

BY DESIGN



Chateau residence by D'Alessio Inspired Architectural Designs

The New Stone Age

Classic and timeless, carved stone adds a centuries-old aesthetic to grand homes. *By Nanci Theoret*

Call it the castle effect.



Today's homeowners in search of the ultimate statement are revisiting history, when natural stone was the be-all and end-all of architecture, covering interior surfaces with exquisite hand-carved ornamentation worthy of the world's greatest chateaux and cathedrals.

"I always say we build castles for the 21st century," says Andrea D'Alessio Jr., whose award-winning Pennsylvania-based D'Alessio Inspired Architectural Designs specializes in residential stone design and construction. "Ancient architecture in Europe and Rome—from the foundation to the entire building and even the bathtub—were built in stone. Stone is authentic and sustainable. People travel and see this and want to live in their own castle. They want to immortalize their legacy for their children."

Parists insist that the stone architecture introduced in elaborate exterior moldings, friezes and balustrades continues inside, where its mere presence creates grandeur for staircases, fireplaces, kitchen stove hoods and sculpted baseboards and crown moldings. Classic and timeless, carved stone adds relevance and a centuries-old aesthetic to even the newest homes.

Interior stone architecture tends to work best in historic re-enactments. The simple, clean lines of contemporary and modern homes don't lend themselves to carved embellishments, says Rob Ripley, whose international clientele fly into Wisconsin just to visit his Carved Stone Creations showroom for inspiration.

"People who are interested in carved stone are usually looking for an Old World or Mediterranean feel," he says. "They've had great experiences in castles in Europe and want to recreate that look at home. They like the old and distressed look carved stone creates; it gives their home



PHOTO: D'ALESSIO INSPIRED ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNS



Both pages: Stone features by D'Alessio Inspired Architectural Designs.

Although recent design trends have flirted with green marble and blue-tinged granite, most homeowners today are leaning to the neutral end of the color spectrum—beiges, grays and off-whites.

"The architect or designer typically gives us the palette they're working with," says Ripley. "Generally they want to coordinate columns and fireplaces with flooring so the look flows through the home and provides continuity. We seldom use color unless it's as an accent."

D'Alessio says white is currently trending. "We're back to white: Carrara and pure-white marbles are hot right now for staircases. We're also doing honed black granite that has no shine and looks plain but very elegant."

His company has created stone mansions and estates throughout the country—Los Angeles to Philadelphia, Long Island to Miami—on properties ranging from one-half acre to more than 50 acres. "Our homes get national attention, and we get calls from China, Norway, all over the world," says D'Alessio.

Despite modern technology that beams three-dimensional CAD drawings and laser engravings right to stone carvers in Italy, France, China and India (wherever the stone is mined), most of D'Alessio's work is still done by hand—and sometimes onsite. "It's a lost art and most architects today don't know how to hang or carve an 8,000-pound piece of stone," he says. "We might have 250 to 500 people hand carving stone, using a pencil chisel just like they did thousands of years ago. There's an authenticity and depth to our stonework. You see one of our homes and don't believe it was built in 2008 or 2012. This is quality construction. We're building a house to last."

Its chateau, a private residence in Bucks County, Penn., took 14 months to complete. "For four months, 10 guys did nothing but chip stone," says D'Alessio. "This is super custom work. People are looking to distinguish their home from the other 50,000-square-foot home being built and there's no better way to do it than with authentic stonework." ■



Kitchen stone by D'Alessio Inspired Architectural Designs