

# A STONE'S THROW

Stone supplier Cava Surfaces brings the best of Italy's quarries to design enthusiasts in Toronto, thanks to relationships forged over the past two decades.

By Susan Semenak

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TARIO DARWISH



Looking out across the Apuan Alps just outside the Italian city of Carrara, in northernmost Tuscany, you might think snow dusts the craggy mountaintops. But actually, the gleaming cliff faces are Carrara's eponymous marble, which has been quarried here since ancient Roman times.

Toronto stone supplier Cava Surfaces has carved out a name for itself for its breathtaking selection of premium, hand-selected marble that comes from these very mountains, along with an array of exquisitely coloured and detailed quartzite, granite and engineered stone from Spain and Brazil. The company's showroom in the North York design district feels like a museum of marble and other extravagant stone surfaces: polished smooth, burnished to a honed satin finish or textured with fluted, reeded and hammered markings.

"Curated by nature" is Cava's slogan, and company founder and owner Joe Barranca has forged close and lasting relationships with Carrara's quarry owners in the nearly two decades he has been in business. Every year in September, he and his team travel to Carrara to choose and reserve the very best slabs they can find on the mountainside. While there, they also attend the Marmomac international stone show in Verona, which brings together stone suppliers from South America, China, Turkey and Iran.

Cava Surfaces sales manager Tariq Darwish says this yearly ▶



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pilgrimage to Carrara—known as “the mecca of marble”—is what differentiates the company from its competitors, who mostly place their orders from a distance. “It is awe-inspiring to get in a truck and scale the mountain along narrow winding roads through open-air quarries. All around you is luminous marble,” Darwish says. “At first, all you see are the dusty stone surfaces. But then the quarriers turn on their hoses, and as if by magic, the true colours and veining of the wet stone blocks come to life. It positively glows.”

Darwish says that he and the Cava team are on the lookout for the finest pieces of marble with the truest white backgrounds and the cleanest, sharpest veining. They keep their eyes open for hidden fissures that might weaken the stone and hazed sections where the colour contrasts are not quite bold enough. “We want to be here ourselves, seeing the blocks being cut, choosing the ones that are the most spectacular,” he says.

Though Italian marble comprises more than 60 per cent of Cava’s sales, the company also stocks granite, onyx, quartzite and

engineered stones. Darwish says he is especially excited by the astonishing variety of pinks and greens in the quartzite that Cava imports from Espirito Santo on the east coast of Brazil, as well as the region’s Taj Mahal quartzite with its crystal-like beige and brown veining.

And though most people think of honed or polished stone when dreaming of a backsplash or bathroom vanity, Darwish says new cutting technologies have introduced many other finishes, including leathered and three-dimensional fluted and reeded patterns, which offer a novel way to bring a dramatic look to contemporary spaces, and bush-hammering, which renders the stone’s surface rough and rocky. “In 2025, it’s all about texture,” Darwish says.

But even as trends come and go, Cava has been, and always will be, about relationships. “Our deep-rooted connections in Carrara allow us to source the most unique stones, setting us apart in Toronto’s design district,” Darwish says. “We curate only the exceptional.” 

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