

CAHI MONTHLY NEWS



Presidents Corner

This is my last president's corner, as I am coming to the end of my allotted time as CAHI president. Elections will take place at our September board meeting and I will be turning over the helm to the next Capitan. I would first like to thank board members Dean Aliberti, Woody Dawson, Al Dingfelder, Rob Gutman, Dan Kristiansen, Bill Kievit, John McKenzie and Scott Monforte and for their hard work and support during my presidency. I feel we have accomplished a lot behind the scene that will steer CAHI in the right direction from here on out. I have enjoyed my time as president and have met a lot of people as I represented CAHI. We have made some inroads in some important areas but there is still lots of work to do and I feel our board will be up to it under its new leadership.

I have some advice to all as I take a different seat in the grand scheme of CAHI. To those veteran inspectors who have seen the tremendous change in our profession over the past twenty to thirty years...you are almost done. Know when to put the ladder away and shut off the computer. We have done our thing and now it's time enjoy the spoils. To the newer and younger members...you have just begun. The changes you will see will not be so evident until you have paid your dues and you can look back over the years as we dinosaurs can. Then the changes will be evident and you will shake your heads as we have done. So my advice to you is to jump in and lead the change, determine the direction your profession will take instead of being swept up with the tide. You are members of the largest home inspection association in the northeast. Make it bigger, make it stronger, and make it work to your advantage. If something is going to govern how you work, shape how you think, and have an impact on how you earn a living then you MUST have a say in how it all goes down.

My last quote..."You will never succeed if you are afraid to fail"...*Stan Bajerski*

Stan

September 2017 Volume 10, Issue 9

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Next Meeting!

Sept 27, 2017

Joe Giaimo

CT Pest Elimination Inc.

MONTHLY MEETINGS – Details & Info

CAHI's regular monthly meetings are held at the Best Western located at 201 Washington Ave (RT 5), North Haven. Meetings are free to members. Most meetings are on the fourth Wednesday of the month from 7-9pm. Guests are always welcome! Guests may attend 2 free monthly meetings to experience our presentations, meet our members, and receive a CE attendance certificate.

Joining CAHI may be done at anytime of the year through our Membership Page

Agent Referrals: How to Succeed Ethically

By Isaac Peck, Editor

Real estate agent referrals are frequently touted as a way for a home inspector to build his or her business and bring a steady stream of work in the door. Proponents of such a dynamic argue that agents are well-positioned to refer quality service providers, including home inspectors, as they can leverage their professional contacts and industry expertise to assist homebuyers, who often have little experience or knowledge of real estate.

Since homebuyers are often inexperienced in matters of real estate, who better to assist in selecting, interviewing and hiring a competent home inspector than an experienced agent, who by law owes a fiduciary duty to the homebuyer, including loyalty, disclosure, reasonable care, due diligence and more?

On the other hand, many inspectors and other industry advocates argue that such an arrangement can have a downside for the homebuyer, as some real estate agents pressure inspectors to not be a “deal killer” and threaten blacklisting should an overly critical report lead to a failed deal.

Of course, not all agents are unethical or attempt to influence inspectors in such an overt manner. Nevertheless, the power dynamic between agents and inspectors means those inspectors who rely on agent referrals for business are often fearful that they may be blacklisted or lose business just for doing an honest, thorough job while trying to protect their client, the homebuyer.

This leaves inspectors in the difficult position of knowing that doing the right thing may cost them business: producing honest, high-quality reports that protect their homebuyer clients can put them at risk of losing future referrals. Can inspectors do honest, ethical and thorough work, while building a network of agents who will continue to refer business? Some inspectors say it's not only possible but critical to success. In other words, one of the keys to success for inspectors is to do business with agents who are ethical, both to preserve their reputation and keep their client's interests as the first priority. This is the challenge of the home inspector.

Dealing with Pressure

A recent letter from a Working RE reader demonstrates the pressures faced by inspectors to “perform.” Emilio Bengoa, an inspector from Idaho, writes “I am a new inspector and as I reach out to real estate agents in my territory, I consistently get complaints about inspectors who report on every little thing. Agents do not want us to mention things that could very well turn into a complaint by the homeowner or even a potential lawsuit,” says Bengoa.

