

Design

Middle East

Interiors and Architecture from the Gulf,
Levant and Beyond

Creative

30

Powerlist 2020

SALUTING THE MOST
INFLUENTIAL AND
POWERFUL ARCHITECTS
AND DESIGNERS
IN THE MENA REGION

Umesh Punia
CEO, GLAZE MARBLE

Stephan Degenhart
ASSOCIATE PARTNER,
DREES & SOMMER

**TOGETHER
FOR BETTER**

**QUALITY MEETS
TECHNOLOGY**

Splendour of marble

Umesh Punia, CEO of Glaze Marble, talks about the brand's core values, the newest addition of Neolith sintered stone to its state-of-the-art gallery, and the marble and granite popular trends

What is the brand philosophy of Glaze?

Since our inception, we have always focussed on the minor details that define quality. This philosophy has given us an identity, that despite beginning from an insignificant operation size, has shaped us into a renowned brand. Even today, being the largest importer of natural stones in the UAE, we stick to our philosophy and our quality. We radically changed the way marble or natural stone was selected, imported, sold & traded in the UAE market. In the late 90's, when we began, natural stone was imported, stored, and traded in a shabby way, more or less similar to construction or masonry stone.

So basically, we believed in the beauty of natural stone, and giving it the same respect as any gemstone in a Jeweler's shop, this became our strength and brand. This different perspective completely reshaped the whole landscape of stone business in the UAE market. For comparison, if you see the marble companies and their stockyards in Qatar, or in Kuwait, or even in Oman, you can see a completely different scenario, with totally different quality and standards, a different price range, and no luxury products at all. So focussing on quality, details, and believing that the marble is no less than a diamond or a ruby, gives us a niche in the market - and then it is all about scaling.

In a nutshell, the foundation stone was laid on the quality detailing of the natural stone which inspired our brand philosophy from the beginning.

What is your competitive edge in this market?

Undoubtedly the UAE clientele, which has a good taste and refined appetite for quality products, in whichever field or segment that may be, we found our competitive edge. Initially, it was not about finding a competitive edge or something of that sort, it was just passion for the natural stone and marble. Finding new and better-quality natural stone was just a mere passion. In the late 90's when I started travelling to Italy, I saw how many varieties and high-quality natural stones were being processed, imported to Italy from different corners of the planet for processing in Italy and then for re-export to the EU and North American countries. I was always wondering why our market is limited to some few basic colours. Why do those exotic stones have no presence in our market? That's where the journey started to add new exotic colours to our collection. So, it was a bold attempt to try and introduce all those expensive and high-end stones. Of course, there were setbacks of dead stock as well, however eventually it became our strength »





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and today we have about 400 colours of marble, granite and different kinds of natural stones in our collection. So, this huge range of collections, combined with our fundamentals of quality and detailing, gave us the cutting edge in the market over many companies that were well established for as long as 30-40 years.

Not only that, but we also have many exclusive agreements for different materials for the UAE market. Each block (lot) of marble/ stone in our stone gallery is hand-picked from the best sources at the most competitive prices from different corners of the world.

Could you tell us more about your biggest state-of-the-art stone gallery in the Middle East?

It's about the passion for the stone business if you have ever heard about the famous stone galleries of Verona (Italy), such as Antolini etc., whenever I was visiting those galleries, every time - the thought used to occur to me to make something like that in UAE, and we did an experiment on a smaller scale in 2007, and made a version of the same, but unfortunately this place was bit far, and despite the earlier version being ready in 2007-08, we were still operating from our old location. But in 2014, when we fully shifted to this location, it was very easy for us to recognise that it was indeed time to make something big, a masterpiece, and here we are today. We are once again very thankful to the Architects and Designers of the UAE who have that world-class taste and appetite to select their great gift of Mother Nature to enhance the esthetic appeal of their spaces. We got a tremendously positive response from everyone, from homeowner to designer or architect, that it was a world-class experience to come and visit our state-of-the-art gallery space. We can proudly say that it is a class apart in this part of the world. It's not just about the infrastructure and the ambience of the building alone, but the huge collection, variety, and quality also. Every

piece of the stone is carefully selected and handpicked. If you are a stone lover, it is irresistible for you not to pick out something or the other. Very often we hear from our clients that they come here just to choose something to enhance a small area, but after walking through our gallery, they purchase material for a much larger space than originally planned. Apart from top-quality marble from Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal and Turkey, we have 100% of super exotic granite and quartzite from Brazil. We also have a large range of semi-precious stone slabs, made of high-quality Agate, Crystals, and petrified wood etc., all these are made in Europe with extreme precision and the highest quality standards.

You are the official distributor of innovative surface—Neolith in the region. Share some features about this hi-tech surface and where all it can be used?

Neolith is undoubtedly the #1 sintered stone, it is a revolutionary product, and technologically speaking, the most advanced surface solution. It's made from 100% natural minerals such as silica, quartz, feldspar etc. These minerals are grinded into a powder and then compressed very tightly, and then heated. So basically, this process is an imitation of what happens in nature to create natural stones, but in a factory setting, using ultra-modern technology to produce Neolith.

Neolith is special because it is extremely versatile, it can practically be used for almost everything, such as flooring, wall cladding, kitchen tops, bar counters, furniture, landscaping basically everything. It is UV resistant, very hard to scratch, completely non-porous, fire-resistant, it comes in a large format, same as marble slabs. Moreover, the designs are truly stunning - especially the marble collection. One of the most distinguished features of the Neolith is its special finishes, such as ULTRASOFT, it gives the same touch and feels like marble.

Which is the most popular surface which gets repeated orders and why?

Trends in architecture and interior design are always evolving, it's not that they change overnight, but they do transform in phases of 10-12 years. In the early 2000's, mainly beige and brown were in vogue, most projects, whether residential or commercial, all were inspired by these warm themes and those days we used to sell the iconic marble Crema Marfil more than anything else, whereas these days it's all about white and grey concepts, so now Statuario, a legendary white marble from Italy, is our best seller. Similarly, for kitchen tops, the Brazilian Quartzites have replaced the old black and red coloured granites. Now the reconstituted Quartzs are also fast sellers for the kitchen and countertops. •

Glaze warehouse stocks more than 400 colours of marble, granite, and other different styles of natural stones

