countertops

Everything You Need To Choose The Right Countertop





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Counter Intelligence

If the kitchen is the epicenter of the home, then countertops are the epicenter of the kitchen. It's where almost every kitchen activity begins and ends. Because countertops are one of the first things you see when you enter a kitchen, they naturally serve as a focal point. And the good news is that choice of color, shape and material is virtually unlimited, enabling you and your designer not only to make countertops the functional workhorse of your new kitchen, but the ultimate expression of your design and personality.

Investing in high-quality, high-performing, statement-making countertops makes a lot of sense. Not only are countertops relied upon for meal preparation, but they are also used for cooking, eating, entertaining, doing homework, charging electronics, reading, relaxing and spending quality family time together. Countertops serve practical and aesthetic functions that can make or break a new kitchen.

How Much Does A Countertop Cost?

Countertop cost is affected by the type and quantity of material and amount of labor required for installation. For budget purposes, according to a recent *Kitchen & Bath Design News* survey, more than 52 percent of showroom customers spent 10 to 20 percent of their kitchen renovation budget on countertops. Almost a third of those surveyed dedicated 21 to 40 percent of their renovation budget to countertops, and approximately 10 percent spent less than 10 percent of their remodeling budget on countertops.

Select Countertops with Care

Countertops increase home value if they are beautiful and durable. Answering these questions will help you prioritize your goals and identify your ideal surface:

- Who will use the kitchen and countertops and for what purposes?
  - The level of activity in your kitchen should influence your countertop selection. If you entertain frequently and you know that your guests eventually make their way to the kitchen. Consider selecting countertops that are not only beautiful, but also durable and stain resistant. Similarly, frequent and passionate cooks gravitate to countertops that are durable, heat resistant and easy to clean. If young children will use the kitchen or the space is smaller in scale, consider countertops that have rounded edges to prevent possible injuries caused by running into corners.
- How will countertops make your kitchen look and feel? Material, texture, color, style, form, finish and shape all play a role.
- How will countertops mesh with your cabinets, appliances, faucets, sinks and hardware? How well will the countertops integrate into other rooms in the home?
- How easy is the surface to clean and maintain?
- How much do you want to spend on your countertops?

Material Options

The most popular countertop materials are:

- ***Granite:*** Granite is versatile, tough and offers an almost infinite palate of colors and styles. Granite is easy to maintain and clean. It will last a lifetime. However, granite is porous and unless sealed properly and
- regularly, it is prone to staining. Granite needs to be resealed every three to five years on average depending on usage and type of stone. Sealing granite is not expensive or time consuming. Granite is more expensive than laminate and solid surface materials.
- ***Marble:*** is beautiful, statement making and classic looking. The downside to marble is that it is prone to cracking, chipping, scratching and staining and may not be the best continuous surface for a high traffic kitchen. Marble also tends to be at the higher end of the price spectrum. If you expect a perfect factory finish for the lifetime of your countertops, marble may not be the best option for you. Marble will develop a patina or living finish with time causing its appearance to change. Marble is more expensive than laminate and solid surface materials.



Granite



Marble



Engineered Stone



Laminate



Wood



Stainless Steel

- ***Engineered Stone (Quartz):*** This option looks comparable to granite and marble however, it is not porous and won't stain, making it easy to maintain and clean. There are an almost limitless number of color, patterns and finishes available. With engineered stone, you can even incorporate veins in interesting patterns to resemble marble and natural stone. Typical quartz slabs are the same thickness as granite, 3cm. However, quartz is heavier than granite and much stronger, allowing for larger tops and longer overhangs. Engineered stone is more expensive than laminate and solid surface materials.
- ***Laminate (Formica, Wilsonart, Devmar and others):*** Laminate is cost effective, comes in hundreds of colors and patterns and is easy to clean and maintain.
- ***Wood (Butcher Block):*** Wood is a living product that will change over time. Wood will show wear and tear, nicks and scratches; it is not heat resistant and needs to be sealed regularly. The attractiveness of wood is its ability to add character and warmth to a kitchen. Another advantage of wood is the range of available thicknesses and edges. Wood countertops should be viewed and used as a piece of fine furniture as opposed to a high-performance kitchen top solution. Designers often pair wood with other countertop materials.
- ***Stainless Steel:*** Professional chefs gravitate to stainless steel, in part, because it is impervious to bacteria and heat. Stainless steel requires more maintenance than most other surfaces because of its propensity to scratch and show water spots and fingerprints. Stainless steel is often selected to create an industrial look or for those who want the look and feel of a commercial kitchen.
- ***Recycled Glass:*** This green material is easy to clean and maintain, stain resistant, heat resistant, durable and strong. Each glass countertop is unique, providing a custom look. Recycled glass, despite its strength, can crack if not properly installed. Also, some designs easily show fingerprints and water spots.
- ***Concrete:*** Concrete is extremely durable and is often custom formed in the kitchen or bath to fit any size, shape, texture or color desired. Concrete countertops need to be regularly sealed to prevent staining.
- ***Solid Surface (Corian and Swanstone, among others):*** Solid surfaces are made from acrylic, generally are less expensive than stone or quartz and easy to clean and maintain. They come in rainbows of colors and the material is unique in that the seams can be invisible. Solid surface countertops can be damaged by heat and are susceptible to scratching.
- ***Tile:*** Common countertop tiles are made from ceramic, glass, granite and porcelain. Tiles come in an endless array of styles, colors, shapes and textures and can be sized to fit any motif. Tile countertops tend to be labor intensive for installation and need to be sealed regularly to prevent damage to the grout. If you are interested in granite, marble, glass, porcelain or another type of natural stone, a way to reduce material cost is to select tile instead of slabs, but doing so will increase your installation and maintenance costs. While there may be cost saving advantages to go with tile over slabs, there are also huge performance differences. Slabs do not require grouting or feature grout lines. Plus, stone, quartz, marble and glass slabs tend to last longer than tile alternatives.
- ***Porcelain:*** Porcelain countertops are available in an endless array of colors, patterns and textures; they are easy to clean and heat resistant. Porcelain is also stronger than granite and lighter. Porcelain slabs are extremely durable but there is the potential for chipping and cracking.