In many cases, Bengoa says that agents are asking inspectors to lower their standards. “Why is it that real estate agents get away with putting demands on us to lower our standards and underreport, but all of them expect us to have E&O insurance? In other words they seem to be strict on the insurance part but not on the thoroughness of the inspection,” reports Bengoa.

Citing examples of things he has heard from agents about his reports, Bengoa says he is often told not to report details or to keep his reporting vague. Bengoa says he has heard things like: “Why are you saying anything about polybutylene tubing? Why can’t you just say: no leaks observed. Or don’t write that the furnace is close to the end of its expected life cycle; you can just recommend it be serviced by a qualified HVAC technician,” Bengoa says. “They tell me if I report like that they will never call me to do another inspection. But if I don’t report this way I may get sued.”

Bengoa believes that unless his home state of Idaho adopts some regulations and licensing standards on inspection reporting, inspectors are likely to face continued pressure to underreport. “All I can do is continue to report utilizing my Standards of Practice (SOP) and maintain an ethical practice in my community,” says Bengoa.

Successful and Independent

Home inspector veteran and President of the Millionaire Inspector Community (MIC), Mike Crow specializes in teaching home inspectors how to market their businesses, including how to market to and network with real estate agents and other industry stakeholders to get referrals. Crow says that over his career his two companies have done over 100,000 home inspections and that when his firm encounters agent pressure, it is the exception rather than the rule. “We have run across agents trying to tell us how to report, but it’s not very common. One of the reasons we don’t see it very much is because we’ve weeded out the agents who try to push us around,” says Crow.

The solution to building a great inspection business while never compromising your ethics, Crow argues, is to effectively market your business so you can pick and choose whom you work with. This allows you to “fire” agents and others who try to influence your report and not have to worry about where your next job will come from. “When you know how to market properly and you know how to make the phone ring, you’re not at the mercy of an unethical agent trying to push you around. Home inspectors talk about the fear of being blacklisted but it also works both ways. We blacklist some agents as well. If there are agents who aren’t working in the best interests of the clients or who aren’t ethical, we turn those appointments down,” says Crow.

Having a strong marketing foundation and diverse selection of leads, referrals, and new business is the key, according to Crow. “Excellent marketing allows you to pick whom you want to do business with. One of the reasons some inspectors succumb to agent pressure is that they think they need the business. But when you know the phone is going to ring and you’re going to be able to replace that time slot with another inspection, you’re not as susceptible to pressure,” Crow says. “Home inspectors who are feeling pressure from agents should get busy finding new referral sources. Put all your efforts into marketing and, if you’re doing it right, you won’t have to work with unethical agents and can pick and choose your clients and partners.”

Good Agents, Great Service

The best agents want a great inspection for their clients, according to Crow. “One thing that many inspectors don’t understand is that it’s the brand new agents who typically try to influence an inspection. The best agents, the top performers, don’t do that because it’s bad for business. The

veterans want their clients to get the best inspection they can because they want referrals. They want the client to be 100% informed so they are happy. If they refer a home inspector who misses major defects or fails to call out important items, how likely are they to get a referral from that homebuyer?" says Crow.

While inspectors should never reduce the quality of their reports or compromise their duty to their clients, Crow says that providing great service to agents is still very important. "At MIC, I teach my students that home inspectors have clients and customers. Our clients are homebuyers. Our customers are anybody who refers us: agents, home builders, past clients, etc. Any time anyone refers us, they want to make sure the person they refer to us is going to get a quality product and great service. They need speed and accuracy. If you're working with good agents, the agents know what their clients want and need. What people don't realize is that the agent is actually looking out for the best interests of the client," says Crow.

Customer service, speed and accuracy, refer to the readability of the report as well. "We tell all our inspectors to stick close to the Standards of Practice (SOP) when reporting. With that said, I don't know any inspector who only inspects to the SOP. We all exceed it. But in terms of writing a great report, sometimes less is more. Home inspectors over the years have wanted to add more and more to their reports. The average report is 40 pages or more. Our report is 15 pages. Very few buyers or agents want to go through 40 to 50 pages of information. Good reporting is about making your information useful to buyers and agents. Speed and accuracy don't just apply to our inspection work but to the report and the intended users. The readers of your report should be able to understand and digest it easily and quickly," says Crow. "You shouldn't have to sacrifice quality to produce a report that is easy to read and understand. The key is finding the right balance and making sure your clients' interests are protected and your customers are happy."

