

Simon Gabriel, Stone Doctor Australia

We talk with Simon Gabriel the principal, of Stone Doctor Australia, about his industry background, his new store in Richmond, Melbourne and the products and services his company supplies.

DS: Simon, please outline your industry background and experience.

SG: My 24 years' experience in stone care, restoration and maintenance started in a family-run business manufacturing industrial cleaning chemical products in Malaysia. That business progressed into a specialised commercial cleaning concern that undertook numerous projects in Malaysia. As a young man, I was offered the opportunity to establish and manage a stone restoration arm of the business, which quickly became a successful venture.

Some of my accomplishments during this period were to complete large-scale restoration projects such as the Petronas Twin Towers. However, when my wife and I decided to move permanently to Melbourne in 2010, I closed the Malaysian operations and started Stone Doctor Australia, bringing with me many years of knowledge and experience.

DS: A multitude of tile and stone specialists have opened business premises in Richmond, Melbourne. You recently joined them. What prompted you to make that move?

SG: Having been engaged in numerous stone restoration works with Stone Doctor Australia over the past four years, I noticed that property owners and tradespeople require adequate information and guidance to successfully complete stone projects without any damage to the appearance of the stone. Each stone surface is unique, and an understanding of the composition and behaviour of the stone is needed prior to installation. The same applies in the post-installation phase, where there seems to be an equally huge void in care and maintenance, which can cause irreparable damage to these surfaces. So, what better place to position our knowledge centre than in Richmond, which is fast becoming a tile and stone epicentre.

DS: Looking around the showroom you are clearly focused on the supply of high quality adhesives, sealers and allied products. Presumably, you are primarily targeting contractors?

SG: We are open for business to all individuals and companies who are keen to complete their projects successfully. We currently work with many architects, builders, stonemasons and tilers, as well as property owners and managers, and we would like to work with more as our products are of a high quality and provide exceptional results. Lithofin, Mapei, Tenax, 3M and Dicarex are some of the product brands we stock that have proven time and again their supremacy in our industry.

DS: Are you planning to sell tools?

SG: Interestingly, we have just contracted ARDEX for tiling tools. They have a comprehensive range of high quality tools. Apart from this we have specific tools and accessories that have been finely selected for cleaning, sealing and maintenance.

DS: You appear to be in a good position to act as a consultant. Is this a service you will provide?

SG: Much thought and effort has gone into establishing our professional services enterprise and the retail and online facets of our business. These divisions have been developed to provide the market with appropriate consultation, which is free of charge, and will be offered into the future. As we continue to extend our knowledge and expertise to our clients, I may undertake

Project Management & Consulting Services at a professional level, but only if there is a demand for this.

DS: You have a burgeoning online presence. How do your sites differ?

SG: We have one website with two online stores. All information about Stone Doctor Australia's products and services can be found at www.stonedoctor.com.au. This includes detailed information on the types of services we provide, our products' technical papers, Material Safety Data Sheets, photos, how-to videos, etc. which are freely available on this site.

We have two online stores. The first (www.stonedoctoronline.com.au) features most of the products that we retail in Richmond. The second (www.stonedoctoronlinedg.com.au) provides specialised stone



Simon Gabriel acquired vast experience in Malaysia working at projects like the Malaysian High Court, the National Mosque, and the featured Petronas Towers.

care products that are solvent-based, acidic or strong alkaline and have special Dangerous Goods shipping requirements. We offer Australia-wide delivery from both of these online stores.

We also have an informative blog containing articles written by myself and other selected industry professionals on relevant topics where we impart our knowledge and experience on dimensional stone-related topics. Our presence on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube is slowly gaining momentum as we reach out through these channels to interact with people.

DS: You will be able to put your practical skills to the test by supplying, re-honing, re-polishing, and post-installation care and maintenance services?

SG: We have three main services. **2BSEALED** The featured sandstone pavers were left with residue adhesive and grout on the surface. The Stone Doctor Australia rectified the situation. focuses on new installations where we thoroughly clean and seal the surfaces and grout, using Lithofin Penetrating Sealers. This is our premium sealing service. Being the only Lithofin Premium Service Provider in Australia means we now act as a retailer, a certified applicator, and a product consultation specialist. Lithofin from



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Germany has a complete and premium range of stone care and maintenance products. **2BRESTORED** is a restoration service. We make old worn-looking surfaces appear almost new by either re-honing or re-polishing. This process requires much experience as the characteristics of stone vary from one to another. **2BMAINTAINED** is a programme that we custom design to suit the client's maintenance requirements. We conduct regular inspections, undertake periodic maintenance and provide re-sealing works accordingly. In doing this, you can be assured that stone surfaces will look pristine at all times.

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DS: What are your immediate plans for further development of the retail arm of the business?

SG: We would like to reach out electronically to more Australians who want to have their stone surfaces professionally installed and maintained. We want to guide them in choosing the right materials and products for the required application, and to leave them with near perfect surfaces on completion.

We hope to have prospective clients understanding the complex and intrinsic demands of various types of stone, and to help them with their maintenance needs. We constantly provide training to our team members and consultants, making them more knowledgeable in every aspect of stone care.

Maybe at some point, we would like to carry the Stone Doctor Australia name to international waters.

DS: I imagine that some of the local stone and tile businesses could be prospective customers.

SG: We are fortunate to work closely with professional companies – like CDK Stone – that produce high quality materials. There are many local tile and stone companies that now consult with us regularly. Stone Doctor Australia has ideally placed itself for free consultation over wide product selection, as well as enquiries for our professional services. This alone, I believe, will continue to attract successful relationships with more tile and stone companies joining our esteemed list of clientele. ☺

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to extract and process, is low maintenance over an extended period, and is easily recyclable.

Comparing glass with stone over a one hundred year period, glass uses about 40 per cent more energy in construction, and over eight times as much energy to subsequently maintain.

With regards to the Frankfurt Opera Tower (which has 30,000 square metres of facade) EuroRoc considered a supposed all-glass facade against the ventilated stone facade actually in use. It determined that the primary energy requirements would double if glass was selected as opposed to natural stone.

In use, a stone facade has a heat transfer coefficient of 0.32W/m² compared with 1.25W/m² for glass, which will considerably reduce the summer cooling, and winter heating, energy requirements (although these were not considered in the EuroRoc report). Instead, the report is confined to the energy requirements of the materials during production, construction, maintenance and recycling.

And it is not just on energy that glass loses out to stone. It is also on cost. Construction costs using glass rise in proportion to the amount of glass used. Whereas a ventilated stone facade with 35 per cent glass for windows costs 400 euro per square metre, a facade with 90 per cent glass costs 1280 euro per square metre. ☺