

niches



Queen of Pavers

**Paver patterns
transform the look, feel,
and first impressions
for many desert properties**

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Charissa Farley is driving through The Tradition in La Quinta, but she's not watching the road. She's not looking at the spectacular homes or mountains, either. Her gaze is aimed downward, scrutinizing driveways.

"Hmm, that's a straight bond," she says, ignoring the majestic house at the end of the driveway. "There's a herringbone. That's an I-pattern." She switches her focus to the other side of the street. "Oh, and look at that four-piece tumbled in those beautiful warm colors."

It is no exaggeration to say that Charissa Farley, co-owner of Farley Interlocking Pavingstones of Palm Desert with her husband Shon, is a bit over-the-top on the subject of pavers. She would be the first to admit it. The couple has been specializing in concrete and clay brick pavers for seven years, with Shon installing hardscapes for 21 years before that, and Charissa is truly smitten with the products. She has lined the floor of their new showroom, The Paving Stone Place, from wall to wall with examples. On a day she was to be photographed, she wore a jacket, handmade by her mother, with a large beaded paving scene on the back and "The Paving Stone Place" written in beads over a pocket on the front.



The technical description of this driveway in The Tradition is Toscana blend, non-tumbled, rectangle and square concrete pavers in an I-pattern with a slider course around the edge.

The esthetic description is far simpler: a classy, Old World look that matches the Tuscan style home.

A more contemporary look is achieved with Artistic brand light-colored concrete pavers embedded with seashells, laid in a hopscotch pattern at this new home at The Tradition.

“It’s like dropping a pebble in a pond,” says Charissa. “Nothing can transform a home more dramatically than pavers. You can watch how beautiful the neighborhood becomes, house by house, just because we changed the driveways.”

Charissa Farley, wearing a jacket with a beaded paver design on the back, has, by her own admission, “an endless source of enthusiasm” for pavers.

Interlocking pavers, using only sand for mortar, have been used since Roman times, the Farleys want you to know, and historic cobblestones can be thought of as an early form of interlocking paving. Charissa ticks off the advantages of pavers: They are less expensive than real stone, but can mimic their aesthetics. They are long lasting and durable enough to be used for airport runways and streets. Water drains through their joints, cutting down on runoff into storm sewers. Freezing and thawing won't crack their surfaces, an attraction in cold weather states. If oil or solvents spill, affected pavers easily can be replaced.

Clay pavers vary slightly in size and are trickier to lay straight and true. Concrete pavers are more uniform and are faster to install. Both products come in an impressive variety of shapes and color combinations, either plain or tumbled. Plain look more like conventional bricks and fit in well with both traditional and contemporary architecture. Tumbling gives pavers a weathered, vintage look. Thick tumbled-concrete pavers in earth tones are particularly simpatico with Spanish and Tuscan style houses, the very styles that have been sweeping developments in the valley during the past decade. Pavers have been replacing poured concrete for driveways, sidewalks, patios, pool decks, and even streets in new construction — a trend the Farleys have watched emerge and expand.

"I'm watching the whole desert change," says Charissa, who notes that several large developments, including St. Baristo in Palm Springs, are specifying pavers for all landscape surfaces. Lucia Lucas of GHA Companies, the developer of St. Bartisto, said they chose oversized, textured "Mega Bergerac" pavers "because we wanted the authenticity of a Tuscan landscape and what it really feels like in a European village."

In existing neighborhoods, the Farleys often observe the ripple effect that happens when one homeowner replaces an old concrete driveway with pavers. "It's like dropping a pebble in a pond," says Charissa. "Nothing can transform a home more dramatically than pavers. You can watch how beautiful the neighborhood becomes, house by house, just because we changed the driveways."

Landscapers, home improvement stores and others also sell pavers, but the Farleys note that they are the only local company certified by the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute (the products' trade association) that installs nothing but pavers. They carry nine or 10 different brands, with a range that includes

concrete pavers, clay bricks, precast cement tiles, white cement pavers with glass, aggregate or seashells embedded in them, recycled rubber tiles for exterior use and turfstone pavers designed for grass to grow through. Their best-selling paver is a gold-colored blend called Toscana that was designed for a desert setting. Through their retail operation, The Paving Stone Place, the couple sells pavers directly to consumers or contractors.

In the pantheon of driveway and patio surfaces, asphalt is least expensive, followed by poured concrete. Stamped concrete, colored



One of the company's most intricate installations was this tumbled clay, brick driveway and path in two patterns — a modified basket weave and herringbone. Clay bricks take longer than pavers to install, and this driveway at The Tradition took about a month.



and salt-finish concrete, and concrete pavers are next in the continuum and are about equal in cost. The most economical non-tumbled concrete pavers cost less than \$7 a square foot installed. This is half the cost of flagstone, which also requires a concrete sub-base.

To install a pattern of pavers, a base of compacted gravel is laid down, and then a layer of sand is added. "A successful installation is really all about compaction and base," says Charissa. "They are critical." The pavers are fitted together on top of the sand, borders are cut and added, and more sand is poured between the joints. A typical driveway can be fitted with concrete pavers in a few days, but clay bricks require more time and patience. A driveway with large, complicated patterns in clay can take up to a month to create. The Farleys have 42 installers working in crews in the valley, with several specializing in complicated, pattern-heavy custom work. Charissa says she likes to brag she has "some of the slowest crews in the valley," a statement she intends as a testament to their skill.

A visitor to the showroom need not worry if he or she knows little about the subject of pavers. Charissa, sometimes teased by admirers with the moniker "queen of pavers," rarely tires of explaining their properties or promoting their virtues. In fact, one day as she was beginning her enthusiastic lecture to a prospective client, she noticed the man continually looking over her shoulder and suppressing a smile. Charissa turned around and saw husband Shon sitting at a desk, holding up a sheet of paper on which he had written: "Don't Get Her Started!"

It was too late. Charissa was on a roll. She was on a mission, which continues to this day, to spread the word about pavers. ■