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# Marble enhances nature-inspired estate

For a high-end residence located right outside of downtown Toronto, the owners employed a wide range of marble tile, complemented by custom-made tile mosaics, to create an environment reminiscent of the surrounding landscape

by Heather Fiore







Photo courtesy of Gennifer Buscemi

The house unfolds with the grand foyer, where 36- x 36- x ¾-inch-thick Pallisandro Classico marble slabs clad the floors, accented by Prestige Brown Marble and Desert Brown marble. A custom-made waterjet medallion is the feature of the foyer, which is constructed of a combination of all three marbles, and depicts the overall nature-inspired theme the home is supposed to portray.





Photo courtesy of Gennifer Buscemi

The 36- x 36- x ¾-inch-thick Pallisandro Classico marble slabs carry on into the hallways and great room, where they're complemented by Prestige Brown and Desert Brown flanking corridors.

Each year, Coverings, known as the largest international tile and stone exhibition in North America, hosts the Coverings Installation & Design (CID) Awards, which is a program that honors outstanding design and installation of tile and stone in residential, commercial, sustainable and international projects.

This year, 15 tile and stone projects were recognized at the fourth edition of the CID Awards, including two grand prize winners — one for tile and one for stone. In addition to the grand prize winners, the 2015 CID Awards recognized 13 other projects for their exceptional work in tile and stone design and installation from around the world. One of the projects, a private residence located in Vaughan, Ontario, Canada, won an award in the "Residential Stone Installation" category for its unique use of stone tile and custom mosaics throughout, which are notable aspects of the design.

The one-of-a-kind home, which was designed by Ambience Design Group in Woodbridge, Ontario, Canada, features 9,400 square feet of different types of stone tile and incorporates a range of custom-designed waterjet mosaic pieces throughout its many different rooms. "They [owners] gave us almost 'carte blanche,'" said Josie Abate, owner of Ambience Design Group. "The exterior of the home is a small, French chateau, so we took cues from that. We interviewed our clients, a husband and wife, who had some ideas. The lady of the house decided the color schemes and interior design, so we really got to know her. They [clients] are very lovely people. The wife liked a bit of ornament and a lot of light. The house is infused with a lot of light; going through the house, there are large, expansive windows and all of the rooms are bathed in light.

"She liked light colors, so we created something that was a little more

feminine," Abate went on to explain. "Not overly feminine, but ornate. We wanted to use very elegant, extremely high-end materials for everything. So, we created something that was traditional with light colors and a modern touch. We didn't want to go too ornate where it would look like a museum or the Palace of Versailles."

Since the 16,400-square-foot house sits on a 200-acre lot, surrounded by nature, Abate and her team wanted to incorporate natural elements, but also make it a bit modern, since it's also located in close proximity to downtown Toronto. "We took cues from nature," said Abate. "We wanted to infuse nature and bring it inside — give life to the home. They have so much light coming in — you can see light coming in from everywhere — so we said, 'let's bring it in to the design elements.' The intent was to complement, not overpower, certain elements, such as the ornate staircase

In the kitchen, the Pallisandro Classico marble is also seen on the floor. A different variation for the wall — 2- x 4- x  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick Botticino marble tiles — were utilized for the backsplash in the main area, pantry and server's area. To complement the marble and create somewhat of a contrast within the kitchen, a Ciani granite countertop was selected for the main island, which is accompanied by touches of Botticino Fiorito marble.

made up of wrought iron [in the foyer of the home].

"We combined two to three colors of marble and it was effective," Abate went on to say. "It was not too colorful. We wanted the focus to be on the design. When you walk through the front door, it's actually very inviting. The main medallion in the entry foyer [one of the main design elements] becomes a focus, but it doesn't fight with the staircase."

Although Abate and her team strived to create a balance between Old World-style and a contemporary feel, she explained how they still managed to develop a "traditional layout" for the home. "It's very symmetrical," she said. "On the left side, there's the living room, then on the right side, there's the dining room. When you walk into the home, it leads visitors into those areas. We thought it was welcoming and that it worked."

To accomplish a perfect blend of styles throughout the home, Abate and her design team selected a varying range of stone tile to utilize, the majority of which was marble. "Marble was used everywhere with the exception of the living room and dining room," said Abate. "It was used because marble is a prestigious, high-end material and that's the kind of look they wanted. They used marble slabs for a lot of the areas so you don't see the joints; it's all bookmatched to look like one unit and that was the whole idea. Wherever there's stone on the main floor, they're all marble slabs. The rest is Walnut wide-plank flooring, which is really



beautiful. The staircase is also Walnut; they did not want a stone staircase because they thought it would look too cold. It's also a good contrast of wood and marble.

