



Windsmere Stone & Granite Ltd

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SOAPSTONE

What is Soapstone?

Soapstone is a metamorphic rock that is composed primarily of talc, with varying amounts of chlorite, micas, amphiboles, carbonates and other minerals. Because it is composed primarily of talc it is usually very soft. Soapstone is typically gray, bluish, green or brown in colour, often variegated. Its name is derived from its “soapy” feel and softness.



The name “soapstone” is often used in other ways. Miners and drillers use the name for any soft rock that is soapy or slippery to the touch. In the craft marketplace, sculpture and ornamental objects made from soft rocks such as alabaster or serpentine are often said to be made from “soapstone”. Be careful when purchasing if the type of rock used in making the object is important to you.

Many people use the name “steatite” interchangeably with “soapstone”. However, some people reserve the name “steatite” for a fine-grained unfoliated soapstone that is nearly 100% talc and highly suited for carving.

How Does Soapstone Form?

Soapstone most often forms at convergent plate boundaries where broad areas of Earth’s crust are subjected to heat and directed pressure. Peridotites, dunites and serpentinites in this environment can be metamorphosed into active fluids in a process known as metasomatism.

Physical Properties of Soapstone

Soapstone is composed primarily of talc and shares many physical properties with that mineral. These physical properties make soapstone valuable for many different uses. These useful physical properties include:

- Soft and very easy to carve
- Nonporous
- Non-absorbent
- Low electrical conductivity
- Heat resistant
- High specific heat capacity
- Resistant to acids and alkalis

Soapstone is a rock and its mineral composition can vary. Its composition depends upon the parent rock material and the temperature/pressure conditions of its metamorphic environment. As a result, the physical properties of the soapstone can vary from quarry to quarry and even within a single rock unit.

Granite & Marble Worktops

Kitchen, Bathroom & Bedroom
Vanity Basins, Bath Surrounds
Cold Shelves

York Stone

Handmade Cobbles
Crazy Paving
Flagstones

Interior Flooring

Marble, Granite,
Limestone

Masonry Service

Exterior Paving
Fire Hearths & Surrounds



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The level of metamorphism sometimes determines its grain size. Soapstone with a fine grain size works best for highly detailed carvings. The presence of minerals other than talc and the level of metamorphism can influence its hardness. Some of the harder varieties of soapstone are preferred for countertops because they are more durable than a pure talc soapstone.

How is Soapstone Used?

The special properties of soapstone make it suitable, or the material of choice, for a wide variety of uses. A number of examples of soapstone use are explained below.

- Countertops in kitchens and laboratories
- Sinks
- Cooking post, cooking slabs, boiling stones
- Bowls and plates
- Cemetery markers
- Electrical panels
- Ornamental carvings and sculptures
- Fireplace liners and hearths
- Woodstoves
- Wall tiles and floor tiles
- Facing stone
- Bed warmers
- Marking pencils
- Moulds for metal casting
- Cold stones



Cleaning Soapstone

You can clean your soapstone after the mineral oil treatment using any household cleaner. Usually just wiping the soapstone with soap and water works fine. A soapstone sink will stand up to any mild cleaner. Sink corners can be easily kept clean with the use of a small vegetable brush when needed.

Soapstone Kitchen and laboratory Countertops

Soapstone is often used as an alternative natural stone countertop instead of granite or marble. In laboratories it is unaffected by acids and alkalis. In kitchens it is not stained or altered by tomatoes, wine, vinegar, grape juice and other common food items. Soapstone is unaffected by heat. Hot pots can be placed directly on it without fear of melting, burning or other damage.

Soapstone is a soft rock and it is easily scratched in countertop use. However, a gentle sanding and treatment with mineral oil will easily remove shallow scratches. Soapstone is not suitable as a workbench top where it will receive rough treatment and where sharp or abrasive objects will be placed upon it.

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Soapstone Tiles and Wall Panels

Soapstone tiles and panels are an excellent choice where heat and moisture are present. Soapstone is dense, without pores, does not stain and repels water. Those properties make soapstone tiles and wall panels a good choice for showers, tub surrounds and backsplashes.

Soapstone is heat resistant and does not burn. That makes it an excellent wall covering behind wood burning stoves and ovens. Fireplaces are also lined with soapstone to create a hearth that quickly absorbs heat and radiates it long after the fire is out. This property of soapstone was recognised in Europe over 1000 years ago and many early hearths there were lined with soapstone.

Soapstone Woodstoves

Soapstone does not burn or melt at wood burning temperatures and it has the ability to absorb heat, hold heat and radiate heat. These properties make it an excellent material for making wood-burning stoves. The stove becomes hot and radiates that heat into the room. It also holds heat, keeping the coals hot and often allowing the owner to add more wood without the need for kindling.



Soapstone Cooking Pots

Soapstone cooking pots absorb heat readily from the stove and radiate it into the soup or stew. Because their walls are thick, they take a little longer to heat than a thin metal pot. However, they heat their contents evenly and retain their heat when removed from the stone – the contents of the pot keep cooking until the pot itself begins to cool. Soapstone pots are highly prized by people who learn how to use them.

Example of a Metamorphic rock



Metamorphic rocks arise from the transformation of existing rock types, in a process called metamorphism, which means "change in form". The original rock is subjected to heat and pressure, causing profound physical or chemical change. The protolith may be a sedimentary, igneous, or existing metamorphic rock.

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