

# Travertine in steam shower

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Maurizio, Thank you so much for sharing your expertise on these forums. My wife and I are planning on how to tile our steam shower, and we had recently settled on travertine. We were almost derailed today by a salesman at one tile store, who said not to use travertine in a steam shower, because you need to seal travertine, and the steam would take off the sealer. He said to use porcelain - which depressed my wife and I, until I looked up your posts here, and we are once again reassured that travertine should be fine. Now, one more variant of the "to seal or not to seal" question. I see there is one question in your knowledge base entitled "Travertine shower - grout sealing?", which directly related to the question I was going to ask.... travertine itself might not need to be sealed, but what about grout? To which you replied, "under the circumstances there's really nothing wrong to apply a good-quality stone impregnator/color enhancer like MB-6 to the whole installation. Polished travertine can't be sealed, but tumble-finish makes it a bit more porous." Now, I believe that particular question was relating to a regular shower, not a steam shower. So I ask you, in a steam shower, would you recommend just not sealing anything? Or should we still use something like MB-6? We want to, of course, keep our shower clean and make sure no mildew or anything grows over time. We also want to make sure that the steam is not steaming off any chemicals there may be in the sealant, and affecting our health with what we breathe in while we are in there. Any advice specific to the steam shower is appreciated. Also, which cleaning product would be the best to maintain it?

Dear Nathan:

What you quoted me for makes reference strictly to tumble-finished travertine tiles. You're not specifying what kind of travertine you have, but I must assume that you're considering either highly polished tiles or hone-finished ones.

If that's the case, the polished version will lose its sheen relatively soon in a steamer. This is due to the fact that the water picks up acidity inside the boiler and it will attack the calcium carbonate of the stone. No sealer could help prevent that. Not to mention that polished travertine can't be technically sealed: its surface tension is too darn dense to let any impregnator (a.k.a. sealer) in.

If you're considering hone-finished travertine tiles instead (which are always the best choice for a shower stall enclosure) the chemical reaction will still occur, but will not be noticeable, for you're starting from a dull finish anyway. Even in the case of hone-finished travertine the sealing is pretty much useless, unless you have well water and reside in an area where the water is rich with iron mineral.

Now the grout.

Typically tumble-finished travertine is installed with wider grout gaps and sanded grout to accentuate the rustic look it's designed to deliver. This makes a difference in the sealing options, because aesthetic reasons come into play: tumbled-finished stones are very "pale" and a color-enhancer like MB-6 will bring some "life" into them by permanently deepening the hue. MB-6 just so happens to be an excellent impregnator, too, but that's not the main reason why it gets applied.

But back to your grout, I may sound crazy to you now (and probably to your tile setter, too: after all, everything out of the mainstream, no matter how clever it is, is considered crazy by many people!), but if I were you I would insist to have my shower stall grouted with almond caulking!

You should make sure that they leave a 1/16" grout gap and that they push the caulk as deep as possible between the tiles.

In my contracting days I was hired to restore an 8-year-old polished marble shower stall whose tiles were in bad state of disrepair. Amazingly, the grout lines were still brand-new! I realized afterwards that all the grout lines had been filled with caulk by the original installer!

Caulk is stain-less and water proof; what else could you ask more?!... J

That is what I will do with my next shower, that's for sure!

Now remember, it's never too early to think about the proper maintenance of your stone. ***The issue of what you'll be doing day in and day out to your stone is far more important than its sealing*** (if and when possible and/or advisable, which in the case of travertine seldom is) and it's all too often neglected. As you can tell by reading many of this site's postings, you're not likely to get good information about it from your dealer or installer. Don't become another statistic! By logging into the Helpful Hints section of our website at: <http://www.marblecleaning.org/helpful-hints.htm>, you will be able to get the short version of our maintenance guidelines at no charge. The full version of it "a 7-page document considered by many as an industry benchmark" is available in pay-per-download format in our Educational Literature section at: <http://www.marblecleaning.org/literature.htm>.

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Thank you

Ciao and good luck,

Maurizio Bertoli

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