

DESIGNER'S CORNER

Kitchen Counters 101: Choose Wisely for Practicality and Look

Designers weigh in on the pros and cons of various countertop materials

BY TRACY KALER | ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON MAY 24, 2023 | [MANSION GLOBAL](#)



A poured concrete countertop by JM Lifestyles resembles wood in this room by Showcase Kitchens.
TIM CREE/CREEPWALK MEDIA



Each week, Mansion Global tackles a topic with an elite group of designers from around the world who work on luxury properties. This week, we explored how to choose the right material for a kitchen countertop.

Choosing the appropriate countertop material can make or break a kitchen's design—and functionality. With an array of materials on the market—ranging from marble to butcher block to concrete—how does one select the ideal kitchen countertop?

Mansion Global asked four kitchen design experts to weigh in on the pros and cons of the most common countertop materials. Here's what they said.

Natural Stone

“Aesthetically, natural stone adds a unique and natural look to kitchen design that can’t be replicated by other materials.

“Granite is extremely hard and durable and comes in a wide range of colors and patterns. It’s also resistant to heat, scratches and stains. However, it does require regular sealing to prevent stains from setting in.

“Marble is a classic and elegant stone that also comes in a range of colors and veining patterns. It does require more maintenance because it has a softer and more porous surface. Marble is also prone to etching from acidic substances, which can create dull spots. However, if properly sealed and maintained, it can be a beautiful and timeless choice for a kitchen countertop.

“Limestone is a bit softer than granite and marble, which means it is more susceptible to scratches and chips. It is a great choice for a kitchen countertop if you want a natural look as it often has interesting patterns and textures, but you have to commit to regular sealing to prevent stains and damage.

“Soapstone has a unique, smooth texture and matte finish. It has become popular over the years because it’s very low maintenance, requiring only regular oiling to maintain its appearance. Something to note is that it can scratch and chip over time, but these can add to the character and charm of the material.”



Marble is classic and elegant, as seen in this kitchen by BANDD/DESIGN.

Molly Culver

—Sara Malek Barney, BANDD/DESIGN in Austin, Texas

Quartz and Solid Surface

“Quartz and solid surface materials are man-made, and they are virtually maintenance-free. They don’t require regular sealing like natural stone, and they don’t stain easily.

“The main difference between quartz and solid surface for kitchen countertops is that quartz is the more durable material. Quartz is made from natural stone which has been ground up. Resin is added, and the result is a sturdy and non-porous material that resists staining.

“Quartz is considered eco-friendly because it has a long life and can be recycled. Solid surface materials can sometimes look manufactured whereas quartz resembles natural stone. It should be noted that vinegar and lemon juice, anything acidic, can etch the surface of quartz. Solid surface materials are often softer than quartz and susceptible to scratches, etching and cuts. Quartz is also heat-resistant; [a solid-stone] surface is not.

“There are so many quartz options that it’s easy to find one to match almost any aesthetic.”



Quartz is a maintenance-free material that can take on any aesthetic, says designer Hannah Rasa.
Stacy Zarin Goldberg

—Designer Hannah Rasa, InSite Builders & Remodeling in Bethesda, Maryland

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Concrete

“Concrete is a very durable material that resists scratches, chips and heat damage as compared with other materials such as granite, marble or quartzite.

“Given the unlimited potential for texturizing, concrete adds a warmth to a kitchen unlike any other material. It can be customized to fit any design aesthetic, having the ability to mix to any color, and unique shape with personalized features such as drainboards or prep sinks. You certainly can do an entire kitchen in concrete, especially if the selected color and features don’t dominate the design.

“A concrete countertop will remain unmarred and as beautiful for years to come as it does the day of installation. With extensive customization, a concrete countertop can take longer to manufacture than a pre-existing slab material. Since concrete is a manufactured material, it is ... generally more cost-effective.”

—John Starck, president and CEO of Showcase Kitchens in Manhasset, New York

Wood and Butcher Block

“Wood and butcher block countertops add texture and warmth to kitchens and are considered a softer, more organic surface. Kitchens are filled with hard surfaces and the warmth of wood countertops can help to soften the overall palette.

“In kitchens, butcher block is preferred for working prep areas. It is more durable and knives stay sharper working on butcher block as you are cutting between wood fibers rather than across them. Butcher block requires maintenance, though. Surfaces should be kept dry as prolonged exposure to water will damage them and the tops will burn so you must use trivets.

“We use wood or butcher block as a portion of the kitchen countertops. Any wood countertop that we install in a kitchen has a marine-grade sealer approved for kitchen use.”



Wood countertops add texture and warmth as seen in this kitchen by Aidan Design.

Robert Radifera

—Nadia Subaran, principal/senior designer, Aidan Design in Silver Spring, Maryland