Free Training to OREP Insureds

Home inspectors who purchase their insurance from OREP enjoy free training webinars from Mike Crow and his team at MIC, including The Home Inspector Marketing Success Formula and 10 Strategies to Get 10 More Referrals Per Month. How much would 10 more referrals add to your bottom line? Crow shows you proven strategies for getting more referrals and helps you master the latest home inspector marketing techniques.

Take advantage of this and many other business building benefits from the OREP Professional Support Network when you shop OREP. OREP insureds email isaac@orep.org to access these free training courses.

About the Author

Isaac Peck is the Editor of Working RE magazine and the Director of Marketing at OREP, a leading provider of E&O insurance for home inspectors, appraisers, and other real estate professionals in all 50 states and D.C. He received his master's degree in accounting at San Diego State University. He can be contacted at isaac@orep.org or (888) 347-5273.

MASONRY



Durable Brick Walkways

Lasting success requires precision detailing at every step

BY JOHN CARROLL

In the world of residential design, brick walkways don't get much respect. Most people see them as a way to keep their feet clean when walking from the car to the house. But as one of the first things visitors see, a paved walkway can significantly enhance the visual impact of a home's exterior. Recently, I was hired to build two brick walkways leading to the entrances to a 1928 house just a block away from Duke University.

There are two very different approaches to brick paving: flexible and rigid. With flexible paving, bricks are set dry in a layer of stone dust over a compacted aggregate base. The joints between the bricks are small and filled with dry sand after the bricks are installed.

For this project, I opted for rigid paving, in which the bricks are set in a bed of mortar on top of a concrete slab with fully mortared joints. Rigid paving is more durable, but it can be unforgiving to movement, with any deformation in the slab showing up as a crack in the finished brick surface. Grouting the joints can also turn into an unholy mess if you're not careful and patient.

LAYOUT FOR THE WALKWAY

The walkways started at brick gate posts that were 78½ inches apart and ended at steps 98½ inches wide. Because neither dimension worked with a 4-inch brick layout, I opted to make the walk 80 inches wide, notched around the brick posts and flared out the last couple of feet in front of the steps. The 80-inch width meant that I wouldn't have to cut bricks for every course on the walk.

Where the walkway met the stairs, the finished surface measured one riser height (about 7 inches) down from the first tread. At the other end, the walk had to be flush with the city sidewalk. Working down from the walk surface, I allowed 4 inches for the concrete slab and 4 inches for a layer of washed gravel. We excavated to that level and mechanically compacted the soil base. After setting up forms, we compacted the layer of gravel and were ready to pour the slab.

John Carroll, author of Working Alone, is a builder who lives and works in Durham, N.C.