"In the basement, we used some marble tiles, not slabs," Abate went on to say. "That's because marble slabs require more work; they're more expensive and the installation is more expensive as well. It was also easier to get tiles down into the basement."

## Beginning the marble journey

In the main entrance, hallway, and for the main custom mosaic medallion in the entry foyer, a combination of Prestige Brown Marble and Desert Brown marble slabs in a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thickness were used, as well as 36- x 36- x  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick Pallisandro Classico marble slabs. The 36- x 36- x  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick Pallisandro Classico marble slabs carry on into the great room, where they clad the floors, as well as the floors in





Photo courtesy of Gennifer Buscemi

For their master bathroom ensuite — the only place in the master bedroom where marble was used — the owners decided to employ a more classic look. Calacatta Polished marble slabs, in a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thickness, were used for the floors and countertops, while 12- x 24- x  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick Calacatta Polished tiles were used for the walls.

the two cloak rooms, kitchen, kitchen pantry, and kitchen server's area. In the kitchen, marble continues up onto the walls, where 2- x 4- x  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick Botticino marble tiles were utilized for the backsplash in the main area, pantry and server's area.

To complement the marble and create somewhat of a contrast within the kitchen and the surrounding areas, the owners decided to employ some different high-end stones. For the main kitchen island, a Cianitus granite countertop was used, which is accompanied by touches of Botticino Fiorito marble; the Cianitus granite was also employed for the bar countertop in the great room. The kitchen, pantry and server's area also feature Dreamy Marfil quartz countertops, which are off-white in color, with distinct, yet subtle veins throughout, to provide a nice relief to the marble and granite used around it. The quartz continues on to the surrounding laundry room and mudroom, where it's used

for countertops in both rooms; Bianco Drift quartz was utilized in the laundry room, while Shitake quartz was utilized in the mudroom.

For their master bathroom ensuite — the only place in the master bedroom where marble was used — the owners decided to employ a more classic look. Calacatta Polished marble slabs, in a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thickness, were used for the floors and countertops, while 12- x 24- x  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick Calacatta Polished tiles were used for the walls. For their walk-in closet, they accented the walls with the Botticino Fiorito marble, which is also seen on the main kitchen island.

The remaining marble on the first floor is seen in its two bathrooms — with 36- x 36- x  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick Crema Fedora marble slabs, which were used for the floors and countertops in one bathroom; and 30- x 30- x  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick Botticino Semi Classico marble slabs, which were used for the floors and countertops in the other bathroom.

## Expanding the color palette

On the second floor, the owners opted for a full color range of marbles throughout each of the three bedrooms' bathroom's ensuites — from very neutral whites to dark, highly-veined browns — and followed the same layout for each room, with marble floors and countertops and semi-precious mosaic accents for the shower wall features. In the second bathroom's ensuite, 12- x 24- x  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick Nestos Marron Polished marble slabs were used for the countertops and floors in the shower, while Glasstone Sapphire Azul marble, glass and stainless steel tile mosaics were used to accent the shower floors and walls. In the third bathroom's ensuite, 12- x 24- x  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch-thick Blue de Savoie Honed marble slabs were used for the floors, tub wall and countertop; the tub wall's detail and face were complemented with Forest Pearl Glass and Mother of Pearl tile mosaics. In the fourth and final bedrooms' bathroom



In one of the three bathrooms on the second floor, 28- x 28- x ¾-inch-thick Bianco Namibia Polished marble slabs were utilized for the floors and the countertops, while a mosaic collection from Sicis was used for the custom-designed feature wall behind the tub, which truly evokes the nature-inspired theme the design team was trying to achieve.

Photo courtesy of Gennifer Buscemi





In the basement, the floors are clad in 18- x 18- x ½-inch-thick Palissandro Classico marble tiles, which was also used to construct the main medallion in the middle of the floor. A range of other marble was used to construct the medallion, including ¾-inch-thick Desert Brown marble slabs, Prestige Brown marble slabs and Bursa Gold Beige Polished marble slabs.

