



# Housekeeping

by Stan Zimmer

## Marble floors require a three stage cleaning and maintenance program

*Another great article from The Rooms Chronicle, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! \*\*\*Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.\*\*\* College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com*

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Many of the better quality hotels have long chosen marble and limestone to give a special elegance to their hotel and to their rooms. The appeal of natural stone flooring gives an extraordinary feel to a hotel's common areas and guest suites that only stone can convey.

Caring for natural stone can be a challenge. How to properly care for the floor, maintain its shine, and deep clean the stone and the grout joints are just a few of the questions that every housekeeping manager will likely face.

Because of the high volume of use, heavy traffic in common areas, and the transient nature of guests, a hotel setting is especially challenging for housekeepers since they will have a limited amount of time to care for the marble floor and a limited budget for the hiring of any outside contractors to maintain the floors. The key is to start early in preparing a standardized program of proper care for marble floors. Such a program should include: 1) Daily maintenance, 2) Deep cleaning at regular intervals, and 3) Periodic "in-house" polish upkeep.

### Daily maintenance

When maintaining marble floors, selecting the right product for the task is the most critical decision to be made. Marble, a metamorphic limestone, is a natural stone that has unique properties. It is these properties that give limestone the capability of achieving a high natural shine that is traditionally associated with marble finishes.

Any maintenance or cleaning product for marble should have the unique ability to achieve excellent cleaning results without dehydrating the stone. This combination of cleaning and hydrating performance characteristics differentiates an effective daily cleanser from mild "stone soaps" and "stone cleaners". Stone soaps may not dehydrate the stone but are often not effective as cleaners, whereas stone cleaners are effective cleaners but often dehydrate the stone's surface.

An effective marble cleanser, such as StoneClean™ "60", will contain a number of surfactants, amines and other ingredients scaled to "grab" the contaminants and float them out. Most neutral cleansers are very poor at "floating" the dirt and oils up and out of the stone. Effective marble cleansers contain a special ingredient that sinks to the surface of the stone. This substantially alters the water extracting effect of the cleaning agents on the stone itself and leaves a very slight, completely clear, moisturizing layer.

Housekeeping personnel will notice how effective this unique solution will clean by just adding two ounces of solution per gal-

Pictured below: A well-maintained marble floor creates an ambience of luxury and cleanliness in a hotel lobby.



ion of water. The product incorporates exceptional properties intended to not only float the contamination to the surface of the stone but also to transfer the contaminants to the mop.

Such a specialized cleaning solution generally eliminates the need for rinsing because the water evaporates from above the stone instead of inside the pores of the stone. Also, since there are no detergents in the composition of the cleansers, it also reduces the need for a rinse. This rare combination of cleaning properties is the hotel's first line of defense in keeping the stone looking clean all the time.

Hotels should not wax marble floors, but many actually do in order to protect the surface of their investment and to make cleaning easier. Therefore, an effective marble cleaning solution should also be "coatings" friendly, so it will work compatibly in keeping a waxed surface clean. Without using the proper solution, residues from detergents or dirt and oils that are not totally captured by an ineffective daily cleaning product can more quickly soil the surface treatment of the stone. This is especially noticeable when housekeeping employees buff the stone and its wax coating after ineffective cleaning.

### Deep cleaning

A program of deep cleaning at regular intervals is necessary to maintain the integrity of the stone floor. However, not all "intensive" cleaners are created equal. An intensive cleanser should also be safe for all sensitive stone surfaces. It should have an exceptional ability to penetrate well into the stone surface and to draw out deeply embedded dirt and oils. If the intensive cleaner is permitted to soak into a stain or badly soiled stone, it may eliminate the need for a poultice to draw the stain out. The intensive cleaner should not be too high in pH such that it might damage any man-made agglomerates (marble tiles made with pieces of stone and then color-dyed and glued together with a resin).

A proper intensive cleanser, such as StoneClean™ & Strip, can often make quick work of waxes or coatings put on marble. This will remove any soiled wax and will give the housekeeper a clean stone surface to work with. However, be aware that there are certain sealers that will require extra effort to remove them from the stone. When faced with this situation, a more aggressive and potentially environmentally unfriendly solution may be required. When multiple and aged layers of sealer are built up on the stone or in the grout joints, they can be very difficult to remove in one application of intensive cleanser. Let the floor dry out a day or two between deep cleaning applications before attempting to remove remaining layers of wax or other marble sealers.

Polished marble floors have a pesky problem when it comes to deep cleaning – cleaning the grout! One contractor recently reported that hotel managers were extremely happy with his service because he pays attention to cleaning the tile grout on his jobs. He thinks that in some cases grout cleaning is a bigger concern than the floor shine to hotel managers. Typical grout cleansers are acid-based and hence, should not be used on marble. Please refer to the article below that was published in a previous issue of TRC about tile grout cleaning procedures.

### Polish upkeep

Since marble and most limestones are only 3-4 on the Mols scale of hardness (diamonds are 10 and quartz sand is 7) there is a need to try to "protect" the surface. Here are some of the options and suggestions for trying to maintain the high shine that marble offers:

- 1) Leave the natural finish from any surface treatment and maintain with periodic "powder" polishing or polishing with a refinishing cream. These treatments are for the purist who wants marble to stand on its own merit. This can be done successfully only when the staff is quick to use the oxalic acid polishing powder or cream that contains potassium oxalate.

One concern here can be that if the floor care staff has not been properly trained in the application of oxalic acid polishing, concerns of "overuse" and re-etching may arise if the stone surface is not quickly rinsed and buffed. To help safeguard against this potential danger, use a quality polishing cream that is derived from natural polishing agents. Natural polishing creams are one third less acidic than oxalic acid, thus drastically reducing the possibility of damaging the stone.

Natural polishing creams are used wet with a white pad and a regular speed buffer, so no special stone equipment is needed. This type of polishing cream may be a little slower in bringing up a high shine than stronger solutions, but it still can do the job even with scratched stones. A small buffer and a white polishing pad is usually all that is needed to "pop" up the natural shine.

Pictured right: A housekeeping employee uses a speed buffer to apply a natural polishing cream to make this marble floor shine.



- 2) *Acid-based crystallization* is another common way to achieve polish protection. This treatment changes the calcium carbonate of the marble into a harder surface. The main advantage of this treatment for initial polishing is that it can quickly bring up a shine. However, to use acid-based crystallization on a regular basis for maintenance poses many concerns.

Decomposition caused by the contact of acidic polish with the stone creates calcite powders that remain in the finish. Over time with progressive polishing, these residues can become visible as clouding or yellowing. This “surface fatigue” means that it will become harder to bring back a good clear shine after repeated acid-based crystallization treatments. Only use this option sparingly.

- 3) *Non-acid stone hardening treatment* is a special add-on to polish protection creams that can protect both the newly restored surface and the newly installed marble floor. Keep in mind though that this is NOT a restoration product, so it will bring out limited results on dull or worn stones. However, when used as a final polishing step for further surface protection, the results can be amazing. Use non-acid stone hardening treatments following oxalic acid polishing, crystallization, or cream polishing as the icing on the cake treatment for polished marble.

The advantages to this procedure include increased slip resistance, better abrasion resistance, and a more lustrous shine. The safe non-acid formula will not harm sensitive stones. It is easy to apply and will not yellow or discolor with repeated applications, nor will it trap dirt into the finish. It also doesn't require stripping the surface before applying to the floor.

Guests will appreciate that the hotel and its staff not only care for how beautiful the lobby and other public areas look, but also how well the marble floors in their guest suites shine. Delivering a good shine and a clean looking marble floor will keep the clients coming back to your hotel!

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