A ROLLING ROCK STONE FIELD GUIDE

How to Choose the Right Stone for Your Project

A field guide to selecting natural stone with confidence

FOR HARDSCAPERS · LANDSCAPERS · AND THE CLIENTS THEY SERVE

EST. 1955

ROLLING ROCK STONE

GRIT · STEADINESS · CARE

Quarried, fabricated & delivered from Boyertown, Pennsylvania since 1955

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Every stone project succeeds or fails long before the first pallet arrives on site — in the decision about what to order. This guide is built to make that decision faster and surer.

It is written first for the professionals who live with these choices every day: hardscapers, landscape design-build contractors, masons, and the architects and builders who specify their work. It is also written to be handed to a client. The technical depth is here for the pro; the plain-language framing is here so a homeowner can follow the reasoning and trust the recommendation.

A word on where this comes from. Rolling Rock Stone has been a producer and supplier of natural stone since 1955 — nearly seven decades quarrying the Blue Mountains of Berks County, Pennsylvania, and curating stone from a vetted network of partners across North America. The guidance here is field-tested, not lifted from a textbook. Where a choice carries structural or code consequences, we point you to the licensed engineer or building official who should make the final call. That is the line we hold: definitive on stone, deferential on structure.

> THE ONE RULE THAT GOVERNS EVERYTHING
>
> Natural stone is a **semi-finished** product of the earth. It is supplied *as it is found* — with natural variation in color, texture, size and thickness — and it is the mason's hand, not the quarry, that turns it into a finished wall. Choose your material well, then choose your installer even more carefully.

1 Start With the Job, Not the Stone

The most common selection mistake is falling for a color in a sample bin before the project has told you what it needs. Reverse the order. Let four questions about the job narrow the field — then choose among the stones that survive.

The four questions

1. **What is the application, and what will it carry?** A vertical facade, a foot-traffic patio, a vehicular driveway, a retaining wall and a pool coping all make different demands. Load and wear come first.
2. **What is the exposure?** In the freeze-thaw Northeast, water that soaks into stone and then freezes is the enemy. Density and absorption — covered in Section 4 — decide how a stone survives that cycle.
3. **What is it attaching to?** Is there a footing and a structural backup for full-bed stone, or are weight and clearance limited, pointing you toward adhered thin veneer? This is Section 2, and it is usually the decisive fork.
4. **What should it say?** Formal or rustic, historic or contemporary, quiet or dramatic. Aesthetic intent is real and it matters — but it is the last filter, not the first.

> FIELD NOTE
>
> Write the answers down before you open the catalog. A one-line project brief — *"adhered veneer, exterior chimney, freeze-thaw, contemporary ledge look"* — eliminates ninety percent of the inventory and stops you specifying a beautiful stone that the job can't actually use.

2 Building Stone or Thin Veneer

Almost every natural-stone project resolves to one of two installation families, and the choice is driven by structure, not looks. Full-bed **building stone** supports its own weight in a masonry wall. **Thin stone veneer (TSV)** is a thin-cut profile adhered to a prepared backup. Get this fork right and everything downstream — foundation, budget, freight, labor — falls into place.

	Building Stone (Full-Bed)	Thin Stone Veneer (Adhered)
Method	Stone-on-stone, set in a masonry wall	Surface-mounted; adhered to a substrate
Profile	Traditional full thickness, ~3–55"+	Thin-cut, ~1–1½"
Foundation	Dedicated footing / foundation required	No structural foundation; weight-restricted
Backup	Wall ties; lintel / shelf support at openings	Cementitious backer, existing masonry or prepared frame
Weight	Heavy — the design carries real mass	A fraction of the weight (~12–14 lbs/sq ft)
Cost & speed	Higher labor & freight; slower	Faster install; a fraction of freight & labor

When each is the right answer

Choose building stone when the design demands authentic depth, structural mass and traditional deep-set joints — and when the site can carry a proper footing. It is the only honest choice where the stone must provide its own structural bearing (with a licensed engineer's authorization) or where a historic, deep-reveal look is the goal.

Choose thin stone veneer when weight and clearance are the binding constraints: interior features, retrofits, chimney chases, and elevations where adding a footing isn't practical. It delivers the genuine texture of natural stone at modern construction speed.

SPEC CHECK — "NOMINAL THICKNESS"

Building stone is produced to **nominal thickness**, not to a precise factory dimension. "Thickness" refers to the bed depth — the dimension that runs *into* the wall — and it arrives as a range. That range is a feature, not a defect: it is what lets a qualified mason shape, dress and set each piece into a cohesive wall. It is also why a real stone mason, not a general laborer, belongs on this work.

