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Projects: Stone deck market opens up for contractors

Proven installation system opens up market for elevated stone decks and patios, balconies and stairs.

For years, decks, elevated patios and balconies have been popular choices for homeowners when designing or remodeling their outside living spaces. However, until recently, decking options have been limited primarily to wood or composite materials. Natural stone, pavers and tile – while aesthetically appealing – were simply too heavy and difficult to install on traditional wood joist framing.

Fortunately, a new durable, plastic polymer grid system is facilitating the installation of stone up to 3" thick on elevated surfaces. The system, which is designed to support the structural load across a 16 inch on center span, effectively opens up the entire range of stone options for elevated surfaces to include the use of natural stone pavers, travertine, pavers, slate, marble, and tile.

"With traditional deck materials, it was nearly impossible to use stone on any elevated surface," explains general contractor Jim Richardson of Richardson Brothers Construction & Demolition, located in Kendall, New York. "I wanted to offer stone decks to my customers, but any underlayment would have trapped moisture. Plus, the joist system would have to be significantly reinforced to support the weight."

According to Richardson, whose company builds and remodels high-end, custom homes, many of his customers are naturally attracted to stone because it adds substantial value to their homes and increases the aesthetic appeal of the property, while requiring little maintenance.

"In my opinion, no composite deck can compare to the beauty of a stone deck," Richardson adds. "There's something about the stone that adds style and class and just feels solid."

The weather in the upstate New York area also can dictate the use of elevated surfaces for non-deck areas. Due to freezing and thaws in the region, installing stone directly on the ground can have unexpected consequences.

"Even with thorough base preparation, the



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freezing ground, frequent thaws and ground settling make it very difficult to install stone on the ground,” Richardson explains. “As the years pass, pavers tend to heave up and down, requiring further upkeep and maintenance.”

Instead, by elevating the stone, “there is no more heaving, and the grass doesn’t grow between the pavers,” says Richardson. Richardson adds that the installation of a stone deck with Silca Grates is comparable in cost to traditional wood or composite decks, depending on the type of stone used.

“When you compare by square footage, the labor and material for installation, the costs for stone decks are very similar to wood or composite decks,” says Richardson.

Silca System

Designed and manufactured by Sare Plastics, a custom injection molding operation, the Silca System is a deck inlay subflooring grid that can be used on new decks, as well as for retrofit applications.

Based on the hexagonal structure of beehives and manufactured from engineered polymers into 1 ½”-thick grids, the Silca Grates ensure a structural surface for natural stone and manufactured pavers. The system is certified to meet building standards by the ICC (International Code Council).

The Silca Grates are fastened to the deck joists 16 inches on center using four 3-inch deck screws coated for pressure treated lumber. The grates can easily be cut to any length or contour using a circular, table or reciprocating saw. “I had never seen anything like it before, but I was amazed at how easy it was to cut and install to match the shape of any elevated structure,” says Richardson.

“I can use it to build anything my customer’s desire using stone, slate, or bricks – including two-story decks, two or three-tier decks, stairs. The possibilities are unlimited.”

Richardson adds that the system can even accommodate the use of sand, whether as foundation to even out irregular stone or polymeric between pavers, by first installing several layers of non-woven textile on the installed Silca Grates.

The system can also be installed by homeowners as a DIY project.

Mark Batz, a homeowner in Sherwood, Oregon, was looking to replace a well-worn 25-year-old cedar deck. Recurring pressure washing and mandatory sealer treatments every few years were taking its toll on Batz, who at 62 years old, was looking forward to relaxing on his deck rather than maintaining it.

This is a common complaint with wood decks, which can warp, crack, distort, split, fade, and promote mold and mildew. To maintain decks, homeowners must seal the wood on an annual or semi-annual basis, along with replacing broken screws and individual boards.

So when Batz came across a local contractor looking to discard several truckloads of used pavers and sand that belonged to them from a recent municipal project, he decided to use the material to install two ground level patios in his backyard.

His next idea was to remodel his elevated wood deck as well. After conducting some internet research on “elevated stone or paver decks,” he discovered the Silca System.

According to Batz, he purchased the product and then installed the pavers on the grates with the help of a contractor friend that also assisted in obtaining the required permits for the project. He then utilized the remaining pavers and the Silca grates on some stairs and even created a hardscape pathway to match the deck. Batz says the Silca grates were easy to work with despite some intricate deck features.

“I had to create very specific shapes to fit several octagonal breakfast nooks,” explains Batz. “We used a circular saw with a blade for plastic and the grates cut like butter. They were so easy to install.”

Batz is extremely pleased with the result and has already recommended the system to others.

“I recommend [the Silca System] for anyone that is trying to build an outdoor surface elevated above ground. Even the inspector said he had never seen an elevated stone deck before, and he was impressed.”

For more information, call Silca Systems at (330) 821-1585 or visit www.silcasystem.com. Silca is located at 14600 Commerce Street NE, Alliance, Ohio.