Photos: Mike Moore [3], Brett Arnold [19-27], all others, John Carroll

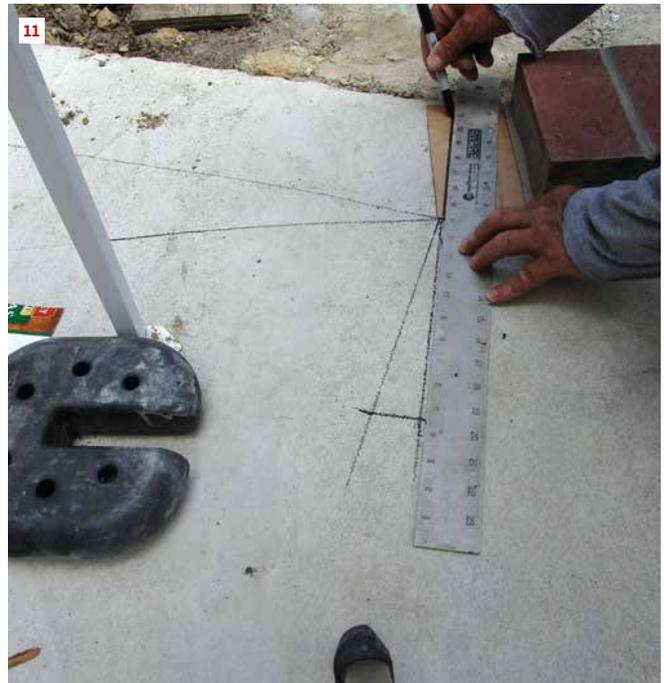
DURABLE BRICK WALKWAYS



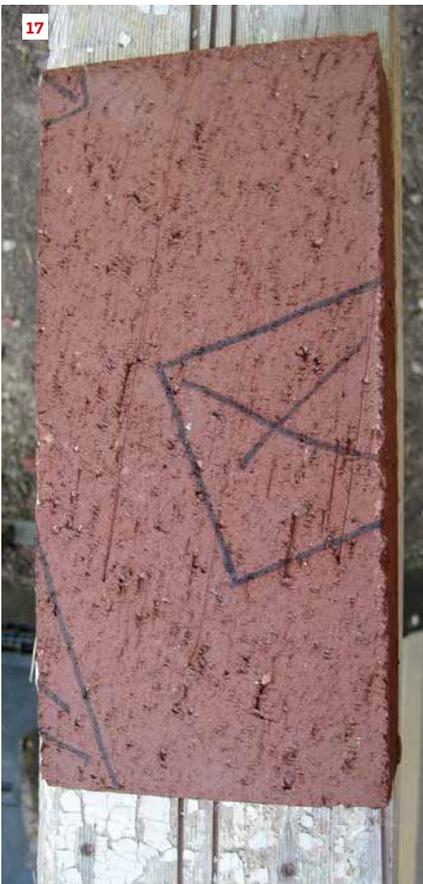
Getting ready for the bricks. Prep work begins with installing a concrete slab to serve as a foundation for the brick walkway. The author excavates down about 8 inches and compacts the subsoil before placing 4 inches of washed gravel. Next, he sets the forms for the concrete and compacts the gravel layer (1). Angled gussets reinforce the forms that create the flare (2). After the concrete is placed, a mag float smooths the surface of the slab (3). An absolutely smooth and flat slab is not necessary. The morning after the concrete pour, the author uses a circular saw with a masonry blade to cut control joints in the concrete. These joints make it more likely that if the concrete cracks as it cures or settles in the future, it will do so in a straight line (4).



Border bricks. The first bricks to go in are along the edges of the walkway. Layout starts at a control joint to avoid having bricks span the joint and be subject to cracking (5). The gap between the bricks that are on either side of the control joint will be filled with flexible sealant, instead of mortar, to allow the bricks to move slightly without cracking the joint between them. Mason's twine stretches the length of the walkway to guide brick placement. To keep the bricks following a perfectly straight line, the author installs them at precisely measured and laid-out intervals along the edge (6). Then he adds a brick next to his first group and taps it into place, leveling over to the next brick in the sequence (7). He leapfrogs in the opposite direction and adds a brick on the other side (8). He completes the installation to the control joint and repeats the process from there (9).



Fashioning the flare. After running the border bricks near the flare in the walkway, the author draws a layout line for the bricks along the flare's border. He uses squares to lay out the angle of the bend, and bisects this angle to define the cut angle for the bricks (10). Next, he places a brick-size cardboard template at the intersection and uses a straightedge to transfer the angle (11). He cuts the template—minus half of the mortar joint—along the cutline (12). The template transfers the angle cuts to the bricks at the pivot point of the flare (13), and the rest of the bricks can then be laid out for the edge of the flare.



Finicky fitting. To fit odd-shaped areas like the one around the railing post, the author first rough-cuts a brick-shaped cardboard template to fit against the steps and around the post (14). Then using a small piece of aluminum angle against each of the flat surfaces of the post, he transfers the exact shape to the template (15, 16). He places the template on a brick, lining up the piece of aluminum angle on the line drawn on the template and marking the other side of the angle to lay out the exact shape that will be cut out (17). A 4 1/2-inch grinder with a diamond blade makes fast work of odd-shaped cuts such as this one. The cut brick then takes its place as the final piece in the flare border. Other bricks receive straight angle cuts to square off the rest of the flared section to the field tile (18).