STRUCTURAL VS. VENEER — DON'T BLUR THE LINE

A **veneer** is a facing thick enough only to support its own weight; it needs an engineered backup (CMU, wood frame or steel). **Structural stone** — stone-on-stone construction that bears primary load without a backup — may be used only when a licensed engineer explicitly authorizes it. Always confirm local building codes before you specify either.

3 The Three Categories of Stone

Beyond the full-bed / thin-veneer question, natural stone sorts into three families by how it was harvested and processed. Each carries a distinct look, and naming the family you want is the fastest way to narrow a selection.

Fieldstone — weathered character

Harvested from the surface and topsoil, fieldstone wears a high-character, weathered face earned over millennia of exposure. It reads rustic, aged and organic — an appearance mechanical splitting cannot fake. Blends such as **Foxfield Blend®** and **Mountain Fieldstone™** live here.

Splitface — fresh, revealed color

Mechanically cut or split to break the geological grain and expose the mineral's inner color and texture. The result is cleaner and more vibrant than a weathered face. Products like **Mountain Mary®** show off this fresher, quarried profile.

Ledge Rock — linear & contemporary

Naturally smaller and longer pieces that emphasize horizontal lines. Ledge rock is the go-to for a modern, informal, "tight" texture and for dry-stack looks. **Stonemont®** (a split ledge rock) is used specifically to achieve long, low-profile lines.

> **A NOTE ON GEOLOGY**
>
> Rolling Rock works most often in **limestone, quartzitic sandstone, mica schist, gneiss and quartzite**. Schist in particular is hard and durable yet carries a natural grain that makes it exceptionally workable for a mason — a good reminder that "hard" and "workable" are separate questions, both worth asking.

4 Reading the Geology

For any project where the stone will take weather or wear, three numbers tell you most of what you need to know about how it will perform: density, water absorption and compressive strength. The pattern to remember is simple — high density plus low absorption equals durability.

Stone Type	Representative Products	Density (lbs/ft³)	Absorption	Compressive (PSI)
Quartzitic Sandstone	Foxfield Blend®, Mountain Mary®	156–166	0.36–0.71%	21,500–26,830
Mica Schist	Crystal Lake®	167–168	0.38–0.45%	16,700–32,380
Limestone	Seneca Limestone®, Hensley Gray™	165–170	0.34–1.75%	14,900–31,420
Recrystallized Marble	Arcadian™	175	0.06%	14,486
Sandstone (import)	Brownstone™	159.7	1.55%	15,400

Figures are laboratory values on limited samples and are indicative, not guaranteed. Gneiss products (Oley Valley™, Ironstone Dark™) vary and are specified case by case.

What the numbers mean on site

- **Low absorption is your freeze-thaw insurance.** Water that can't get in can't freeze, expand and spall the stone. The densest options here — recrystallized marble and the tighter quartzitic sandstones — resist water-induced internal pressure best.
- **Strength and workability are a trade-off.** Crystal Lake® schist reaches an immense 32,380 PSI and shrugs off the harshest cycles — but it demands a master's touch to shape. Hensley Gray™ is celebrated as "very workable," making it the better choice for high-labor, intricate patterns like Euro Ashlar.
- **Match the metric to the job.** A quiet interior veneer doesn't need 30,000 PSI. A vehicular surface or a pool surround in a hard-freeze climate does care intensely about density and absorption.

5 Choosing by Application

Merchandise the project by where the stone lives, not by SKU. Below are the workhorse applications and the material logic behind each.

Application	What to reach for	Why
Patios & walkways	Flagstone; dimensional or irregular flagging	A breathable, high-value walking surface that matures rather than crumbles
Retaining & garden walls	Wallstone; boulders for grade	Permanent grade retention with no synthetic binder to fail over decades
Facades & fireplaces	Building stone or TSV per structure	Depth and mass for full-bed; adhered texture where weight is limited
Steps & landings	Heavy steps cut to full rise	A one-time investment that resists the scaling and pitting of harsh weather
Coping, sills & caps	Specialty cut stone	Precision-fabricated to the exact transition a high-traffic detail needs
Water features	Dense, freeze-thaw-rated landscape stone	Structural integrity and beauty in a constantly wet, high-stress zone

> **FIELD STRATEGY**
>
> Design a space that uses stone of a similar color palette that leads to a finished outdoor room that has character and appeal, giving your client quality that is value engineered.

