

SURFACE MATTERS

If you're a little overwhelmed by the variety of countertop materials in the market, fret not—we've done some research to help you decide

More than just a place to prepare food, the modern kitchen is increasingly becoming an important social zone for family and friends. Because of this, homeowners are paying more attention to the type of countertop materials that they use, turning the culinary space into one that also functions as a gathering place.

“Contemporary luxury is the trend for kitchen counters right now, with a focus on material composition,” says Bu Shukun, director of local design firm Architology. “There is a preference for bold designs that express clarity of construction with materials that seamlessly contrast.” He shares that some of the most popular features at present include kitchens with a combination of different surface materials, such as wild marble counters with matte black cabinets, or stainless steel tops and slim-tile cabinet doors.

In terms of design, general manager Daniel Magg of bathroom, kitchen and furniture purveyor W. Atelier tells us that marble-effect surfaces are all the rage right now, though his advice is to think about the specifics of your kitchen rather than simply following trends. “Some light-coloured materials are sensitive to sunlight, so if your kitchen is very sunny, it's better to choose darker colours,” he says. He adds another useful tip: “Countertop thickness plays an important role from a design, as well as an ergonomic, perspective. As most materials are three metres long and a maximum of 1.3 metres wide, you should consider the material size when the kitchen is planned in order to avoid unsightly joints.”

Your culinary habits should affect the countertop selection, too. Azman Sawal, a senior consultant from home kitchen specialist MK-Tre, says it's important to consider the type of cooking you'll be doing and the type of appliances you'll be using. “Asian cooking often requires the use of spices

DARKER, LESS POROUS MATERIALS MINIMISE STAINING—ITS TEXTURAL DESIGN MAKES A BOLD IMPACT TOO

RIGHT Table and kitchen countertop in Caesarstone's Tuscan Dawn quartz surface; the Statuario Maximus and Wild Rock quartz surfaces, also from Caesarstone

such as turmeric and curry powder, which leaves hard-to-clean stains,” he explains. “If you cook Asian food frequently, use a material that is less porous to minimise staining. The types of cooktops and kitchen appliances are also important. Industrial cooking appliances from brands such as Wolf or Viking have stronger voltage and fire output, so certain materials like solid surfaces aren't ideal for kitchens using these brands.”

OPPOSITE PAGE Kitchen brand Next125 pairs its sleek, handleless cabinetry with its selection of laminate, ceramic or quartz worktops





HERE'S A QUICK GUIDE TO HELP YOU MAKE SENSE OF THE MYRIAD MATERIALS AVAILABLE

1
QUARTZ
Quartz surfaces are engineered stone comprising crushed quartz and other minerals that are combined with resin. This results in rock-like worktops more durable than natural stone, thus creating a non-porous, heat and bacteria-resistant worktop that doesn't require protective sealing. Look to brands such as Caesarstone, which produce such surfaces with up to 93 per cent quartz in patterns that mimic marble, concrete and semi-precious stones.

2
SOLID SURFACES
Composed of a higher percentage of resin than quartz, solid surfaces are more malleable than quartz worktops. Its pliability allows the stain-resistant surface to be easily integrated seamlessly with materials like wood and stainless steel. "Because of their acrylic content, solid surfaces are more pliable, which allows for curved counters," says Ann Lee, general manager of furniture retailer P5; the store carries Italian kitchen brand Dada, which uses solid surfaces from Corian.

3
NATURAL STONE
Natural stones such as granite and marble are highly durable, with a robust look. However, these are porous, which can lead to water marks on your countertop over time. If you love the rugged look of natural stone, consider Sensa by Cosentino—this collection of natural granite surfaces has been treated with an invisible coat that protects against liquid penetration, stains, as well as colour damage that may be caused by sunlight and UV radiation.

4
LAMINATES
Laminates are a versatile paper-based composite that is easy to clean, while offering good resistance to scratches. It's also available in myriad textures to suit any interior style—these include wood-grain veneers, matte-effect lacquers, as well as high gloss finishes. Laminate brand Formica has introduced Protec+, a new collection which harnesses the antimicrobial properties of silver to prevent the growth of bacteria on these surfaces.

5
STAINLESS STEEL
Extremely durable, and highly heat and water-resistant, stainless steel is the go-to for professional chefs; and it adds a sleek accent to any kitchen. While the metal alloy is easy to clean, it is more prone to scratching and dents. Opt for a brushed finish to conceal such imperfections, and pair it with steel, wood or laminate cabinetry from SieMatic—its "AntiPrint" coating reduces the appearance of fingerprints on matte surfaces.

6
NANOTECH MATERIAL
A technologically advanced material that is revolutionising kitchen design, Fenix NTM (nanotech material) has a matte finish and a smooth feel. This durable and aesthetically attractive surface material is low-maintenance, has anti-fingerprint properties, and is highly resistant to abrasions. The material has a surprising thermal healing feature that allows micro-scratches on the surface to be healed an infinite number of times.

7
CERAMIC
Like stainless steel, one of the biggest advantages of ceramic is that it allows you to cut and prepare food directly on your countertop if you so choose. Resistant to scratches, stains, heat, mould and chemical products, ceramic also holds up well against humidity, which makes it ideal for outdoor kitchens. Italian ceramic brand Laminam offers counters in sophisticated textures that are inspired by stone, wood and plaster.



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