DURABLE BRICK WALKWAYS



Paving process. The recipe for brick-laying mortar is two-and-a-half parts masonry sand to one part Type-S masonry cement plus water (19). After combining the sand and the water together in a mixing tub, the author mixes in the masonry cement, stirring the mortar with a mixing paddle on a heavy-duty drill. When it's thoroughly mixed, he slowly adds water until the consistency is right. To ensure that the basket-weave pattern will be perfectly straight, he stretches masonry twine between the edges and staggers the first bricks, as he did with the border bricks (20). For each brick, a layer of mortar goes down first (21) before he presses the brick into place (22). Then using a mallet and a short heavy-duty level, he taps the brick into plane with the bricks on either side (23).





Grouting and jointing. A narrow tuck-pointing tool delivers and presses narrow strips of mortar into the joints between the bricks (24). When the joint is full, a concave jointing tool creates the finished surface of the mortar joint (25). At this point, the excess mortar is left to dry on the walkway surface. Once the mortar has set up, the excess is scraped off the surface (26) and blown off with a leaf blower (27).



Finishing up. After the mortar has cured overnight, a course scrub pad cleans off any residual mortar (28). The final step is filling the brick joints over the control joints in the concrete slab. The author tapes the edges of the bricks, pushes foam backer rod into the joint (29), and then fills the joint with a polyurethane-based caulk made specifically for use with concrete and masonry (30).

Home Inspection Industry Buyers Lists ???

This was one of many recent emails from people trying to help me improve by business. Unfortunately, most of the authors have never run a home inspection business. This one in particular thinks they can provide me a list of buyers and that such a list is gold for me. As home inspectors we should not be searching for the endless source of home buyers. Our time is better spent making ourselves highly visible to home buyers who need and are looking for a home inspection. Many home buyers do not want a home inspection and others will have referrals from friends or family. I prefer to spend any time or effort on improving my visibility and the quality of the content that is visible.

But, if anybody tries this magic list or other search methods for our “holy grail” of home buyers ... please let me know of your experience so I can share it with the rest of our members.

Al Dingfelder
Certified Master Inspector
Accuracy Plus Home Inspections, LLC

Hi,

Hope you're doing well!

I am **Flavia Johnson** I had a chance to go through your company's website and I hope our **Home Inspection Industry Buyers Lists** can help you to **Boost up your sales** with our **verified Direct Contact numbers and email contacts** you can reach your Active Clients and increase your sales.

So, would you be interested in connecting with **Active Decision makers**?

Target Titles/Functions:

- Building Owners / Managers
- Apartment / Property / Site Managers
- Facilities maintenance and operations staff
- Certified Home Inspectors
- Restoration / Cleaning Services Manager
- Building Engineers
- Design professionals
- Home and Building Inspectors
- Quality Control / Property Inspector
- Property/ Real Estate Developers
- Contractors / Builder / Realtors

- HVACR Service Technician / Mechanics
- Equipment Operator / Installer
- R&D Professionals
- Certified consultants
- Environment Specialist
- Health / Safety / Filtration Specialist
- Thermal imaging Inspection
- Heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) inspection
- Plumbing inspection
- Structural inspection
- Others allied to this industry

Segments:

- Home Improvements Centers
- Building and Construction Companies
- Wholesalers / Dealers / Distributors
- Many More

List includes: Company and Contact name, Title/Designation, Direct contact number, Verified email address, Mailing address, Fax number, Revenue size & employee size, SIC/NAICS and more.

List Details:

- ✓ **Format:** Excel spreadsheet.
- ✓ **Quality:** We provide up to 90% and anything less than that we replace with fresh contacts.
- ✓ **Benefits:** Complete Ownership, Unlimited, Multichannel marketing.

Please help me with your **Target market (Title/ Industry /Location)** and I will get back to you with Data counts, Cost and Benefits.

Warm Regards,
Flavia Johnson

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BY ROB CORBO



Refinishing a Brownstone Stoop

I've written a number of articles for *JLC* on renovating Hoboken, N.J., row houses. One topic I haven't discussed but that's often part of our scope of work is refinishing a home's entry stoop.

In a typical Hoboken row house, the entry stoop provides two means of egress from the home. The door at the top of the stairs enters into what's often referred to as the "parlor level" and serves as the home's formal entrance. There's also a door under the stoop's landing; this door provides access to the "garden level" and usually serves as the home's main egress. It's not uncommon for the small, covered space beneath the stairs to be used as a storage area (for bicycles, snow shovels, and so on), and it is typically gated and locked. Technically, the city owns the area from the street to a building's front façade, but it takes no responsibility for maintaining the stoops or the areas on either side of them.

