



CARRIERES DU HAINAUT

**BELGIAN BLUESTONE
SPARKLES AT ISABEL
MARANT BOUTIQUE
IN SHANGHAI**

Iconic clothing brand Isabel Marant was founded in 1994 by the French designer herself. Marant first settled in Paris and soon went on to conquer the rest of the world, opening boutiques in some of the most buzzing locations including **Shanghai**, China's most populous city and the country's beating economic heart.

Today, Marant's international empire comprises some forty boutiques, each decorated in a **sleek, minimalist style**. The interior design purposely emphasizes raw building materials, such as the concrete floors which are typically used in many Isabel Marant boutiques.

In the new shop in Shanghai, however, there is no concrete to be found. The original floor has been replaced by **Belgian bluestone tiles** from Carrières du Hainaut – not only because of the aesthetic qualities of this natural material, but also because of its excellent technical properties.





INSPIRED BY CHINESE NAIL HOUSES

The Isabel Marant boutique in Shanghai was designed by Ciguë, an architectural firm based in Montreuil, France. The choice of materials, using Belgian bluestone instead of polished concrete, is mainly inspired by **Ciguë's remarkable concept**.

Visiting the metropolis of Shanghai in search of inspiration, the Ciguë team stumbled upon so-called '**nail houses**': traditional houses that stand out in the modern urban jungle because their owners refused to give in to real estate developers. For Ciguë, this typical Chinese phenomenon became the starting point for the boutique's design concept.

The idea arose to place a wooden hut in the middle of the shop, symbolising the famous nail houses. Next, Ciguë went in search of the perfect material to represent the surrounding **urban landscape**.



BLUESTONE FROM HAINAUT: A NATURAL MATERIAL WITH AN EDGE

The **sawn finish** of the Carrières du Hainaut tiles creates a rough look that perfectly matches the boutique's concept. Ciguë was especially careful to avoid the smooth, even look of a polished concrete surface, as it would not fit their design vision.

Although the sawn finish tiles actually have a smooth surface, the 'roughness' of the **saw marks** is clearly visible, as the designers intended it. The tiles also feature **light blue strips**, creating a floor which has a lovely variety of shades.

"Isabel Marant boutique shops often have concrete floors, but we wanted a finish that offered more shades and displayed more character."

Alphonse Sarthout (2nd person from the left on the picture)
Founder of Studio Ciguë





Another reason why Ciguë opted for Belgian bluestone at the Shanghai boutique is that the natural stone **combines perfectly with other building materials**. Both the colour and texture are an excellent match with the oak of the central hut, the black steel of the clothing displays and the copper of the decorative frames in the shop. The result looks harmonious and balanced.



EXCELLENT TECHNICAL PROPERTIES

On a **technical level**, too, bluestone was at the forefront of this project. The subsurface in Shanghai is relatively unstable, which means that the buildings literally move from time to time. To prevent the floor from cracking, it is therefore crucial to choose a particularly **strong material**. Bluestone from Hainaut has a **naturally high resistance** and is available in large tiles, offering a safe solution to this problem.

Moreover, Belgian bluestone is easy to clean (with just water) – an essential quality for the floor of a luxury boutique. Because foot traffic can be busy in the store, it was important to choose a **stylish material that ages beautifully**. In this department as well, bluestone tiles with a sawn finish make for a wonderful alternative to concrete.

Last but not least, bluestone tiles are very **easy to install**, a great advantage for the workers on the construction site. The entire floor was laid in barely three days; much faster than is typically the case with cast floors in concrete. Once installed, bluestone floors also do not require a protective layer. Concrete floors, by contrast, need to be shielded from the rest of the yard.

FACTS AND FIGURES:

115 M²

Boutique shop with
a total area of 115 m²

100 M²

100 m² of Belgian
bluestone tiles

3 MONTHS

3 months of decorating

12

12 people: 2 architects and 10 workers





MORE THAN JUST A BLUESTONE FLOOR

The Isabel Marant boutique in Shanghai is already unique in its use of bluestone floor tiles, but it also has **custom display tables** to boot, made with residual material from the tiles and thin rods of black steel. The tables are used to showcase accessories such as shoes and jewellery, confirming the versatility of bluestone as a material and emphasizing the special character of this project.






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