

Kashmir Handicrafts

Quality Handicrafts Since 1965

c/o Prabhat Goyal, 18A, Mall, Opp CTO, Agra ZIP 282001 STATE:UP INDIA

www.kashand.com

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Inlay Art

The art of inlay work (also called *pietra dura*) played an important role in not only shaping but also in enlivening the structures erected by the Mughals in India. This is evident in its most dominant form in the incomparable **Taj Mahal**. The crown of Mughal architectural activity, the Taj Mahal, constructed between 1630 and 1653 by a workforce of more than twenty thousand, is said to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World. One of the most beautiful specimens of mankind's cultural heritage, this monument of love was the vision of the fifth Mughal Emperor in India, Shah Jahan. His tribute to his beloved wife, Arjumand Bano Begum, popularly known as Mumtaz Mahal, has been embodied in the pure white marble structure of the Taj Mahal.



Marble Inlay (Pietra Dura) Craftsmanship in the Taj Mahal

The craftsmen who use their skills to shape our vision at Kashand.com are the 17th and 18th generation descendants of those very master craftsmen who realized the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan's dream of creating a monument of love in his deceased wife's memory. The master craftsmen who specialized in this fine art of

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setting gems and semiprecious stones in marble came from Persia (today's Iran) to decorate the Taj Mahal.



Pietra Dura Craftsmanship inside the Taj Mahal Mausoleum where the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan and Queen Mumtaz Mahal have been buried

So enormous was the vision of the Emperor that it took *20,000 highly skilled master craftsmen 22 years to realize his dream*. During these years most of the master artisans had chosen Agra, India as their second home, as Agra was the capital city of the Mughals. Since then this exquisite art has been an integral part of the cultural heritage of Agra, and has been kept alive by the descendants of these great artisans who gave the world the mesmerizing Taj Mahal under Kashand.com's patronage. So particular has the clan been about keeping the art limited to only a small number of people that they have not even taught it to their sisters and daughters, lest they pass it on to their husbands. We at Kashand.com endeavor to relive the Taj experience with our skilled craftsmen. Being descendents of the very artisans who shaped and decorated the Taj, these artisans shape and drape our marble products in the *very same* style, using the *very same* decorative accessories, the semi-precious stones.

Fine pieces of semi-precious stones embedded on marble surface, a technique known as **Pietra Dura**, have beautified the Taj Mahal. The decorative value that they have added to the mammoth structure is as if Shah Jahan has decorated his deceased wife in bridal make-up. Inlay work, particularly on marble, where it takes the name of **Pietra Dura**, generates a lot of debate as far as its origin is concerned. The most accepted version is that the form is Italian in origin but the accomplished Indian craftsmen adapted it to their needs, gave it an indigenous touch and used the technique to carve out traditional Indian motifs that are today the crown of Indian art.

The Process of Inlay Work (Pietra Dura)

The work of shaping crude stones to ornamental pieces of art is carried out with great precision. Two different artisans work upon the stone and the marble. A design is cut out on a metal sheet. Grooves, measuring 3-4 mm, are made at the appropriate places on the marble surface and, at the same time, the work of refining the stones is carried out.

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A design layout on the Marble Stone

The grooves are made exactly of the same size so that the stones can fit perfectly in them. During this process special emphasis is laid on choosing various shades of semiprecious stones to give the right gradation and shading to the flowers and other motifs.



Semi Precious Stones Used for Inlay Work

Emery stone wheel is used to file and refine these precious and semi-precious stones like **Agate, Amethyst, Blue & Green Aventurine, Carnelian, Jasper, Lapis-Lazuli, Malachite, Moss-Agate, Sodalite, Tiger's Eye, Serpentine, Chalcedony, White Jasper, Hematite, Onex-Marble**, which after being shaped and polished, are then laid into the marble with adhesive. After it has dried, the surface and edges are polished and buffed to make it resistant from weather, wear and tear giving a long lasting timeless beauty.

The sweat and toil that goes into this aspect can be realized from the fact that some of the pieces that are finally inlaid in the marble are as fine and thin as a needle. The actual inlaying of these fine pieces of semi-precious stone also involves great artistry and complete mastery of the art.

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Precious Stones for Inlay being filed and shaped using Emery wheels

After all, **each 2-centimeter flower bud inlaid in marble may be comprised of 50 or more stones.** Each part of the design is shaped individually and requires a lot of patience and skill. *At times a single Magnolia flower may have more than 100 individual pieces and may require about one week to make.*



Precious Stones being inlaid on marble stone

We at Kashand.com endeavor to maintain this technique in its essence in the purest form and continue to employ the technique to make available to the world glimpses of the Taj Mahal through our work. We manufacture the following items with utmost care and topmost quality of traditional workmanship in the same style:

Marble Inlay Table Tops, Chess Boards, Dinner Tables, Coasters, Jewellery Boxes, Statues, Bowls, Trivets, Candle Holders, Vases, Lamps, Ash Trays and Wall Hangings.

We also undertake custom work designs – family emblems, portraits, or special gifts for your loved ones are designed and manufactured to your complete satisfaction. If you are looking to decorate your home, kitchen, bathroom or garden, doing up the interiors or making your property stand out for its magnificence and uniqueness in the neighborhood, do get in touch with us!

Bring Home the Taj!

We have multiple reference customers in the US vouching for the authenticity and quality of our craft. We now present some contemporary items fashioned in the traditional pietra dura art as an addendum to this paper.

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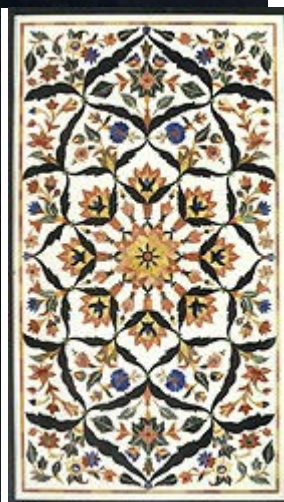
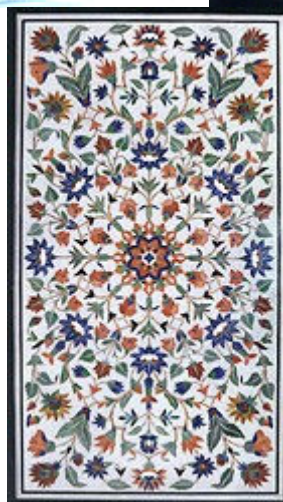
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Tabletop Pietra Dura Designs on White and Black Marble Stone



Tabletops sizes range from 1 foot by 1 foot to 10 feet by 10 feet. Custom designs and sizes are welcome.

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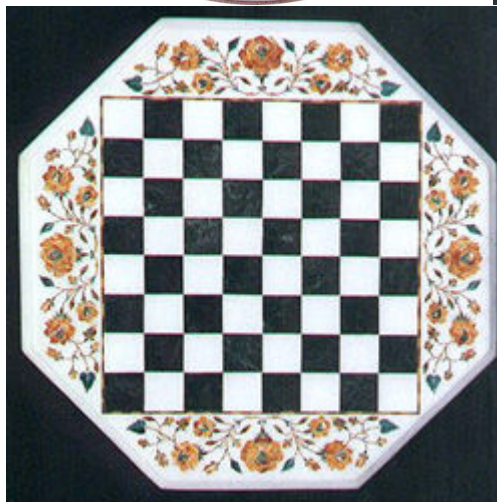
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Coasters and Jewellery Boxes



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