BROWNSTONE HISTORY

Entry stoops in Hoboken were traditionally made mainly from New Jersey brownstone. They were commonly built as open-stringer stairs (1), but occasionally have closed stringers composed of a mix of brownstone and brick (2). Extracted from nearby quarries around the turn of the century (most of Hoboken's row houses were built between 1880 and 1900), brownstone—a type of sandstone—was an inexpensive substitute for marble and limestone. The growing urban middle class at the time could afford something a little more architecturally sophisticated than the usual brick façade, and brownstone offered a reasonable upgrade—it was easy to cut, carve, and transport.

Brownstone quickly became known for its tendency to deteriorate, however; the qualities that made brownstone appealing as a building material (ease of cutting, carving, and transporting) also made it vulnerable to the harsh, Northeast weather. It was rarely specced for new construction after the early 1900s. Water combined with salt (which is applied liberally here in the Northeast during winter) easily penetrates sandstone and has the potential to wreak havoc on weather-exposed entry stairs.

The options for repairing brownstone are limited. Though my clients typically make good money working in Manhattan, their incomes are offset by steep housing and living costs. They rarely have the budget or desire to replace damaged brownstone with real brownstone, or to replace entire façades of brownstone veneer with

The typical stoop on a brownstone row house was built with an open stringer. Here, a worker begins a repair by chipping off all of its brownstone finish with a rotary hammer (1). Some stairs were designed with closed stringers composed of a brick and brownstone mixture (2).

Photos by Rob Corbo

more-stable masonry products. Because the local preservation commission is still pretty low-key about rehabbing these façades—unlike in some of the historic districts in Brooklyn and Manhattan where builders commonly have to abide by strict restoration rules and regulations—we are usually able to make use of concrete stucco. It provides a harder wearing surface, making for a more durable resurfacing material for a stoop than traditional brownstone would provide.

REFINISHING THE STOOP

Resurfacing a brownstone stoop is a maintenance repair, much like exterior painting or re-roofing. The lifetime of the repair depends on the quality of the original work (the structure that forms the underlying substrate for the wall cladding and the stoop) and the quality of the re-build. My clients should expect to get 15 years out of the resurfacing; longer if they stay on top of repairing surface damage (such as that caused by a heavy flower pot being dropped on the steps, or by an enthusiastic snow shoveler who gets a little overzealous chipping ice).

In addition to repairing the stoop, we often rehab a home's entire façade. We set up scaffolding for any pressure-washing, brick repointing, and painting that needs to be done, and we cover it with netting to protect pedestrians from falling items. The garden-level façade adjacent to the stoop is typically a brownstone veneer with brick above it, and we usually have to tie any entry-stoop repair work into this façade. Along with our project foreman, Danny DoCouto, our masonry sub, Victor Bezama, of FPV Contracting Co., coordinates all this work.

RESTORATION COAT

At the start of the job, Bezama's crew begins by chipping away 1/2 to 3/4 inch of the stoop's surface down to solid brownstone with rotary hammers (see photo 1, previous page). They also chip away the garden-level façade's veneer; roughing up the surface to promote the bonding of what I call the "restoration" coat.

With the chipping complete (3), the demoed surface gets pressure-washed to remove dust and debris. Bezama's crew lets the surface dry before using a fast-setting cement-based repair mortar called MasterEmaco N 424 (master-builders-solutions.basf.us) for the restoration coat. They mix this repair mortar with water (it comes as powder in 5-gallon buckets) until it reaches the consistency of damp beach sand—and only as much material as they can install without it prematurely setting up. Working from the top down, they lightly wet the work area to a saturated-surface-dry standard and apply a thin bond coat, consisting of a diluted mix of the repair mortar.



Modern repair of a brownstone finish relies on three-coat concrete stucco—a more durable material than the traditional sandstone. After the old material is chipped off, reducing the stairs to a rounded but stable substrate, the repair crew builds back the stairs using a "restoration coat" of a fast-setting cement mortar. With little more than trowels and straightedges, the skilled crew sculpts a new set of stairs from a well-compacted build-up of the repair mortar.