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### Venturing to the colorful and contemporary

In the basement, it seems the most color — in the broadest spectrum — was utilized, incorporating some of the owners most ambitious design ideas. The hallways are lined with 18- x 18- x ½-inch-thick Palissandro Classico marble tiles, as well as the floors in the service kitchen and coat room; this marble was also used to construct the main medallion in the basement, which serves as the showcase piece on this floor, similar to the medallion

located in the entry foyer. A range of other marble was used to construct the medallion, including ¾-inch-thick Desert Brown marble slabs (which were also used for the guest room countertops on this floor), Prestige Brown marble slabs (which were also used for the service kitchen countertops, kitchen and bar countertops and backsplash, and hallway border on this floor) and Bursa Gold Beige Polished marble slabs.

The guest room's bathroom ensuite features Botticino Semi Classico marble slabs on the countertops and Glasstone Colonial Brown marble, Light Emperador marble and glass mosaic tiles on the shower floors and walls. Located nearby, in the basement's main bathroom, 18- x 18- x ¾-inch-thick Bianco Carrara Polished slabs, which were cut down to ¾-inch-thick tiles, were used for the countertops and floors, while 1-

x 1- x ⅝-inch-thick Cristallo Teal/Grey/ Bianco Carrara Blend mosaic tiles were utilized for the walls.

Although the majority of the marble is seen on the first floor, a good amount was employed in the spa and sauna that's located in the basement, which is quite possibly one of the most calming features of the home and which stands out the most from the nature-inspired vibe the designers were trying to accomplish, given its ocean-like color scheme. The main massage room in the spa features 12- x 24- x ⅜-inch-thick and 2- x 2- x ⅜-inch-thick Dolomite White Polished marble tiles, which were cut from ¾-inch-thick slabs, for the walls, floors, and bathroom's floors and countertops. The spa's massage room's shower walls are also accented with ¾- x ¾- x ¼-inch-thick Shading Blends Mughetto tiles, while the sauna's





**Prestige Brown marble slabs, which provide a nice contrast to the lighter colors seen on the walls and floors, were used for the basement's kitchen's countertops.**

floors and walls are coated in a combination of 1- x 1- x  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick Mint Green and Pure White marble tiles.

One of the most impressive features of the basement is the custom-designed, crescent-shaped wine cellar, which incorporates a custom-made medallion on the floor as well as a custom-designed tile mosaic in the middle of the wall — created and supplied by The Tile Mural Store in San Antonio, FL — which serves as the room's focal point. The floor medallion, which is 5-feet wide, utilized tiles from Sicis' Cosmati collection in the color Lymbus; the wall tiles that line the top of the walls, above the storage for the wine bottles feature 4- x 12-inch Celestial Listello Beige marble tiles from the Boutique collection, as well as  $\frac{5}{8}$ - x  $\frac{5}{8}$ - x  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick Noce Travertine Polished mosaic tiles. The floors, walls and countertops are clad in and 18- x 18- x

$\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick Cappuccino Light Honed travertine slabs.

All of the marble slabs and tiles used throughout the home, as well as the granite slabs, were supplied from Olympia Tile & Stone in Toronto, Ontario, Canada; all of the quartz countertops were supplied from Caesarstone Canada in Concord, Ontario, Canada; and all of the marble, glass, steel and custom mosaic pieces used for the second, third and fourth bedrooms' ensuites were supplied from Orro Mosaic in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Given that this design required an immense amount of work, Abate and her team were required to do some rearranging when it came to the architectural layout of the home. "For almost every area we were involved in (every room), we moved a few walls, because sometimes, certain rooms weren't large enough,"

Abate explained. "We worked from AutoCAD drawings and elevation drawings. For most of the areas, we did colored renderings. The client told me it was hard for her to visualize what it would look like once it was completed, so we had colored renderings completed for all of the important areas in the home."

Although this design is highly ambitious, Abate and her team are well-versed in catering to their clients' every need, having completed high-end projects like this before, which is why she and her team didn't really encounter any unusual challenges along the way. "We wanted to design something different, so we all put together some ideas," said Abate. "We all came up with some sketches and transformed those into technical drawings using AutoCAD and Photoshop to refine our ideas. The final colored renderings clarified the creation of the



The main massage room in the spa features 12- x 24- x  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick and 2- x 2- x  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick Dolomite White Polished marble tiles, which were cut from  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick slabs, for the walls, floors, and bathroom's floors and countertops. The spa's massage room's shower walls are also accented with  $\frac{3}{4}$ - x  $\frac{3}{4}$ - x  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick Shading Blends Mughetto tiles.

medallions so the client could actually see them the way they were going to look in actuality."

