

Ask The Kitchen Guy Blog

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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?

Answer: As the purchase of a countertop can be a large part of a kitchen remodel budget, I am going to assume you are a loyal reader of this blog and still in the planning phase.

There are three basic types, Hard Surface (Stone), Solid Surface (Acrylic) and Laminate; plus a fourth 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 article will feature Hard Surfaces specifically Granite, Marble and Soapstone.

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.

Granite:

Granite comes in the widest variety of looks, colors and quality. Yes quality, just like diamonds and other precious stones, granite is rated. These ratings can vary. However, first choice is the rating recommended by quality fabricators.

Quality retailers and fabricators will insist you pick your slabs. However, this is not a guaranty that the final product will meet your expectations. All granites are different, some can look very different when sitting horizontal in your kitchen compared to looking at them vertically in a distributor showroom.

Some granite requires special enhancing treatments to bring out the natural beauty of the stone. When these stones are cut for your countertop, the edges will require that same special treatment or enhancement. Many fabricators do not have the experience or resources to treat the edges of some granite properly. If you choose exotic granite or one with large movement in it, you are more prone to these issues. Before purchasing, you may want to ask your fabricator if they have worked with that exact stone or one similar to before. You may also want to check with the Marble Institute of America and see what they can tell you about your choice.

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Pros – Generally considered the most beautiful, granite can be polished to a very high sheen. Granite can also be honed (a sort of dull or softer look). Most quality fabricators will make sure your countertop has a sealer on it. They may also offer optional higher grade or longer lasting sealers. Either way, proper care is always recommended.

Cons – It may be natural but I do not consider it green or eco-friendly. Granite is mined all over the world and must be shipped in large container ships, trains and trucks to get it to your door. Moreover, it is typically quarried or strip mined. Granite, like other stones, needs to be sealed and the sealer needs to be renewed from time to time. It is not NSF (National Sanitation Foundation) certified for commercial food preparation.

Marble:

Marble is generally not recommended in kitchens but can be used in bathrooms and other rooms. If you like the look of marble for your kitchen there are some quartz and acrylic products can look very similar.

Pros – Natural beauty is hard to match.

Cons - Despite the fact that it looks similar to granite, it is not. It is generally considered softer and its properties are different from granite. It is more prone to stains and does not hold up to most cleaners and soaps. It tends to dull over time. Like granite, it may be natural but I do not consider it green or eco-friendly. It is not NSF certified.

Soapstone:

Soapstone is sometimes considered the original stone counter top primarily mined in the north eastern United States.

Pros - Often a serious cook's favorite because of its heat resistant properties. Soapstone also has a unique natural beauty. It is non-porous and will not stain. It can be rejuvenated with linseed or similar oils.

Cons – Soapstone does not polish to a high sustainable sheen. You will have to treat it periodically with oil. Before purchasing, do your homework. Soapstone's unique properties can be both a blessing and a curse. Soapstone is mined in a similar fashion to granite or marble; hence many would not consider it green or eco-friendly.

Recommended Informational Sources:

www.marble-institute.com

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