The finish coat—a color-tinted cement-based mortar—goes over the scratch coat and is finished with trowels, levels, and sponges (5). Ironwork is an important but extremely expensive part of a stoop repair. Usually, the old ironwork is salvaged with wire brushes and new paint, but occasionally the author has a chance to replace it entirely to good effect (6). When cured, the finish coat needs to be power-washed with a weak solution of muriatic acid to even out the color (7).

The crew applies the repair mortar in firm, 1/8- to 1-inch lifts to get good compaction, building out the material beyond what's needed. After a few hours, they "shave" off the semi-dry excess material, a little bit at a time, to the desired profile. The shaved waste falls off like grains of sand and is considered dead material that can't be re-used.

I'm always amazed by the skill Bezama's crew exhibits at this stage—they basically sculpt out the stairs using only trowels and hand levels (4). They're able to precisely recreate the stair's bullnose and scotia molding on each tread, while maintaining riser-height and tread-depth uniformity, and providing a 1/8-inch-per-foot slope on the treads and landing for drainage. On the adjacent façade, they make the linear lines simulating brownstone blockwork with longer, 4-foot levels. The ability to shave the Matrix mortar allows them to create sharp edges on these faux-blockwork lines. When they've formed the entry stoop (and adjacent façade), they let it cure, then apply the scratch coat.

SCRATCH AND FINISH COATS

For the scratch coat, Bezama's crew uses a two-part sand, one-part Portland-cement mix, which they apply 3/8 inch thick with notched towels to create a smooth, grooved surface. They let it cure for one to two weeks to harden up, or longer if the schedule allows. It must cure well, as it acts as the only moisture infiltration barrier on the facade.

For the finish coat, the crew uses a cement-based repair mortar called Matrix (conproco.com/matrix) that's color-matched to the brownstone and is mixed and applied similarly to the MasterEmaco N 424 repair mortar. They apply it 1/4 inch thick, using trowels, levels, and sponges (5). After this top coat dries, they power-wash it with a weak solution of water and muriatic acid as needed to achieve a uniform color (7).

IRONWORK

Decorative railings can be a real budget buster; I've gotten quotes up to \$40,000 for a stoop's wrought-iron work alone. We try to re-use the existing railings as much as possible, simply removing and storing them during the job, then reinstalling and painting them in place. However, on some jobs, we've needed to have them sandblasted, primed, and painted off site.

When the budget allows, new railings and guards look awesome (6). We work with Joe Monga, of Decorative Ironworks, in Paterson, N.J. He has catalogs and pictures of different styles that clients pore over, but we often have to rein them in; newel posts alone can cost \$8,000 apiece.

Rob Corbo is a building contractor based in Elizabeth, N.J.

Is Granite Going Out of Style?



Is it true? Could granite's 30-year reign be coming to an end? We can't say for sure. In fact, we think granite remains a solid choice. After all, it's both durable and attractive — and it's become increasingly affordable too. But there's just no denying granite's seeming decline. As homeowners opt for more modern kitchen designs, they're also opting for more understated countertop alternatives.

Here's a quick look at some of the countertop's hottest contenders:



Engineered Quartz:

Perhaps granite's top competitor, engineered quartz offers the beauty of stone without the maintenance. It's tougher than granite, and it's highly resistant to scratching, cracking, staining and heat. Unlike granite, which offers the unique qualities of natural stone, engineered quartz is largely uniform; because it's engineered, there's no choice of one-of-a-kind slab. There are, however, a number of colors and designs available — from stark modern whites to options closely resembling marble. And, because engineered quartz is non-porous, it never has to be sealed like natural stone.



Wood:

Increasingly, homeowners seek and appreciate natural wood countertops — particularly easy butcher blocks and those custom-created by quality craftsmen. While wood countertops can add warmth, balance and beauty to any modern home, they also require a fair amount of maintenance. Because wood is susceptible to damage from heat and moisture, it must be sealed about once a month. The best part about wood, though, is that it can be refinished in the event that damage does occur.



