

by design

Move over, granite!



The latest countertops blend high style with eco-friendly smarts

by Deborah Tyszka

Granite's reign as the most popular choice for high-end kitchen countertops may be coming to an end. Innovative, eco-friendly, manmade products are low maintenance, available in myriad colors and have the same visual appeal.

Sean Jacobs of JP Kitchen Design Studio in Oconomowoc sees alternatives to natural stone gaining in popularity. "The current hot trend is quartz. Quartz as a category had zero market share in 1997. Today it's equal to granite in square footage installed," he says. Quartz is a non-porous manmade surface that, unlike granite, requires no sealing and repeats a pattern, giving a more uniform appearance.

"I see the next trend being concrete and its various aggregate components," predicts Jacobs. He cites Vetrazzo, a brand from California

Made from recycled glass, Vetrazzo countertops come in many colors.

JOEL PULIATTI FOR VETRAZZO

that repurposes glass from decommissioned traffic lights, windshields, and used bottles. A brilliant blue finish called Cobalt Skyy uses only recycled Skyy vodka bottles, for example.

Add some spice

Countertops are more than just a surface for food prep; they are a statement of your style. Perhaps you want something exciting, like a surface in a bright acid green, or something with some sparkle, but you worry that it's too much for a large area. Use it for your wet bar or built-in desk to get the impact without committing it to an entire kitchen.

"Glass with an artistic design really makes a statement," says lead designer Terri Schmidt of Dream Kitchens in Delafield. Metal countertops of pewter, copper or stainless steel are also very luxurious. Another option is Pyrolave, a volcanic slab material that is fabricated like stone but glazed like tile.



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The way you live

Lifestyle plays an important part when selecting a countertop. "Bakers love the properties of stone with a honed finish to roll out dough. Serious cooks like the heat and stain resistance of granite. They also like the function of solid wood tops for chopping," Schmidt says.

Young families may have tighter budgets than empty nesters. "Laminate always ranks

first in value," comments Jacobs. "It's been the most innovative segment in the countertop industry over the past five years, with new aesthetics and finishes that replicate the look and feel of natural stone."

For those prone to spilling, stain-resistant quartz composite may be the solution. Acidic foods like lemons, wine and tomato juice will eat through the sealant used on granite.

A surface that is easy to clean and keep germ-free is important to everyone, but



DREAM KITCHENS

Complementary cement countertops, a mosaic tile backsplash, and stone accent wall create a clean, modern space.



JP KITCHEN DESIGN STUDIO

Quartz countertops are gaining in popularity. A manmade surface, quartz comes in a multitude of colors, has consistent patterns, and is nonporous, so does not require sealing like granite.

especially to those with young children. Schmidt says, "A solid surface, in general, is the most hygienic: glass, quartz, granite, marble, Corian."

Friends of nature

While granite captures the beauty of nature, many man-made products help sustain the environment. "This is the buzz in our industry, and many materials are entering the marketplace with eco-friendly enhancements, meaning they are recycling post-industrial or post-consumer materials. Left unattended, these would be in our landfills for thousands of years, but instead are used in today's surfacing materials," says Jacobs.

Which one is the most "green"? "I believe Paperstone is," answers Jacobs. "It has a 100-percent post-consumer recycled-paper content with an oil resin derived from the shell of a cashew nut, which makes it impervious to moisture." Scratch-resistant and heat tolerant to 350°, Paperstone can serve as a cutting board.

For chopping and cutting, though, nothing beats wood. Today, there are many creative

ways to integrate wood into countertops made of other materials.

"(Incorporating) multiple colors and textures remains a trend. They will always make a space



COLLEEN COOMBE

Mixing countertops defines work spaces. A butcher-block-topped island with a small sink make food prep a breeze.

more aesthetically pleasing to the eye," says Schmidt. "Different countertop materials function to accommodate different tasks in the kitchen," she adds.

Complementary countertops create a custom look that blends your personal style and needs, a winning recipe for any kitchen. 🍴