

Blocking Out the Pool Patio

THE HARDEST part about building your own pool deck out of paving stones has less to do with heavy lifting or excavating and a lot to do with selection. Trust me, the challenge of choosing the shape, style and color of the stones has to be more exhausting than the actual construction.

I spent several weeks poring over brochures and videos and visiting design centers related to four major paving stone manufacturers: Cambridge, Grinnell, Nicolock and Unilock. All are members of the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute, a trade association representing a majority of North American manufacturers. After the dust settled, I selected the RoundTable series of pavers from Cambridge. Why Cambridge?

First, the manufacturer, based in Lyndhurst, N.J., has the size, shape and color of the three stones I wanted to feature in my design. Second, several masons and mason supply sales personnel recommended using Cambridge because its paving stones have a smoother finish.

Still, it wasn't an easy decision.

For those who read this column regularly, you'll remember that I am sharing the experiences of my summer project — building a 1,500-square-foot pool patio from paving stones. Excavation, which included the removal of a 10-by-12-foot concrete patio, is nearly complete, and I expect to be setting pavers in the next few days.

A lot of the excavation — soil must be removed from around the pool to a depth of about seven inches — has been done by my three sons. While they've been digging, I've been busy with the selection process. I wanted a 6-by-9 stone (that's inches) for the interior of the patio, which will be set in a running bond pattern. For the deck border, I will

use a 3-by-6 stone set in a soldiers' course (pavers placed side to side). For the pool border, I wanted to use a bullnose stone (a stone with a rounded edge used in steps and pool borders). Since my pool already has a border of aluminum coping, I want the rounded edge of the bullnose to fit into the coping. This will allow a cleaner look on the pool border.

All four manufacturers make the size and shape of the stones I wanted. However, some of the sizes were available only when you purchase them as part of a package. For example, to buy Nicolock's 3-by-6 stone for my exterior border, I would also have had to buy 6-by-6 stones. My patio, then, would consist of a running bond pattern combining Nicolock's 6-by-9 and 6-by-6 Rustico series. Because my pool is an 18-foot by 38-foot rectangle, I wanted to stick with one stone — a rectangle — for the running bond pattern.

I was a little more flexible regarding the border. I could have used 4-by-8 Holland stones — each com-



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The smoother, rectangular paving block by Cambridge, bottom left, was selected over paving stones made by Grinnell, Unilock and Nicolock.

pany makes them. But I like the look of the smaller stone for the border. As for color, we wanted a pewter gray for the interior and a charcoal or darker gray for the border. Each company was able to fulfill our color requirements. In Cambridge's color scheme, we chose Onyx / Natural for the light gray and Black / Onyx for the darker gray borders.

One reason some masons like the Cambridge stone is its smoother finish. Cambridge calls it ArmorTek. It's a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-dense top layer of cement that contains fine sand granules and increased color pigment. According to Cambridge, this ultra-hard surface prevents the stones' natural aggregate — those small stones — from showing through after several years of use.

Each company has excellent products; I've already used Grinnell for a 130-foot retaining wall. All of the four companies' paving stones have an average compression strength of 8,000 pounds per square inch and are designed to resist cracking in freeze-thaw cycles.

As for cost, I paid just under \$2 per square foot for the Cambridge stones. I found Cambridge to be slightly more expensive than the other manufacturers, and the reason, according to salesmen and masons, was the ArmorTek finish.

Oxygen bleach. Some readers have contacted me about difficulty finding oxygen bleach, a deck-brightener that I wrote about in a column about deck maintenance. If you can't find it, look for brighteners or cleaners that contain a large amount of sodium percarbonate. Other oxygen bleaches contain hydrogen peroxide or sodium perborate. Or check the Internet: www.oxyboost.com or www.oxiclean.com. Homestead.com has an excellent site that rates the brands of oxygen bleach. Visit www.oxygenbleach.homestead.com/files. ■

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