Soapstone:

Soapstone is an attractive, natural quarried stone that ranges from light gray to green-black in color. While the material is soft and pliable, it's also nonporous (i.e., it doesn't require regular sealing like granite). Soapstone is also resistant to stains and acidic materials. The downside to soapstone is that it is susceptible to scratches and deep indentations. Light gray soapstone will also weather and darken over time, occasionally developing a patina finish. The material comes in smaller slabs, so seams will be visible in soapstone countertops longer than seven feet.



Concrete:

Concrete countertops came onto the scene in the 1980s — and they’ve evolved a lot since. These days, precast concrete countertops are available in a number of different colors. Generally, they’re flat and smooth, and they can run from 1.5 inches to 10 feet long. While concrete countertops have historically cracked and chipped easily, recent innovations have made them less prone to damage. Concrete is naturally strong and heat-resistant, and slabs can be sealed to prevent staining.



Stainless Steel:

There’s a reason restaurants use stainless steel countertops in their kitchens. It’s heat-, rust- and stain-resistant; it’s easy to clean; and it won’t absorb or harbor even the toughest bacteria. The downside to stainless steel countertops is that they scratch easily — and they show it too. For this reason, it’s best to use a cutting board any time you’re prepping food on a stainless steel countertop.

Also, it's a good idea to choose a brushed stainless finish that will help conceal any marks. At first blush, you may think that stainless feels ultramodern or cold, but a balance of stainless steel and wood can create a warm, timeless and uber-functional kitchen.

Not Sure Which Countertop to Choose?

When you're remodeling your kitchen, the most important question to ask yourself is this:

Are you remodeling for yourself or a potential buyer?

If you're remodeling for yourself, go with what you like best. (And if you love granite, by all means go with granite!) But if you're remodeling with an eye toward selling, we advise going with a more neutral option. You'll get the upscale look you're going for without alienating granite-tired buyers.

Federal Register Notice Regarding Radon

EPA Indoor Environments Division sent this bulletin at 08/24/2017 03:01 PM EDT



This message is to inform you of a notice of availability that was published on August 23, 2017 in the Federal Register. EPA is seeking public feedback on a proposed approach for developing voluntary criteria for organizations that credential radon service providers.

Currently, states receiving indoor radon grants from EPA may only list providers credentialed by one or both of two recognized credentialing bodies or by their state-run certification program. These criteria will establish an ongoing and open evaluation process for organizations wanting to credential radon service providers, and it will help states ensure high-quality radon services are available to their citizens.

This is a non-regulatory proposal designed to benefit state programs, small businesses and consumers.

To access the notice, please visit the Agency's electronic docket (EPA-HQ-OAR-2017-0430) on regulations: www.regulations.gov/document?D=EPA-HQ-OAR-2017-0430-0001. You may submit your comments directly online via this hyperlink. The 60-day comment period closes on Monday, October 23, 2017.

Additional information can be found on our website at www.epa.gov/radon. Depending on volume of interest and questions received, EPA may host a question and answer session via webinar during the comment period. Please visit our website regularly for updates.

Thank you for your continued interest in the EPA's Radon Program.

Are you advocating for healthy indoor air in your community?

Access **free** media resources here!





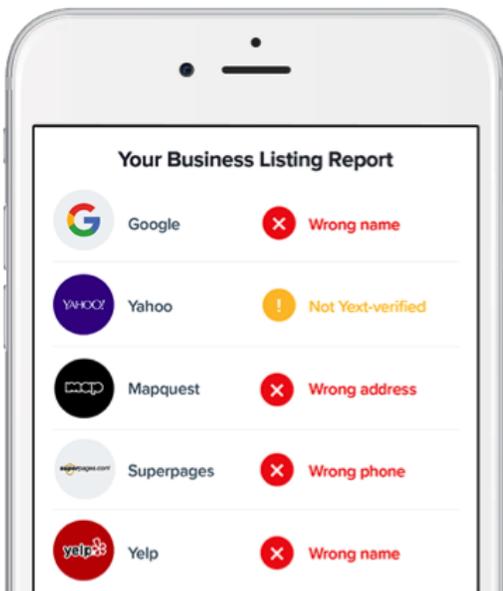
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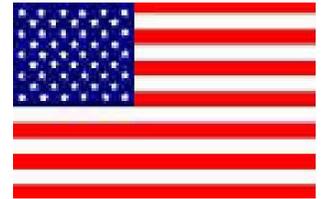
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