veining that works beautifully with the verdigris. “Isn’t the marble just spectacular?” enthuses Calderone. “She wanted ‘life’—spills, stains, the messy stuff—to colour her home.”
“Spectacular” doesn’t come cheap. “A slab can cost upwards of $3,500,” says Brenda Izen, principal of Izen Architecture, an award-winning Toronto-based studio that focuses on the design of high-end modern homes. But that didn’t prevent Izen from getting one of her clients excited about using a dramatic green marble, which she’s “obsessed with,” in their bathroom—a room where white once reigned supreme. “We’re going to use it on every surface, including the walls, countertops, sinks and shower and tub surround. It’s going to be show-stopping.”

Another exciting quality of these unforgettable stones is that they allow even the smallest of spaces to have a staggering impact. When Moulson was working on a tiny bathroom in his acclaimed D2 Townhouse in Dublin, he opted to cover the walls in floor-to-ceiling painterly lilac Azul Imperial. “I wanted it to meld into the sky,” he explains. “It turned out quite well—particularly on a cloudy day.”

When it came time to choose a material for her own master bathroom, Calderone found herself unexpectedly drawn to pink marble with intensely-rose-hued veins. The stone, which ended up cladding her shower walls, had the suitably romantic name Rosa Aurora and swiftly stole her heart. “To be honest, I never imagined that I would use pink, but I went with my instincts,” says Calderone. “Even my husband loves it”—anecdotal evidence that the irresistible appeal of these unforgettable marbles is truly universal.