

Soapstone Description

Web Link: <http://www.soapstone-co.com/whatis101.html>

Soapstone 101

Soapstone is quarried like Granite and Marble. It is a steatite stone and its primary components are magnesite, dolomite, chlorite, and talc. It can range in age from 300 to 400 million years old depending on which part of the planet it is drawn from. As talc in soapstone is soft to the touch, it gives the smooth feeling of rubbing a piece of dry soap. Thus the name was derived - "Soap" Stone. No. You can't wash with it.

For thousands of years, soapstone has been used throughout the world for tools, carafes, vases, goblets, sculptures, fireplaces, etc. In early American history, soapstone was used primarily for building blocks, sculpting and urns. As villages and towns began building home structures, a popular choice for the do-it-all sink was soapstone. It could be easily cut to shape with non stone cutting tools. Four styles of common sinks from the 1800's and early 1900's were the Philadelphia, Chicago-Wright, Boston-Williams and the good old New England Double Bowl (our most popular). In early New England, Soapstone uses ranged from fireplace hearths to countertops, sinks, and oven fireplace stoves. In different parts of the world, soapstone is still used as a daily staple for mixing bowls, cook-tops, cookware, and oven baking decks. Currently in the USA and in different parts of the world, soapstone is used for the largest variety of items ever yet - including balusters, stair treads, window sills and island tops. It's fast becoming a very popular choice by designers and architects and it's one of a kind texture and look make soapstone one of the most aesthetically pleasing stones to be used for the job.

True Soapstone is inert. Alkalis and acids won't affect it as they will a granite, marble, or slate. For over one hundred years, soapstone sinks and tiles have been used in science class rooms and labs along with work tables and counter tops. Its longevity to long term - high traffic use is amazing!

Because of its truly remarkable and natural heat retention characteristics, soapstone is widely used for masonry heater fireplaces, wood stoves, fireplace liners and pizza ovens. Soapstone heaters and fireplaces heat very quickly from burning coal, pellets or wood, the soapstone will then slowly radiate heat very evenly for hours on end. Even after the fire has long gone out!

In our continuing search for the best soapstone available on earth, we have come to know more about it than any other company can ever claim. Vermont Marble, Granite, Slate & Soapstone Co. has access to virtually every type and class of soapstone in every form imaginable. From colorful soapstone that can be carved with your finger nail to a more rugged and very dense building soapstone (counter-tops, sinks, masonry heater fireplaces, etc.).

A couple of common questions about soapstones include:

Q. Since soapstone is soft to the touch, does this mean it's absorbant?

A. Though soapstone is soft to the touch it is far from absorbant. If the surface picks up a stain or discolors, this is literally - just on the surface - and can be scrubbed or sanded off. Slates, marbles, most granites, limestones and travertines are absorbant. Soapstone is not.

Q. Once oil or a sealer is applied, can it be removed some day to bring the stone back to the original color?

A. Yes. Even after 100 years of hard use, soapstone can be re-finished to a new state as though it was just installed.

Our soapstone is perfect for achieving that warm "old fashioned", "rustic", "early American" look. It's also versatile enough so that it can be used with very modern designs.

Upon installation of our soapstone countertops, we recommend that the stone is sealed with mineral oil or stone sealer. The mineral oil and some light penetrating sealers will bring out a dark richness to the stones natural color and also work as a protective sealing layer to the surface of the stone. Mineral oil may be re-applied to the stone periodically. Most sealers will remain for quite a while longer than the mineral oil. It is not necessary to use oil or sealers on the stone. Spilled wine or virtually anything

else will not penetrate and stain the stone on the inside. It can and may leave a darkened area or superficial surface stain. However, these marks can be scrubbed off the stone or sanded off as they can't penetrate the soapstone below the very surface. Some people opt never to apply anything to the stone, as it will soon begin to take on it's own natural patina with regular use.

Soapstone Countertop Care and Maintenance Guide

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Good information to keep your soapstone looking great!

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Taking care of soapstone is pretty easy. Remember, this stuff is impenetrable. Nothing can get down into this stone! So...several options exist.

Option one is - don't do a thing. Time will make this grayish blue stone slowly darken from regular use. It will gain a natural patina darkened color over time. If a mark gets on the stone you don't like, either rub it out with dry paper towel and lots of muscle or use a little piece of light grit (300-400) sandpaper. The sanded stone will return to its original gray-blue color.

Option two: Use standard mineral oil that's purchased in a pharmacy. Rub it onto the stone (not too much so that it remains looking wet). Rub off any excess. This will darken all the stone tenfold to almost a black color. Over time, the mineral oil will need to be re-applied (every 4-8 weeks) to keep all the countertops uniform in color, as the oil will evaporate. If time goes by and you wish to return the tops color to the original grayish blue, you can with a lot of sandpaper and a few hours of time - have a friend help and use an electric flat sander.

Option three: Stone sealers will work with slightly limited effect on soapstone compared to granite.

Remember - Nothing can get down into soapstone - Stone sealers are made as a rule to penetrate Granite and Marble - not soapstone. They can't get down into soapstone like they with marble and granite. There are two types of sealers. One which will change the color of the soapstone to look like it was oiled. Once it dries (1-2 hours) it will keep the stone looking dark and oiled for up to three years or more. Another type of sealer will leave the natural

soapstone color unchanged (gray-blue), and will protect the stone from changing color at all. It should be re-applied every year or so. If either sealer is scratched through, you may wish to re-apply some more to that area.

Scratches: Depending on the size of the scratch will depend on how to repair it. The deeper the scratch, the lower number grit sand paper you'll want to start with. 80 grit sandpaper is pretty rough and will sand quite a lot of soapstone quickly. As the scratch is sanded out, you will want to graduate to a higher grit sand paper (220) - then higher to (300-400) for a finish that will basically match the original grit finish. After sanding is complete, top off the repaired area with a little mineral oil or sealer.

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