

Marble rescue

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The Marble Rescue Cheat Sheet: Distinguishing Etches from Stains

How to Identify & Fix Stains, Etches, and Dull Spots.

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Marble Diagnostics

ETCH VS STAIN DETERMINATION

Marble damage looks similar at a glance, but etches and stains require opposite treatments. This protocol isolates the physics first so you do not apply the wrong remedy.

Use the flashlight test to classify the damage, then follow the scenario that matches your diagnosis.

Asset card

Baseline material data before any intervention.

MATERIAL	Calacatta, Carrara, Statuario marble
VULNERABILITY	Acid sensitivity (calcium carbonate dissolves at pH < 7)
TOOLS REQUIRED	High-lumen flashlight, microfiber cloth, pH-neutral stone cleaner

CRITICAL WARNING

The forbidden list

These actions permanently damage marble finishes.

NEVER USE VINEGAR OR LEMON

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NEVER USE ALL-PURPOSE CLEANERS

Most contain citric acid as a chelating agent, which causes dull spots.

NEVER USE ABRASIVE SCRUBBERS

Green scouring pads scratch the polish and leave permanent haze.

The diagnostic: the flashlight test

Before applying any product, identify the physics of the damage.

1. Turn off overhead lights.
2. Hold a flashlight at a low angle (raking light) across the surface.
3. Look at the reflection of the bulb on the stone.

IF THE REFLECTION DISAPPEARS OR BLURS

This is an ETCH. It is physical damage to the surface polish caused by acid. It feels rough to the touch.

IF THE REFLECTION REMAINS CLEAR BUT DARK

This is a STAIN. It is color absorbed into the pores. It feels smooth to the touch.

The step-by-step protocol

Select the scenario that matches your diagnosis.

Scenario A: Treating a stain (absorbed color)

1. **Identify the source:** Oil (salad dressing) or organic (wine/coffee).
2. **Apply a poultice:** Mix baking soda with water (for organic) or acetone (for oil) to form a thick paste.
3. **Cover and wait:** Apply paste 1/4 inch thick. Cover with plastic wrap and tape down edges. Poke holes for airflow. Leave for 24-48 hours.
4. **Remove:** Remove plastic. Let paste dry completely. Chip off with a plastic spatula.

Scenario B: Treating an etch (surface burn)

1. **Assess severity:** If you can feel a deep depression with your fingernail, call a professional stone restorer.
2. **Buffing (light etches only):** Apply a marble polishing powder (Tin Oxide) to the spot.
3. **Friction polish:** Use a damp white pad and buff in circular motions until the gloss level matches the surrounding stone.
4. **Neutralize:** Rinse thoroughly with water to remove residue.

The maintenance schedule

MAINTENANCE NOTE

Reseal marble countertops every 6-12 months.

Water test: Pour water on the surface. If it darkens the stone within 5 minutes, the seal is compromised. Reseal immediately.