### Undertaking a complex installation

The installation was led by a skilled trio of installers — Sergio Ferreira, Silvio Di Rubbo and Zbigniew Zielinski — from Rockford Tile Contractors in North York, Ontario, Canada. "To say the least, this was a sizable project, which required a great amount of preparation, coordination and highly skilled employees to make it all come together," said John Pertili, president of Rockford Tile Contractors. "The Pallisandro blocks were selected and then were approved to be processed and cut into slabs that were 36 x 36 and 18 x 18 inches in tile format. All other materials were then selected and matched to meet the needs of my client and their designer. Once the

materials were procured, we worked on the design and detailing of the four waterjet slab feature panels: the grand foyer panel measures 15 x 15 feet, the two smaller main floor panels measure 6 x 9 feet and the basement panel measures 5 x 15 feet.

"Work slowly commenced on some of the bathrooms first, then the spa and steam areas before splitting off and assigning the main floor to one crew and the basement to another," Pertili went on to explain. "Layout of the main floor — which included the grand foyer, three connecting corridors, the great room and kitchen — took a great deal of time ensuring everything tied together, given the large area and given its detailed borders and waterjet panels. Furthermore, we had a series of slab stairs and stair nosings to tie into the main floor. Progress was slow and tedious. The basement and its associated areas

continued at the same time albeit at a more progressive rate."

The installation, which required five installers and two helpers at any given time, took about 10 months to complete, with a project manager onsite at all time to supervise the installation. The installation team utilized a variety of products, including Laticrete Hydroban Waterproofing, Laticrete 253 Gold and 254 Platinum, Laticrete Permacolour grout, Mapei Primer T, Mapei Kerabond and Keralastic, Mapei Keracolour grout, TEC 338 and Schluter Ditra Matte.

"Preparation of the 5,000 square feet of main floor required use of Mapei Primer Tover — a self-leveling topping," said Pertili. "The floor was then skimmed with Kerabond and Keralastic, and the 36- x 36-inch Pallisandro slabs, borders and decorative waterjet panels were then installed with a mud bed.





The wine cellar, one of the most ornately-designed rooms in the home, features a floor medallion, which is 5-feet wide, with tiles from Sicis' Cosmati collection in the color Lymbus, as well as a custom-made tile mosaic in the middle of the wall. The wall tiles that line the top of the walls above the storage for the wine bottles feature 4- x 12-inch Celestial Listello Beige marble tiles from the Boutique collection, as well as  $\frac{5}{8}$ - x  $\frac{5}{8}$ - x  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick Noce Travertine Polished mosaic tiles. The floors, walls and countertops are clad in and 18- x 18- x  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick Cappuccino Light Honed travertine slabs.

"The steam room and spa bath had a thorough application of Laticrete Hydroban, and 1,500 square feet of stone tile were then installed with Laticrete 254 Platinum," he added. "The basement area consisted of 3,500 square feet of 18- x 18-inch Pallisandro stone tile with a custom waterjet medallion, and 1,000 square feet of 18- x 18-inch limestone tile installed over Schluter Ditra Matte using TEC 338 non coupling mortar."

Although the installation team said this particular project presented some serious challenges, given its extremely intricate details and features, everyone involved is enthralled with the finished product, which is a reflection of all of the hard work put forth. "I am proud to state that, collectively, we have all taken great pride in being a part of it, and

that the end result is one of exacting standards with the highest quality," said Pertili.

Although this home was one of Abate's more ambitious projects, taking about two years to complete, she said

her clients couldn't be happier with the finished product. "Both of them were extremely overjoyed," said Abate. "I got a big hug; then, I understood how happy they were. I was honored to work on this project with them." □

### Private Residence Vaughan, Ontario, Canada

*Designer:* Ambience Design Group, Woodbridge, Ontario, Canada

*Stone/Tile Suppliers:* Olympia Tile & Stone, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Orro Mosaic, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Caesarstone Canada, Concord, Ontario, Canada; The Tile Mural Store, San Antonio, FL (custom-designed tile mosaic in wine cellar)

*Installer:* Rockford Tile Contractors, North York, Ontario, Canada

*Installation Products:* Laticrete, Bethany, CT; Mapei, Deerfield Beach, FL; TEC, Aurora, IL; Schluter Systems, Plattsburgh, NY; Prosol Distribution Inc., Kingston, Ontario, Canada (Durox Flooring Accessories, Inc.)