

Roman Travertine: proposed as a candidate for “Global Heritage Stone Resource” designation

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Roman Travertine is one of the most long-standing and famous stones, used since the times of the Roman Empire. Together with Carrara and Botticino marbles, it is probably the most worldwide well-known and diffused Italian dimension stone.

Travertine derives its name from the former town, known as Tibur in ancient Roman times; the ancient name for the stone was Lapis Tiburtinus, meaning Tibur Stone, which was gradually corrupted to Travertino (travertine).

The Roman Travertine is geographically located circa 25 km to the east of Rome, Central Italy, in the hilly area of Guidonia-Montecelio and Tivoli. Its deposit, formed during late Pleistocene time over an active strike-slip fault nearby the Colli Albani quiescent volcano, is about 20 km² wide and 60 m thick on average; the thickness is over 85 m toward its western N–S-elongated side, where thermal springs and large sinkholes occur in an aligned pattern.

The first quarries date back to pre-Roman times; nowadays three main productive sub-zones can be recognized within the extractive basin: "Valle Pilella", "Barco" and "Le Fosse", where more than fifty quarries are in operation, together with a relevant number of processing plants and artisanal laboratories.

Lithological and stratigraphical features allow the distinction of an extensive number of commercial varieties, being the most renowned the Classic, the Bianco, the Noce, the Paglierino, the Navona.

Used since more than 2.500 years, the Roman Travertine has deeply characterized the architecture of Rome and its history, with the realization of villas, palaces, artistic and monumental buildings, and masterpieces with unmistakable features, such as the Anfiteatro Flavio (the Colosseum), the Theatre of Marcellus, the St. Peter's Basilica and Colonnade, the Tritone Fountain, the Adriana Villa, the Trevi Fountain, and many others.

From Renaissance times on, the travertine has been extensively used to build an innumerable amount of churches, common buildings and houses, and artistic buildings, making Rome the “city of travertine”.

After its diffusion in Italy, the Roman Travertine has known an uninterrupted expansion abroad, becoming a sort of reference in the commercial worldwide category of the travertines; and this is probably why it has been sold and applied almost everywhere, irrespective of the geography, of the cultural landmarks, of the local culture and architectural styles.

Nowadays, it is comparable to an icon of the Made in Italy, evoking what is still appointed the “eternal city” (Rome) and the remarkable heritage this city has accumulated.

For the role this stone has played in the national context, for its history, the worldwide diffusion, the great importance in the social and cultural aspects, the Roman Travertine is here proposed as a candidate for the designation as “Global Heritage Stone Resource”.