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Holy Land's 'Jerusalem stone' cements base of U.S. buyers

Denver Business Journal - by [Cathy Proctor](#)

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Gill Lobel was driving with his family through Israel about four years ago when he hit upon his next business venture.

The Australian had traded stocks and commodities on Wall Street, in Israel and Asia. He also had started an online gaming software business that was sold to cable magnate John Malone, and also worked in construction.

While driving through the Israeli desert, Lobel wondered if anyone would want to buy the unique stones he saw along the road.

With \$20,000 borrowed from his brother, Lobel bought a shipping container and filled with pieces of golden limestone formed millions of years ago from water, sand and shells. It's known as "Jerusalem stone" because the stone comes from quarries around the ancient city, and by city edict, all the buildings in Jerusalem — the "City of Gold" — must be surfaced with the stone.

"I sold it within a week to a U.S. client, before the container was even here," Lobel said from the showroom of his Denver-based [Jerusalem Stone Co.](#), which opened in October 2005.

The showroom walls are lined with samples of the stone cut into shiny tiles, rough tiles, smooth stones, sinks and mosaic materials. The colors range from a golden yellow to grayish to pink. The stone runs \$7 to \$16 per square foot, depending on the cut and finish.

Builders in the Jerusalem area have used the material for centuries.

That it comes from the Holy Land appeals to religious clients, Lobel said.

It's been used to build Jerusalem's Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall; the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Jesus is believed to have been crucified and buried; and the King David Hotel.

"What's special about the stone is that it comes from Israel," he said. "We only sell Jerusalem stone from Israel, with certificates of authenticity that it's quarried, cut and fabricated in Israel."

Lobel's company is a partner in a quarry that dates back 4,000 years, located near the town of Mitzpe Ramon in southern Israel. The Jerusalem Stone Co. also is a partner in a Jerusalem fabrication company that cuts the huge blocks of rock into custom-ordered



Kathleen Lavine | Business Journal

Gill Lobel, surrounded by tiles made from stones from Jerusalem, dreamed up his latest business venture while driving in Israel.

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pieces.

"Anything that anyone wants from stone we can make — a tile, a sink, anything," said Lobel, who is Jewish. "I want to take this product and make something beautiful come out of Israel, but not be political about it.

"We're a company that sells something beautiful from Israel that makes people feel good when they touch it, when they pray on it."

The first year, Lobel's company sold \$50,000 worth of stone. Today, revenue is up 600 percent, Lobel said, although he declined to be more specific.

About 50 percent of the company's business is residential, for homeowners who want the stone for their homes, floors and countertops. The other half comes from churches and synagogues, he said.

The company has clients in the United States, Australia, Israel, Canada and England.

Pastor Michael Walker, with Denver's Church in the City, chose Jerusalem Stone from Lobel's company to renovate the old, abandoned synagogue at East 16th Avenue and Gaylord Street.

"We're restoring a synagogue and the Jerusalem stone is coming from the Holy Land, Israel," Walker said. "So many people have a love for Israel in our congregation. When they walk in there, they'll feel like they're in the Holy Land. Be able to touch it. Most of them can't make the trip yet, and we want to bring the Holy Land to them."

Elliott and Barbara Troy chose Jerusalem stone for tiles in their bathroom, the entryway and surrounding their Evergreen home's fireplace last summer.

The couple were wondering what to do with the fireplace when Elliott Troy mentioned he'd heard something about a Jerusalem stone company in Denver.

"I ran down the next day to see what it looked like," Barbara Troy said. "We'd been to Israel, and it had a lot of meaning to us. It came out beautifully."

Jerusalem Stone Co.

Showroom: 6500 Stapleton Dr. S., D-19, Denver 80216 Phone: 720-301-6156 Online: jerusalemstonecompany.com

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