

Landscaping with Carmel Stone

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By: Steve McShane

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There is absolutely nothing that compares to the estates on the Monterey Peninsula ornately decorated with our unique local rock known as “Carmel Stone.” The color and texture carry a history and heritage unmatched anywhere in the world. In this short piece I seek to inspire the use of this stone and similar natural stone for your home and landscape.

Those that have lived in the region more than forty years remember truckloads of Carmel stone used widely for homes, walls and foundations. It is probably most famous for the fact that some of our earliest settlements were crafted from both adobe block and Carmel stone. The stone you see in old Monterey originated from quarries that dotted the landscape between Monterey and Carmel and up Carmel Valley. Masons and builders preferred the stone as it was easy to work with and plentiful.

Years later, Carmel stone has been increasingly difficult to find. Quarries have moved to other parts of the County or state and ultimately the stone varies in color and texture. The good news is that you can still get the same look locals embrace a hundred years ago. I find folks looking for Carmel stone on a regular basis. I move most of it for dry stack walls, borders and boulders. It is sold by the pallet and when installed right, it offers stunning contrast to local landscapes.

I also find clients looking for similar contrast that can be applied to patios and, fireplaces and veneer. This is where the wonder of globally sourced stone offers modern compliments to old world Carmel stone. For folks looking for something that will work for patios, I’m often recommending something more durable like an Arizona stone. An Arizona Oak has the same color variation as a Carmel stone. For fireplace and veneer, there are some incredible options coming out of India. I am a huge fan of a stone called French vanilla. Like Carmel stone, it’s very easy to work with and can come pre-cut.

It would be unfair to mention that there are number of synthetic and lightweight stones available as well. However, nothing can quite compare to the use of natural stone when it comes to our homes and landscapes. I also must mention that the application of natural stone is only as good as the mason that installs it. A good mason takes time to choose just the right pieces. This applies to dry stacking performed by a landscape contractor. As with all home improvement projects, always check references and get several bids when you decide to hire someone to proceed with a project.

I hope you're as inspired as I am to embrace the look of local Carmel stone when landscaping. While it's hard to find, it's a look that is easy to mimic with the wide array of natural stone offerings at your local landscape supply today. Spend the time snapping photos of homes and estates you love and I hope you will approach one of your local landscape supplies for ideas.

Steve McShane is Owner & General Manager of McShane's Landscape Supply in Salinas. He can be reached at steve@mcsshaneslandscape.com.

Steve McShane Biography (Revised 5-18)

Steve McShane is Owner & General Manager of McShane's Landscape Supply in Salinas, California. He has a B.S. in Soil Science from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo and an M.B.A. from Santa Clara. He serves on the Salinas City Council. When not working, he loves hiking, traveling to far reaches of the planet and experimenting with exotic fruits. He can be reached at steve@mcsshaneslandscape.com or (831) 455-1369.