

KITCHENS & BEDROOMS & BATHROOMS

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Cutting edge

A kitchen is only as good as its countertops, so seek out quality surfaces that offer the best in form and function

Words: Ashlee Beard

Close your eyes and imagine the kitchen of your dreams. What do you see? A minimalist white space? Perhaps an Italian designer kitchen in a sophisticated shade of espresso, or maybe a country kitchen full of rustic charm? The units and colours may be fixed in your mind, but have you given a thought to the worktop? Whichever cabinets you may choose, they play a supporting role to the most important element of a well-functioning kitchen – the countertop.

The eye and the heart may decide the design of your kitchen, but investing in a new worktop should be a more calculated choice. As Neil Lerner of Neil Lerner Kitchen Design explains, "A worktop is much more than just looks. Obviously it needs to look stylish, but it also needs to be practical, as it is in constant use. That's why

the first thing I do is to ask the client several really important questions before choosing a worktop for their new kitchen. The main question is, 'what will you be using your worktop for?' This may sound obvious, but it's vital for ruling out certain types of materials."

Whether you opt for bespoke, or an off-the-shelf solution from the internet, templating is, in most cases, essential to ensure a perfect fit. This involves removing your existing worktop and measuring the exact worktop area to create a 3D file, which will serve as the template for your new worktop. If it's a simple island unit or a straightforward run of units, as long as your walls are perfectly straight you may be able to get away with buying off the shelf, but otherwise, particularly with stone, many reputable suppliers will not sell a worktop without templating first. **[KBB]**



Bringing strength to stone

Stone composite or engineered stone worktops offer the natural beauty of stone, combined with the durability of manmade materials. Quartz is one of the main components due to its extreme hardness and resistance to acids. The formula is added to marble or granite, imbuing it with strength, robustness and easy maintenance.

Quartz and wood work together in harmony on this bespoke island unit worktop and breakfast bar by Edmondson Interiors (left). The mixing of materials offers practicality and creates a subtle zoning effect within the kitchen. Expect to spend from £40,000 for a fully fitted kitchen.

Another benefit of composite is its versatility. As well as classics, such as marble-like Blanco Zeus (shown opposite) from Silestone by Cosentino, companies are offering options for contemporary looks. Prices start from around £400 per sq m for Silestone.

01256 761229 or www.silestone.co.uk

01580 212934 or www.edmondsoninteriors.co.uk

Rough beauty

Once favoured for its industrial appeal, concrete has evolved. As Nicky Spear of Sustainable Kitchens states, "Many clients see our concrete worktop in our showroom and ask what material it is, but when they find out it is concrete it catches them by surprise. It is very versatile in its look and, although it's typically a hard, industrial material, it can be transformed to look very soft and warm in many kitchens through the use of colour and light."

As it is cast in a mould, concrete is incredibly versatile. It also works well with other materials, such as wood, and is eco-friendly. However, due to its porous nature, concrete must be sealed upon installation, followed by regular waxing to reduce the risk of staining. Because of this protective coating, hot pots and pans should be kept well away. This polished concrete worktop (right) from Sustainable Kitchens starts at around £4000.

0117 961 6471 or

www.sustainablekitchens.co.uk

