

“VANCOUVER ISLAND
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THE MOST BEAUTIFUL
MARBLE IN THE WORLD
AND IT’S NOT FOUND
ANYWHERE ELSE.”

MAGNIFICENT MARBLE

HARNESSING NATURE’S BEAUTY,
ONE COUNTERTOP AT A TIME

TEXT BY TESS VAN STRAATEN PHOTOS BY DON DENTON

FOR MATRIX MARBLE & STONE'S Ivo Zanatta, each massive slab of stone in his family's iconic Duncan factory and showroom is a work of art.

"They're pieces of nature, they're works of art and they're very special," says Zanatta, who's been at the helm of the family business for 16 years. "Nature creates all these patterns — it's not a designer in New York or Paris — and each one is unique."

Matrix Marble & Stone was started by Zanatta's father, Dennis, in 1980. Moving to Canada from his native Italy, Dennis Zanatta had a vision to bring his artisan craft to Vancouver Island. Thirty-five years later, Matrix carries the largest selection of marble and stone on Vancouver Island and is a major supplier of specialized building products.

"My father and my mother brought natural stone to Vancouver Island and they were the first to do this kind of work here," Zanatta says. "They also brought grapes to Vancouver Island and had the first vineyard, bringing wine-making [here] as well. So when you think about it, my parents brought more investment to the Cowichan Valley than any other industry."

Zanatta says his parents wanted to bring the things they loved to their new home and their intention was to show what

Vancouver Island could produce. Yet, despite their passion for the island and their love of natural stone — which they imported from all over the world — the Zanattas had no idea just how popular local marble would become.

"Vancouver Island marble is some of the most beautiful marble in the world and it's not found anywhere else," Zanatta explains. "It's the only white marble quarried in Canada and it's typical of the geological formation of Vancouver Island, which makes it unique."

First Nations have known about the island's special black, white and grey marbles for centuries, and early settlers on the island used it to make grave markers.

When black marble was discovered near Cowichan Lake in 1990, Dennis Zanatta made arrangements to start quarrying it. Six years later, the Zanatta family scouted a source for white and grey marble near Tahsis and the rest is history.

Vancouver Island is now one of the main sources for white, grey and black marble in western North America and while kitchen counters and marble bathrooms are Matrix's bread and butter — they do a countertop a day — the Duncan company has also been commissioned to undertake many unique projects, both at home and abroad.

"We've done some incredible projects over the years," Zanatta



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Ivo Zanatta in the Matrix Marble & Stone warehouse, located in Duncan.



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says. “Last year we did Canada House — the embassy in London, England — creating huge custom tiles out of Vancouver Island white marble. We’ve also done many sculptures, including one at the Victoria Police headquarters.”

Specialized, computer-controlled equipment at Matrix’s fabrication facility means they can carve almost any shape from blocks of stone.

But even after decades of experience in the family business and honing his craft in Italy, Toronto and Vancouver, Ivo Zanatta says working with natural material is always tricky.

“[It’s a] challenge because what you’re doing is trying to take something that’s not perfect

and make it look perfect,” Zanatta says. “You’re trying to take the best out of something and the beauty out of something that has imperfections.”

For Zanatta, who learned the art of fine stonework from his father and still takes pride in being a hands-on boss who “works the tools” to this day, took over the family business in 1999. Continuing his father’s legacy was a natural progression.

“When you grow up in something and you’ve been immersed in something since the beginning it’s not intimidating at all,” explains Zanatta.

Attitude is Everything!



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Zanatta says his biggest challenge came a decade later, with the recession. It had a huge impact on the business because all the work on high-end homes dried up.

“That market has virtually disappeared and we’re still recovering from that,” Zanatta says. “After the recession, price became more of a concern than quality, so now people are building high-end homes and importing materials from China. The price might be lower, but the quality isn’t there.”

Zanatta’s hoping environmental concerns, and a resurgence in buying local, will help. The company has also diversified with a popular line of LEED® qualified marble pavers, which add a touch of luxury while being eco-friendly.

For Zanatta, whose home uses all Vancouver Island marble and natural, island-sourced materials, it’s hard to pick a favourite from the more than 100 different types and colours of stone Matrix carries from around the globe.

“My favourite marble changes all the time,” Zanatta says. “One of the great things about the natural stone industry is that new quarries open all the time and new stones are being discovered every day that are incredibly beautiful. Nature is always going to bring us something new to love.” **B**



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