

Thin Stone and How to fix it

Peter Harrison of the Stone Federation of Great Britain claims he is often called in to trouble shoot where installations have gone wrong, and claims that the main cause of the problems is a lack of knowledge by the fitters, a lack of training and a failure to follow British Standards and Stone Federation Guidelines.

“Approx 70% of the domestic stone industry tilers is made up of ceramic, porcelain and terrazzo fitters who have moved into the market thinking that stone can be installed in the same way. In the past a lot of stone was hard marble or granite which was relatively forgiving to movement and stress. Nowadays the trend is towards light coloured limestone, in particular 600 x 600 by 12mm. Many fitters who lack a background in stone don't understand the characteristics of this more vulnerable stone used thinly. They don't understand that can crack if the screed moves. Because of a number of failures installers regularly say “I'm not going to fix stone, its doesn't work”

Stone Does Work. It works extremely well and gives a long lasting quality finish, but it must be fitted properly. The design must be right. The stone used must be suitable for the application. Movement joints must be used to compensate for surface movement. And uncoupling membranes are needed to prevent shear stresses being transferred from the substrate to the surface.

Often if a floor has cracked or debonded it is because installers have not fitted an uncoupling membrane or enough movement joints. The lack of movement joints often arises because of aesthetics. The installer should be alerting the customer to what will happen without them. But they are not doing this because they probably don't know themselves. If laid properly and sympathetically with the design, movement joints can improve the look of the finished floor rather than detract from it.

To overcome these problems the Stone Federation is working closely with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), who are currently funding a training officer for the stone industry. The Stone Federation has published a new code of practice bringing together all the stone flooring elements of the different British Standards, including the use of uncoupling membranes, the maximum size of floors before intermediate movement joints should be incorporated, and the use of perimeter movement joints.

Installers, architects and specifiers should all familiarise themselves with the new Code of Practice and should warn customers of the problems that could be encountered from floors that fall outside the requirements. We don't want to stifle innovation but we don't untrained installers continuing to say they're not going to use stone because it's a bad product.”

Peter goes on to recommend Schluter Systems manufacturers and suppliers of uncoupling membranes and movement joints. Technical manager Ian Knifton adds “Movement joints create independent tile fields, absorbing much of the surface movement. Without them the shear stress builds up between the surface and the screed, causing debonding and cracking. Stress relieving joints are an essential part of any stone installation and should be incorporated at the design stage.” www.schluter.co.uk