6 Style, Shape & Pattern

The stone is the vocabulary; the **style** is the sentence. Shape and pattern set the scale and formality of the wall, and the final look is a collaboration between the stone and the mason's hand. As the second-generation stone-guru Agostino Giuseppe Vinci put it:

> *"Stone can be neither good nor bad — although some stone may be better for certain jobs than others, stone can do nothing. The ability to create a finished product lies in the talented hands of a person called a stone mason."*
>
> **— Agostino Giuseppe Vinci**

Style	Character	Best for
Ashlar	Rectangular, dressed to clean coursed lines	Formal facades where geometry is paramount
Square / Rectangular	Higher "rise"; blockier, substantial units	Large walls that need balanced, permanent proportion
Ashlar Blend	A curated mix of the two above	A custom look that avoids uniform monotony
Ledge Rock	Small, tight, horizontal settings	Contemporary, informal, "tight" horizontal texture
Irregular (Mosaic)	Random "five-point" / rubble shapes	Rustic, organic, historic character
Sawn Rise	Cut to uniform heights	Sleek, minimalist, modern linearity
Structural	Horizontal but deliberately un-coursed	An authentic, load-bearing gravity look

WHO DECIDES THE PATTERN?

The producer supplies a general shape description to narrow the field; the **installer determines the actual pattern of the finished work on site**. Specify the style you want, but expect — and welcome — the mason's judgment in the final setting.

7 Color, Finish & Character

Color and finish are where a project finds its voice — and where the "no two pieces alike" nature of natural stone becomes the point rather than a problem.

Finish

- **Natural cleft —** the stone split along its own geological layers, leaving a textured, characterful face with subtle relief. The classic, timeless look.
- **Sawn —** cut to a smooth, dimensioned surface and clean edge for a refined, contemporary, predictable layout.
- **Thermal (flamed) —** heat-treated to raise a fine, consistent grip; the choice where slip resistance matters most, such as around water.

Color & patina

Natural stone spans steely blue-grays and charcoals through lilacs, rusts, buffs and warm earth tones. Because the color is integral to the mineral rather than a surface pigment, it does not fade to reveal something else underneath — it develops a patina and, done well, looks better with age. That longevity is a genuine selling point: a stone selection rarely looks dated a decade later.

> **FIELD NOTE — SAMPLES ARE A PROMISE OF RANGE, NOT A MATCH**
>
> Samples, brochures and photographs are representations only. Because stone is a product of the earth, the material delivered to the job site will **invariably differ** from any single sample. Set that expectation with the client early, and — better — show installed panels and full pallets so they're buying the *range*, not one lucky piece.

8 The "As-Delivered" Reality

A great selection can still go sideways at ordering if the natural-stone realities aren't built into the numbers. Three to plan for:

Nominal sizing

Stone arrives within a feasible range of size and thickness, not to exact dimensions. That is normal and expected. It is also why the installer must be skilled enough to shape and set toward a cohesive result.

Yield & coverage are subjective

Square feet per ton cannot be guaranteed. Actual yield depends on the specific stone, the architectural pattern, and — significantly — the individual mason's skill. Treat any coverage figure as a starting estimate.

Order with a contingency

Always add a reasonable contingency percentage to project volumes. Running short mid-project risks a color and character break between dye lots of the earth; a modest overage protects continuity and gives you repair stock.

> **THE INSTALLER-OVER-BUDGET RULE**
>
> When you have to choose, choose the **mason**, not the lowest bid. The stone is a semi-finished good; the hand that sets it is the final stage of production. Select a stone mason contractor on the evidence of completed work — their portfolio is the truest spec sheet in this whole guide.

9 The Selection Checklist

A one-page field reference. Answer top to bottom and the right short list writes itself.

> **BEFORE YOU SPECIFY, CONFIRM:**
>
> □ **Application & load** — vertical or horizontal? foot, vehicle or water exposure?
>
> □ **Exposure** — freeze-thaw climate? if so, prioritize density & low absorption.

- □ **Structure** — footing + backup for full-bed, or weight-limited (thin veneer)?
- □ **Code & engineering** — does a structural use need an engineer's authorization?
- □ **Category** — fieldstone, splitface or ledge rock look?
- □ **Style & pattern** — ashlar, ledge, irregular, sawn rise…?
- □ **Color & finish** — cleft, sawn or thermal? palette family?
- □ **Quantity + contingency** — volume estimated with overage for continuity & repair.
- □ **Installer** — a qualified stone mason chosen on portfolio, not price.

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Bring us the project. We'll help you leave no stone unturned.

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