Glass



Concrete



Tile



Porcelain

Finishes

The look and feel that countertops create are also affected by the type of finish. Polished is the most popular finish. Other options include honed, concrete and leather surfaces for granite, marble and quartz.

A honed finish has little to no shine, a smooth matte surface and are favored for their ability to conceal imperfections.

Concrete finishes have little to no shine with a slight texture to resemble a real concrete look.

Leather finishes have a soft sheen, are less glossy than a polished surface and have a different tactile feel. Leather finishes hide fingerprints and water spots well.



Honed finish



Concrete finish



Leather finish

Getting Edgy

Building a new kitchen involves a lot of decision making, from how the room will look and feel to the details that make all the difference. The edge of your countertop is one of those details that can make a huge difference, especially in smaller spaces The edge you select should match the style of your kitchen. Generally, speaking, the most common edges are:

- Single Bevel
- Bullnose
- Eased
- Ogee

A ***single bevel*** is often specified for more modern designs. It is characterized by a clipped flat corner cut along the top at approximately a 45-degree angle. The flat design makes the edge easy to clean, but has sharp edges because the bottom edge comes to a point.

Bullnose edges complement any design motif. They are characterized by a smooth round edge that softens the countertop. Bullnose edged countertops do not have details so they are easy to clean and do not have sharp edges, making them an attractive option for families with children. A demi-bullnose is rounded on the top side, but features a sharper edge on the bottom. Because the top edge is rounded, demi-bullnose edges are easy to clean and safe for kids. Bullnose edges are great option for raised bar tops and islands where the edge may be leaned upon while eating or used for other activities.

Eased edges are commonplace in contemporary designs because they help soften the hard sharp edges found on laminate countertops. Eased edges also are commonly specified in kitchens with oddly shaped counters or countertops with strange angles. The edges are slightly more pointed.

Ogee edges are more detailed and commonly specified in traditional design motifs. Ogee edges typically have two curves and grooves. Cleaning is more difficult but the round shape eliminates the possibility of injuries caused by a sharp edge.



Single bevel



Bullnose



Eased edges



Ogee edges

Other Fun Countertop Options

Waterfalls: A waterfall counter, also called a riser, breaks away from the expected horizontal countertops. The countertop material, typically stone, quartz or marble, continues vertically down the sides of the island, creating a continuous flow that ties the countertop to the floor, giving the whole space a unified, connected feeling.

Waterfall counters will transform countertop material to a piece, especially in open floorplans where an island can be seen from one or more rooms. If you don't have an expansive space, you can still create a big impact in a small space with a waterfall counter. Waterfalls' sleek, clean lines complement both modern and traditional kitchen styles.

Integrated Sinks: A sink and countertop made from the same material enables a seamless blend and flow from the work surface to the sink. Incredibly easy to maintain and clean, there's no need to worry about dirt and food being stuck in the space between the countertops and the sink. Common materials used for integrated sinks include marble, quartz, stainless steel and concrete.

Countertops are the functional and in many cases aesthetic focal point of any kitchen. Selecting a material, color, style and functionality that best suits your lifestyle and budget will help to ensure that the countertops selected will bring a smile to you, your family and friends every time they cross the threshold of your new kitchen.



Waterfall



Integrated sinks