

How can I identify the material of my gray, rough fireplace base?

Q. I have a base to a fireplace that is gray in color and rough, not smooth. How do I identify what type of stone it is?

A. It's entirely possible that your fireplace base that looks like stone isn't natural stone at all. Many fireplaces use cast concrete, manufactured stone, or cement-based finishes that are designed to imitate real stone. These materials are often gray and rough, tend to look very uniform, and may feel slightly sandy or chalky compared to natural stone. Older fireplaces may have brick that was later coated with mortar or cement to create a stone-like appearance.

If your fireplace base is natural stone, it may have certain features like variation in color and texture. Have a look at the edges, as well. A gentle scratch that leaves gray powder may suggest concrete or mortar, while resistance to scratching could suggest stone.

Marble, travertine, onyx, and other highly decorative or translucent stones that don't handle heat, soot, or wear very well are generally not installed as fireplace bases.

Most stone fireplace bases and hearths are made from dense, durable types of stone that can tolerate heat. Bluestone is one of the most common choices. It is typically gray to blue-gray, often with subtle color variation, and usually has a naturally rough or cleft surface.

Another possibility for your fireplace base is slate. Frequently used for fireplaces, slate is usually dark gray or charcoal in color, and it may feel slightly rough.

Sandstone was commonly used in older homes and rustic settings. It is often

light gray, tan, or beige and has a visibly grainy, sand-like texture.

Granite is one of the hardest and most heat-resistant stones used around fireplaces. It typically has a speckled appearance with visible mineral crystals and feels very cold and extremely hard. Granite is difficult to scratch and does not absorb water easily.

General trends can still help narrow things down. Homes built before about 1920 commonly used sandstone, limestone, or bluestone. Mid-century homes often used slate or bluestone. Homes built from the 1980s forward frequently use concrete, manufactured stone, or granite, while modern homes may feature granite, slate, or engineered materials.

Hopefully, the information we have provided will help you determine your fireplace base material. If you're still unsure, you can contact a stone restoration professional. To find a vetted PRO in your area, visit www.surfacecarepros.com and click on **Find a PRO**. A PRO can correctly identify the stone, recommend proper cleaning and care, and advise on whether sealing or other protective treatments are appropriate. You'll also know who to call to handle more complicated tasks like deep cleaning, restoration, and repairs.

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