

Move your rooms into the Stone Age

By Jeff Schnauffer

The green movement has made natural materials like stone, concrete mix and even new types of granite trendier than ever, experts say.

"People want distinctive, one-of-a-kind, functional works of art with shapes and textures that appear organic," said Barbara Capella Loehr, editor of www.KitchenBathDesign.com. "Natural stone, cast stone, concrete — these materials fit the bill." Cast stone sinks present the opportunity to blend stone with another material, Loehr said.

"Cast stone sinks have an overall unique look," said Joshua Johnson, president of J. Aaron, based outside of Atlanta. "Everything about them is kind of Old World. It brings about a different feel to them. They look like a kitchen out of 17th-century France."

Compared to other types of sinks like marble (which is limited to whatever colors of marble the piece is cut out of) and fire clay (which usually only comes in colors like white and biscuit), cast stone or concrete sinks can be mixed with different colors.

"The sky is the limit on the color," said Johnson, whose farmhouse and vanity sinks run about \$2,500. "We even made one that was pink."

For durability, consider the new e-granite kitchen sink from Oak Brook, Ill.-based [Elkay](#). While the company's lifeblood has been stainless steel, requests for more sinks in a solid surface or stone prompted the creation of the

e-granite brand, which has the natural look and feel of stone but is more resilient.

"It's made of 85 percent granite silica and can withstand heat of up to 536 degrees, which means you can put a hot pot right in the bottom of that sink and it won't hurt it," said Ann Rottinghaus, marketing communications manager for the plumbing division at [Elkay](#).

Adds Loehr: In the kitchen, stainless steel is still the most popular choice for sinks, but granite is now beginning to make inroads because of its durability, and because people can match their granite countertops."

Then there is natural stone, which Loehr said carries a "wow" factor, especially in the bath and powder room — "A drop-in or vessel sink made of natural or cast stone really makes a design statement and allows people to express their personal style and add a personal touch."

Natural stone sink possibilities include those in marble, travertine, limestone, onyx and stone mosaic. Michael Zimber, president and founder of Stone Forest in Santa Fe, N.M., said his company's design concept "came out of the garden and out of the Japanese tradition of bringing the outside in. There's something about the radiant mass of real stone. It's like a unique fingerprint of nature. We're making art pieces that people put in their bathrooms and kitchens.

"I think as long as we keep creating new and intriguing designs," said Zimber, "the market will react to that in a positive way." — *CTW Features*

