

Counter Culture: Beyond Granite

Granite has long been the gold standard in kitchen countertops. But as homeowners look for options with less maintenance and more sustainability, granite's reputation is cracking.

If you're looking for a new countertop, here are some options other than granite to consider.

QUARTZ

OK, get the visions of shiny rocks out of your head. Unlike granite, most quartz countertops are actually engineered out of lots of things and not a solid piece of stone. So, yes, it can look like a rock. But it can also look like wood or come in a variety of stunningly modern and chic colors. There's also no resealing and it may have a smaller environmental impact than your solid chunk of granite, depending on your fabricator and location.

BUTCHER BLOCK

While wooden countertops take hits on sustainability and low maintenance, they get lots of points for style. And, once you know the proper maintenance for your wood, it may be easier than you think. If you're still a little scared of caring for it, consider making just one section of countertop butcher block and choosing another, more low-maintenance, material



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ularly, as all of them but stainless steel will eventually develop a patina. You'll also need to be OK with scratches and scuffs. All of these things build beautiful character, but if it's perfection you're looking for, maybe go another route.

CONCRETE

You read that correctly. Your favorite driveway substrate is coming to a countertop near you. While it's heavy (so is granite), it can be customized in a variety of colors and textures to look like natural stone or be embossed with a pattern of your choosing. And, of course, it's right at home if you're going for an industrial look. Consider, though, that it may crack as your home settles and may also require some maintenance, depending on your finishes. The good news is that imperfections, nicks and cracks are generally pretty easy to fix.

TILE

Tried and true tile is also available in a variety of options and, if you have bad memories of replacing cracked tiles past, today's materials are harder than ever before. Some considerations to take into account are grout, which is porous and may harbor kitchen bacteria, and sealants. And, yeah, keep a few back for replacements, if needed.

REAL ESTATE 101

Consider the Source

Green building materials are composed of renewable, rather than nonrenewable resources, according to the California Department of Resources. If you want to use green building materials in your building or remodeling project, look for the following: materials that contain recycled content; materials that are natural, plentiful or renewable; materials made with efficient manufacturing processes; locally available materials; salvaged, refurbished, or remanufactured materials; reusable or recyclable materials; materials with recycled or recyclable product packaging; and durable materials.

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METAL

Metallics have been big for a while now, and their dura-

ble, non-porous nature makes them a good choice for countertops. Think: restaurants. Stainless steel is the tradition-

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METAL

Metals have been big for a while now, and their durable, non-porous nature makes them a good choice for countertops. Think: restaurants. Stainless steel is the traditional choice here, but you can also go for a warm copper or even bronze. You'll need to polish these countertops regularly, as all of them but stainless steel will eventually develop a patina. You'll also need to be OK with scratches and scuffs. All of these things build beautiful character, but if it's perfection you're looking for, maybe go another route.

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HOMEWISSE GLOSSARY

Soft second loan: a second mortgage whose payment is forgiven or is deferred until resale of the property.

SOURCE: Federal Trade Commission

AD SPACE