



Photography by Kelly Reed Photography

# Counter Couture

*Top Trends for Well-Dressed Countertops*

by Deborah Martin, ASID

It's the details that make every kitchen or bath new construction or renovation project unique. Countertops with their detail-centric design elements offer special opportunities for adding personality to a space. At the Las Vegas Kitchen and Bath Industry Show, North America's premier kitchen and bath trade event, high-end design and low maintenance were inherent themes sparking countertop trends for 2015.

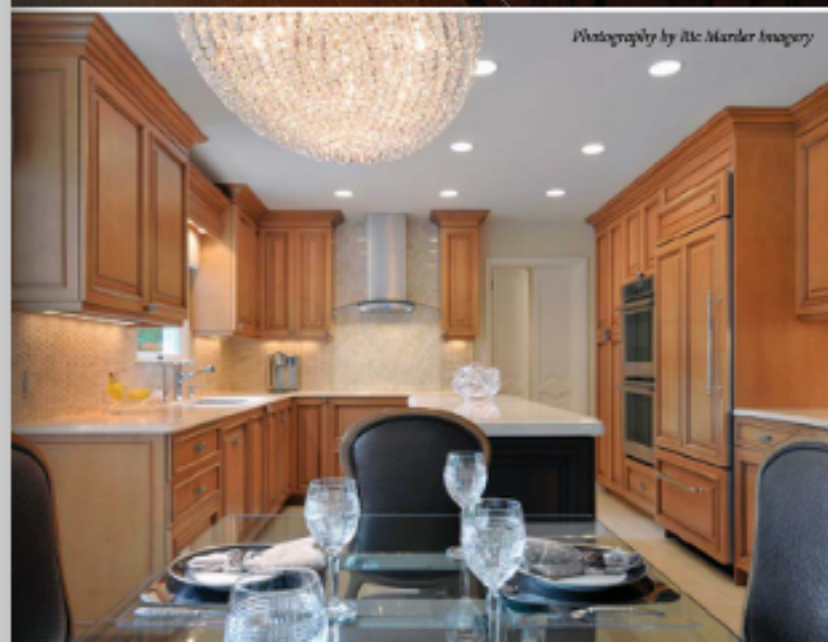
After years of being the material of choice, granite has lost its status to quartz as the most sought after countertop product in bathroom and kitchen settings. Durable, stain resistant and sleek, quartz countertops appeal to those seeking a carefree lifestyle with aesthetics. On the market for the past 30 years, this engineered stone is made from a blend of stone chips, resins and pigments. Its marked increase in popularity has resulted from the release of new colors and collections by trend-savvy manufacturers.

Unlike granite and marble, it is nonporous and, as a result, the stain resistant qualities make quartz impervious to most cleaning products, oils and liquids. Although quartz resists cracking and scratches, extreme heat can damage the resins that bind it so care should be taken with hot pots and curling irons. Unlike granite, however, this champion countertop material never needs to be resealed.

A favorite among those with large installations, quartz can be fabricated in larger pieces resulting in fewer seams. Its unique ability to flex makes it ideal for backsplashes and other large vertical surfaces. Comparable in cost to granite, this product especially appeals to those who prefer a uniform look without the quirky variations and movement inherent in natural stone surfaces. It is also best suited to projects with elaborate tile installations so that every element in the space does not rival for attention.



Photography by Kelly Reed



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## Showy Countertops

Those who favor granite as a countertop material appreciate its authenticity as a natural material. The near limitless spectrum of colors and patterns makes granite a top choice for those seeking showy countertops central to design. The same attribute that makes it a popular choice can also frustrate the uninitiated as each granite slab has unique color, pattern and shading qualities which can make acquiring several slabs for a larger project more challenging. This is where the talent of a skilled fabricator comes into play in joining slabs in such a way that seams are not featured.

Because of its inherent porous quality, granite must be sealed with an impregnating water-based sealer. Polished granite with its mirror like finish stands up better to stains than honed granite which is more porous. Imperial White and Absolute Black granites are a good choice for homeowners with neutral color schemes in comparison to busier, more colorful granites.

Improvements in production have made marble more affordable, but the cost of maintenance must be factored in. Even with periodic sealing it is still susceptible to stains and scratches. Like its natural counterpart granite, marble is not impervious to chips from stray pots and pans. In more wet environments like bathrooms, water marks can be a problem. Yet marble's popularity with the revival of white kitchens and white appliances has soared over the last decade. This is because it is available in so many different shades of white from the very pure Thassos to Carrara, coveted for its gray veining.





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## Noteworthy Trends

Aside from actual countertop materials, other noteworthy trends mix countertop products for a custom look. This also matches the suitability of countertop materials with functionality. If the island is at the center of kitchen activity, especially in a home with small children where frequent clean ups are necessary, perhaps a low maintenance quartz product should be considered for this location with marble or granite in perimeter spaces.

Varying the thickness of countertops in both kitchens and bathrooms is a great on-trend way to add visual interest and to create a focal point. A double thickness countertop on kitchen islands has been trending for some time, but a laminated build up in bathrooms is particularly effective in creating a luxe environment.

Opportunities to design the outer edge of the countertop and inside edges of sink cutouts should not be overlooked. Where a bullnose edge detail was the standard of choice for years in both traditional and contemporary kitchens, the skill set of fabricators has improved to afford unique opportunities for tactile expression that result from implementing more than one edge profile. Because of the additional expense, consideration should be given to choosing this for surfaces with the fewest linear feet.

Photography by Amanda D'Donato



Photography by Randy Scott Sando

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The lines between living spaces throughout the home continue to blur, and luxury market homeowners continue to embrace trends that create opulent, indulgent environments to live and entertain. Bearing witness to this ongoing phenomenon are introductions like the new Jenn-Air Obsidian. With its

bold charcoal black interior, this appliance takes a purposeful departure from white proving that the inside of a refrigerator should be just as stylish as its exterior. And so it goes with countertop design as our quest for ambient spaces underscores the need for careful attention to each and every detail.

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