



At the P.F. Chang's in Sherman Oaks, Calif., the restaurant chain's usual stonework is set off with bands of creamy limestone -- similar to what's used in the surrounding shopping mall.

# Tasty & Timeless

Scottsdale, Ariz.-based P.F. Chang's China Bistro Inc. offers unique Chinese cuisine at more than 70 restaurants – and each location is a visual feast for stone lovers as well.



Whether it's either of the two prototype designs the company uses for its stand-alone operations, or what it refers to as an "inline" (located within someone else's building, such as a shopping center) store, the décor relies heavily on a variety of stone types and colors to catch the diner's eye.

"We probably put a little stronger emphasis on stone," admits Brian Stubstad, Chang's Director of Architecture and Design.

He attributes a lot of that to his own philosophy that stone is both durable and timeless.

"There are a lot of materials that people can use," he says. "But, if you go to Europe or Asia, you can find these great old stone buildings that are hundreds of years old."

**Client:** P.F. Chang's China Bistro, Scottsdale, Ariz.  
**Designer:** MBH Architects, Alameda, Calif.  
**Contractors:** ITX Construction, Anaheim, Calif;  
 Shawmut Design and Contracting, Downers Grove, Ill.  
 McCarty Constructions Co., Norcross, Ga.



The Palo Alto, Calif., restaurant reflects a fairly typical mix of slate, granite and marble elements.



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The restaurants' statuary is almost always supported by slate because of its strength and durability.

Stone is a very durable material, but it offers great aesthetics and it becomes timeless in its designs."

The other appeal to stone, Stubstad says, is that there's a certain feeling of warmth it gives off.

"Compare it to a sheetrock wall painted blue or green," he says. "That can come off feeling cold. The stones we use bring great warmth levels to our designs and there's a comfort level in that for our customers."

He also praises stone – especially slate – for its traction, and subsequent ability to reduce the amount of slip/fall accidents on wet floors.

P.F. Chang's can control design at its restaurants, since all are company-owned. Stubstad says he prefers to think of it as, "a collection," and – because of that – the company can go out of its way to make each restaurant look different.

Even with the differences, there are some common uses of

the material that run through the company's restaurants – such as the dry stack stone on the exterior of its stand-alone buildings. The material is also used for exterior accents with some of the inline stores, and for feature character walls on the restaurants' interiors.

Slate also makes an appearance on walls as well as floors. "We like to use China Lotus and Rajah and California Gold slates in our designs," says Stubstad. "Those are three colors that show up prominently. And, we also use a lot of Mexican travertine."

For instance, all Chang's bathrooms are done with travertine floors and walls, and custom-designed concrete-trough sinks.

"We place a fair amount of emphasis on our bathrooms," says Stubstad. "We try to make them very appealing for our customers."

Granite is still another material that appears regular in the



The warm tones of the lighting in a dining niche are reflected in the stone walls of the Rancho Mirage, Calif., restaurant. The designers believe stone warms the atmosphere in a way that sheetrock can't.

A wall of slate, in a variety of shades and dotted with niches for statuary, sets of the steel and wood staircase between the two levels of the restaurant inside the Aladdin Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.



restaurants for items such as countertops and the hostess stands. While Stubstad describes himself as a very hands-on designer, a lot of the nuts-and-bolts work of making each P.F. Chang's restaurant into an integrated design statement falls to the designers in the Restaurant Studio at MBH Architects in Alameda, Calif.

Marcelina Balicudiong, an MBH designer, says some of the most-interesting jobs for the restaurant company are its inline stores because the spaces and the locales present unique challenges. A case in point, she says, is the company's new restaurant in Sherman Oaks, Calif.

## *"stone's aesthetics have a big role to play"*

"We try to take into consideration the area that we're going into," she says. "For instance, in Sherman Oaks, we were going into a shopping center that had several limestone elements in the architecture. There's a creamy band of limestone that was part of the exterior that we wanted to incorporate into the entry of the restaurant."

In another instance, with the company's restaurant in the new Aladdin Casino in Las Vegas, the MBH team was faced with integrating two floors' worth of space into a cohesive whole. Designer John Proctor worked with local artisans to come up with a functional and attractive steel and wood staircase, backed with a slate wall.

Balicudiong says the restaurant studio tries to make each restaurant fit in with its locale, regardless of whether it's in the Southwest or on the East Coast.

"They give us the location and if we don't know the area, we research it and see what other elements are in the same vicinity and then we take the Chang's dining concept into that," she says.

She echoes Stubstad's comments about slate's variety of colors and textures, and especially its durability. She notes that the designers have access to a facilities expert who advises them about issues such as wear and maintenance.

"Just recently, we were having a discussion about a wall that wasn't going well, and Brian (Stubstad) said, 'We need to add slate; otherwise this isn't going to hold up,'" she says. "We consider things like the traffic flow and its need to last."

Along with the various stones incorporated into a particular location, Balicudiong explains that with every restaurant, the concept is then fleshed out with wood types, textures and finishes, as well as fabric and lighting.

With many restaurants changing their décor just about as quickly as they change menu items and product packaging, Chang's Stubstad says it's those other elements that will likely be revised from time to time by his company.

"We'll always be introducing new things to the décor in terms of fabric textures and colors and new wood finishes," he says. "However, stone's aesthetics have a big role to play in what we put down and how each restaurant feels. The slate and stone are going to be with us for a very long time." -- K. Schipper