

Ask The Kitchen Guy Blog

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Part 2 of our review of countertop materials – Quartz and other Hard Surfaces:

Question: Hey Kitchen Guy, we are remodeling our kitchen and it is time to pick out a countertop. What material do you recommend and why?

There are three basic types: Hard Surface (Stone), Solid Surface (Acrylic) and Laminate; plus a fourth type that we will call Specialty. All have unique qualities and there are pros and cons to each.

Hard Surfaces: This category includes granite, marble, quartz, recycled glass set in resin (similar to quartz), and recycled glass set in concrete and soapstone. Hard surfaces are manufactured or sold in slabs. This part of our series on countertop materials will continue discussing Hard Surfaces - specifically Quartz, Recycled Glass Set in Resins, Recycled Glass Set in Concrete and Concrete.

A common trait with all hard surfaces is seams. If you have a large island or an “L” or “U” shaped countertop and choose a hard surface, you will most likely have seams in your countertop. Depending on your choice of material, the seams can be very visible.

Quartz and Recycled Glass in Resins:

Quartz and Recycled Glass set in resins are very similar so we will discuss them together. These are manufactured products. Generally speaking, they are made by crushing quartz or glass then mixing them with resins and other materials to create a look and color consistent from one slab to another.

Pros – Color and patterns are consistent. These surfaces are extremely hard and dense, making it very, very difficult to stain or scratch. There is also no maintenance required - just soap and water cleanup. However, you know that there are some countertop cleaners that if used properly will enhance the look of your countertop.

Some quartz colors are made with recycled materials in controlled environments and can be considered somewhat green or eco-friendly. Obviously the brands that feature recycled glass are considered green or eco-friendly as well. Some recycled glass tops are only available in 2cm thickness instead of the more common 3cm using one third less material over all. Most are NSF (National Sanitation Foundation) certified.

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Cons – Resins cannot be polished to the same high sheen as granite or marble. They also lack the movement and natural beauty of many granites and marbles.

Recycled Glass in Concrete is considered by many to be the first green or eco-friendly countertop. While very eye catching and eco-friendly, this type of countertop has very unique characteristics.

Pros – It comes in several colors and is often featured on television shows and articles when eco-friendly counters are being installed. The colored glass against white concrete makes for a striking contrast in many of the offerings in this group. For those who prefer a little less contrast, the concrete can be tinted. Some brands are NSF Certified.

Cons – Striking colors can be a little hard to take at six in the morning before your first cup of coffee. These counters are prone to staining and will require more care and sealing than the average granite or marble. In at least one case I know of, a manufacturer talks about stains adding to the patina of the countertop. Glass pieces can chip out during fabrication. Although repairable, fabrication difficulties make it an expensive option for consumers.

Concrete:

Concrete, as the name implies, is made from concrete. Concrete can take many forms and a variety of colors can be added. It can be prefabricated or forms can be made and the counter can be made on site. Colors, sealers and other treatments can also be added.

Pros – Concrete countertops typically have an earthy or rustic look. It also has an appealing quality for do it yourself types. However, it is best left to the pros, especially if you are tinting or trying to create a pattern.

Cons - Concrete counter tops are not cheap. Concrete is naturally porous and prone to staining. Even with sealers you can expect to have some staining. Like with Soapstone, I strongly recommend you research this countertop option very carefully prior to committing to it.