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**Pavers — An Optional  
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New Standard?**

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# Pavers — An Optional Upgrade or the New Standard?

By Charissa Farley

It has been an interesting and fascinating study to observe the evolution of exterior hardscapes over the last 10 to 20 years and the development of the usage of interlocking pavers. Interlocking paving stone systems have been used since the ancient roads of Rome, throughout Europe and even in the early United States, where ship ballasts were used to pave early streets on the East Coast. But for some reason, this method of construction was not often used in the United States until as late as the 1970s. Ten to 20 years ago in the Coachella Valley there were only a few highly visible interlocking paving jobs: downtown Palm Springs, The Gardens at El Paseo and the most spectacular, Bighorn Country Club — a project with approximately 7 miles of interlocking pavement streets 24 feet wide.

As marketing strategies were developed to educate potential users of interlocking pavers, the market was segmented into commercial and residential uses. The commercial market was and still is approached mainly through design professionals. The interlocking paving industry has a wealth of education programs designed for architects and landscape architects to help provide them with all the information they need to specify pavers confidently. The manufacturers have become quite adept at providing new materials, colors, shapes and textures so that projects can become personalized through their hardscapes.

The residential market is constantly evolving. As in any aspect of design, the trends change and pavers are no exception to this. Ten years ago we used to use solid color nontumbled pavers in the field and a contrasting border. Now, with the influx of Old World/Mediterranean

architecture, pavers simulate the same look as rock with tumbled and textured tops and variegated colors that range from highlights of golds, beiges and terra cottas to undertones of browns, greys and charcoals. Geometric or repetitive patterns that used to be standard are now often replaced with an Old World look, which is random and nonlinear. The paver manufactures are continually developing new looks mid-century modern, contemporary and the latest architectural trends.

And, just like in fashion, the residential paver trends trickle from the “celebrities” down. The residential market for pavers years ago was primarily in custom homes valued at over a million dollars. But that has changed. Over time builders and developers discovered that their customers wanted the look of million dollar estates as well. It became customary to use pavers at the front entrances of communities — and they discovered — the more elegant the paver, the more elegant the statement about their projects. They also regularly offered pavers as an option, a desired product and a source of revenue for the design center.

About this time something interesting happened. During the time of the Yangtze River Dam project in China, when concrete became scarcer and as a result, the price of concrete, and particularly poured-in-place concrete, increased, our region took a unique strategy. As the housing market was booming, we *lowered* our prices and increased our volume. Pavers now could beat the price of stamped concrete and now can rival the price of grey concrete. (Additionally, there are now sustainability studies that show that over the lifetime of the hardscape, pavers are less expensive

than asphalt.) It was a self-fulfilling prophecy! When a builder could sell his product faster as a result of using pavers as their hardscape, at a comparable price, it soon became the standard.

It didn't stop there. Pavers as a standard for high-end homes now became accessible for all homes and the perspective of builders and homeowners as to what was standard in a home at different price ranges has changed significantly. It is not unusual now to see pavers in new homes priced at the half-a-million-dollar price range. KB Homes project in Coachella offered pavers as an option in their homes priced in the \$300,000 range.

Due to extensive advertising and marketing, homeowners are also better educated on pavers, and a steady segment of our industry has become individual homeowners who are looking to increase the value of their home and their curb appeal by dramatically changing their home's first impression by tearing out their old concrete or asphalt driveway and replacing it with pavers. Pool companies and landscapers now as a standard promote pavers in their projects as well.

And finally, homeowners associations and management companies, especially now, when everyone is concerned about their properties losing value, are actively pursuing ripping out all of their old streets and common areas (which require maintenance as often as every one to two years — and still look substandard) and replacing them with pavers. We have large photographic murals of communities with pavers streets and we challenge those considering doing large-scale paver projects to imagine what those photos would look like with asphalt!



And where is the industry headed? There is a new and evolving market that has nothing to do with "pretty pavers" and it is offered as potentially the "least expensive option." As the federal government mandates storm water management issues to counties and municipalities the interlocking pavement industry has introduced a pavement system that collects water underneath the pavement allows it to percolate into the subsoil or be diverted before it collects pollutants such as oil, cleaning products, pesticides, etc., and thus avoids the necessity of retention tanks or other costly methods of dealing with this issue. Permeable pavements are "green" and may qualify for LEED credits. Assemblyman Krekornian recently introduced a bill mandating permeable pavements in all hardscapes in some new housing projects.

We are always trying to stay on the forefront of where our industry is heading: paver design as it relates to architectural trends and preferences; color design and integrity; diversity of product within communities; engineering issues in residential street use; education and standards for municipalities, counties and state agencies; cleaners, sealers and polymeric sands; and even soil stabilization through "green" enzymes for increased compaction, possible efflorescence mitigation and dust control.

Charissa Farley is the President of Farley Interlocking Paving, a paving installation company, and The Paving Stone Place, a paving-stone showroom and distributor. Her company helped create the colors "Bella" by Belgard (used at Griffin Ranch) and "Desert Blend" by Ackerstone. They have won three National Concrete Awards and participated in the hardscape design for the front entries at both the newly remodeled Rancho Las Palmas by KSL and Andalucia by The Drummond Company. They are the largest distributor/installer

in the Coachella Valley and have installed over a million square feet of pavers including Toscana, Griffin Ranch, Andalucia,

Bella Clancy, St. Baristo, The Villas in Old Palm Springs, Brava, Legacy, The Hideaway and The Tradition. ■

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