

Paper Number: 1418

Botticino marble (Italy): a nomination for “Global Heritage Stone Resource”

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After the Carrara marble, Botticino marble is probably the second most famous Italian dimension stone. Quarried from a Mesozoic formation with a calcareous composition, known in geological literature as “Corna”, it crops out in the Italian pre-Alps near Brescia, Lombardy region, North Italy.

Archaeology tells us that Botticino was first used more than 2,000 years ago. The city of Brescia still offers numerous examples of its use, both in structural and ornamental contexts (Capitolino Temple, Broletto Tower, Loggia Palace etc.).

In the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution brought about the modernisation of fabric production in the Brescia area, and acted as a driving force behind new urban planning projects in Rome and throughout the world. Botticino was the stone selected for the greatest Italian monument (Altare della Patria) and, in 1904, for the Grand Central Terminal in New York City, the world’s largest railway station. Since then, the applications of this versatile marble boomed and numerous new orders built its reputation both in Italy and internationally.

Botticino marble outcrops extend over an area of approximately 10 km², including the municipalities of Botticino, Nuvolento, Nuvolera, Rezzato and Serle, where more than fifty quarries are in operation, together with a relevant number of processing plants and artisanal laboratories. Depending on the lithologic characteristics, three main commercial varieties are identified -Classic, Semiclassic and “Fiorito” (Flowered)- together with numerous local sub-varieties.

In addition to its intrinsic geological, petrographic, technical and commercial properties, several issues related to the Botticino are considered to be of relevant importance for its designation as a Global Heritage Stone Resource. Such issues may be synthetically resumed as follows:

- the creation of a distinctive trademark (Botticino Classico Mark) since 2005;
- the existence of three local Consortia, one of which is the largest in Italy (according to the number of affiliates);
- the presence of a Museum, since 1996;
- a relevant number of cultural initiatives strictly related to this stone, the most important of which are the MarmoDesign Award and the International Symposium of Sculpture in Botticino Marble;
- the existence of an old Training and Professional Education School (Vantini School);
- the first example in Italy of the elaboration of a global VIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) Plan extended to the five municipalities to assess the social and economic sustainability of the quarrying + processing activities.

Last, but not least, the Botticino marble is probably -but unfortunately- the most copied marble in the world, both for the illegal use of its name to denominate other stones with a similar aspect, and for artificial “stone” production (i.e., artificial fabricated replicas, reconstructed stones, etc.).

For the above mentioned features, for its undisputed importance in productive, social, employment, economic and cultural aspects, and for the role played in the architecture and urban landscape (not only local), the Botticino marble is proposed for the nomination as *“Global Heritage Stone Resource”*.

