

How to restore travertine damaged by the wrong sealer?

Q. My bathroom needs to be stripped and resealed. A contractor sealed brand new travertine with a water-based sealant, and it has turned the beautiful tile into a mess. I have 160 sq. ft. on the floor, 100 sq. ft. on shower walls, and 28 sq. ft. on the shower floor. The house is in Sorrento, Florida. I am getting conflicting stories on what process can be used. Could you find me a guru to solve this problem?

A. It can be discouraging to discover the hard way that not every contractor has the same level of knowledge about natural stone maintenance. A mistake in product choice can have a big impact on the appearance of an installation.

In this case, the water-based sealer was likely a topical sealer rather than an impregnating, or penetrating, sealer. It created a film on the surface rather than soaking in, resulting in a cloudy, uneven finish. Travertine, being porous, is best protected with a penetrating sealer that absorbs into the stone and inhibits stains and moisture absorption without changing the appearance of the stone.

If you are considering handling this yourself, we encourage you to contact a qualified contractor with experience in natural stone restoration. This is the safest way to achieve the desired results. To find a vetted PRO in your area, visit www.surfacecarepros.com and click on **Find a PRO**.

Stripping away the incorrect sealer is the first and most critical step. Your PRO can apply a chemical stripper or solvent that safely breaks down the coating without harming the travertine. Once the old sealer is removed, the stone can “breathe” again, restoring some of its natural texture and clarity.

Refinishing comes next. Depending on the condition of the stone after

stripping, this might involve honing for a smooth, matte finish or polishing for a softer shine. Refinishing evens out inconsistencies left by the old sealer and revitalizes the overall appearance of the tile.

Finally, your PRO can apply an appropriate penetrating sealer. Unlike a topical sealer, a penetrating product absorbs into the stone's pores without altering its natural look. Excess sealer should be wiped away during application to prevent residue or cloudiness.

Each of these steps—stripping, refinishing, and resealing—requires skill and careful attention. Attempting it without the proper equipment or experience is not recommended.

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