

# Brazil Purchasing Trip Interview

Last month, two of Tithof's executives traveled south of the border on a purchasing trip to Brazil. We sat down with one of the travelers, Brook Cumorich, Vice President of Sales, to pick her brain about the buying trip and get a peek at what's on the water heading our way!

**Before a purchasing trip, like your most recent one to Brazil, what are some ways that you prepare; in terms of product/facility research, etc.?**

Mainly, I'll do a thorough investigation of the factories through their websites, other industry contacts and partners, essentially check their existing inventory any way that we can. This research should answer basic questions like, do they have materials we are looking for? Do their offerings parallel our needs?

**Having said that, name the top three things that you look for when deciding on or purchasing material at these factories once you're there.**

Stone follows trends just like any other fashion; so being on or ahead of trend is a differentiator for our brand. We have always taken pride in setting the pace for our industry and competition.

First and foremost, do I like it? As elementary as that sounds, it's true. Is this a material we can promote and sell? Will it move quickly or is it simply eye candy? It is very important to me that we offer materials that fit all price points, styles and colors. We have to offer a wide variety across all price and style sectors – basics and exotics.

Beyond that, we're looking for the material color being on trend with the industry, and the structural health of material. Are there fissures beyond the norm? How is the surface polish? Pitting? Is the stone a first choice selection or a really great standard?

**Now that we have the buying background, can you provide a couple of examples of 'red flags' that you may come across on a purchasing trip?**

It all comes down to quality for our brand. If I see low quality or older machinery, I immediately hesitate on moving forward – only because our inventory at Tithof has a consistency of quality to it that I never want to jeopardize. I'll also look for poor quality resins (used for coating the materials) or unorganized/poorly labeled slabs. How a slab is finished at the factory level sets the pace for the overall quality of the end product. We can make certain enhancements during the finish work but the stone surface is one primary key to the overall quality of the product.

**How is the natural stone industry different overseas than here in the U.S.?**

The international markets are primarily exporting, while in the U.S. we are primarily importing. The Brazilian domestic markets are wonderful to work with. Our Brazilian partners are helpful and friendly, not to mention the contagious pride they have in their market. The majority of the families in Brazil and Italy's small stone villages are 'lifers;' multi-generations passing along the tradition as the younger generations come of age. These family businesses, much like ones in the U.S., are centered around great customer service, and strong relationships – that extends to the nearby villages participating and supporting as well. The connections at these levels are what allows Tithof to bring the best quality to our end user.





**So you've chosen the materials you'd like. How do the purchased materials/slabs make it to the U.S., and ultimately Tithof Tile and Marble?**

An order is placed and a container is dispatched to the stone factory. Approximately 6 bundles of slabs (38-42) are crated in wood and loaded into a dry box container. The loaded container is picked up at the factory and brought to the port via truck to be loaded onto an ocean bound vessel.

Once at sea, the slabs rest comfortably for approximately 21 days. The vessel will make land at the East or Gulf coasts, and the container will then be transferred to a rail car to continue the inland journey to the Chicago Rail Yard.

Once received in Chicago, a trucking company is dispatched and the container is delivered to the Tithof Tile and Marble Kenosha, Wisconsin loading dock. After receipt of the container, our experienced personnel use what I affectionately call the 'jaws of life' to cut through all bracing and free the bundles from the confines of the container. Bundle by bundle, the container is emptied and slabs are loaded onto carts for future photography and inventory process steps. Finally, the slabs are available for purchase and fabrication!

**Of the current shipment heading our way, what Brazilian material are you most excited about adding to the Tithof Tile and Marble inventory?**

I actually have a few favorites from this trip. Brazilian Hills, White Pearl and White Infinity are my favorite exotic selections. As for basics, I am quite fond of Smokey Taupe. These are all brand new materials to add to our inventory, and ultimately our portfolio.

**So many U.S. companies do their purchasing from local importers and never venture from that process. Why do purchasing trips like these and direct importing as a whole save your customers money?**

By purchasing slabs directly from the stone-processing factories we are able to pass along that savings direct to our clients. In years past, the only option for fabricators was to purchase from a local importer then re-sell the material to clients. The elimination of this step is directly correlated to approximately a 25% reduction in material cost.

In addition an in stock inventory allows us to sell material by the square foot rather than the slab. This is very impactful on projects that require just over the full slab. Slabs are approximately 60sf, in the past on an 80sf kitchen project I would have to purchase 120sf of material for the client. Putting 40sf in the grey area. Do we charge the client? Do we absorb the cost? Is the material unique or does it have mass appeal? With the slabs in stock we can now safely eliminate all of that grey area. The Tithof stock slabs are sold by the square foot required for the project. Easy.

That being said, our local industry partners are beyond valuable. We have decades of history working together and continue to partner with them on a good number of projects with amazing results.