

# Stone Choices for Outdoor Living

By Fiona Phelan



It's backyard season again and for many families that means cookouts and dining al fresco on the patio.

While flagstone and blue slate have long been popular for

patios and garden paths, more and more people are turning to interlocking concrete pavers. Pavers come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors and can be used for everything from patios to walkways, steps, walls and even driveways.

"Customers are very lucky these days, because technology and competition have created a great deal of options for them to choose from," says Charles Daniels of D. Rich Stonework, LLC. "Concrete pavers have become popular for a variety of reasons but the biggest one, I believe, is flexibility.

"Customers can really customize projects to their specifications because of the variety that is available. Durability is also huge. Paver systems last a very long time, are easy to maintain, and if there is an issue (for example if someone chips a paver) it is very easy to repair."

**D. Rich Stonework, LLC** has been in business for about 5 years ([www.drichstoneworkllc.com](http://www.drichstoneworkllc.com)). Co-owner Damon Rich, a Killingworth resident, has been a mason for about 13 years. Rich does the estimates, designs and construction while Daniels takes care of the business. The company belongs to the Killingworth and Middlesex Chambers of Commerce, CT Home Builders Association, snow and ice management association, and has been certified by the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute.

If you're looking to create a beautiful indoor or outdoor fireplace, garden wall, a unique siding for your home or steps; consider veneers from natural stone or brick. Veneers are thin cut stones that are applied to a base with mortar. With this technique you get the look of stone or brick without the labor intensiveness and cost of stone cutting.

"Stone veneers will continue to grow in popularity because although concrete pavers are terrific, nothing beats the look of real stone," says Daniels. With stone veneers you can achieve many different looks – brick, thin layers of stone, stream stone, river stone, and fieldstone – and in many colors.

While both the interlocking pavers and veneers may seem like they are easy to work with, Daniels highly recommends using a professional and obtaining at least three estimates for the required work. "We also recommend that customers do a little research before calling contractors," he adds. "Visit distributors and do research online about the types of products you are interested in so that you can have expectations and build a list of questions for each contractor. You want to be able to obtain the most information from them and be able to compare apples to apples between the different estimates.

"Be wary of anyone that offers square foot pricing, because they are not taking into consideration the specifics related to your job," Daniels warns. "Either they are charging you too much, or worse not enough, which means they are going to try to bill you more later to cover their costs or they are going to cut corners so that they don't lose money.

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"Before we give prices, we come out and give free estimates and consultations with the customer to go over the customer's preferences, measure the area and assess needs for excavation, drainage, etc. We then compute a custom price that is specific to that job, not an across-the-board square foot price."

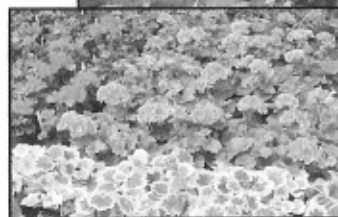
Customers need to do a good deal of research when choosing a contractor. It is important to verify that they have proper insurance, licensing, and if any certification is available (such as ICPI certification for pavers). A good contractor will typically be involved in associations and organizations that deal with their trade or business in general. The Better Business Bureau and the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection websites offer useful information about selecting a contractor.

"Customers should always ask for references and ask for addresses where the contractor has done work before so that they can go and see an actual job," notes Daniels. "Also, if you are trying to work within a budget, let your contractor know exactly how much you have to spend so they can tailor the project and the estimate toward your budget."



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