



Home Tips®



• CHRISTIAN BUILDING INSPECTORS, INC., 3697 HABERSHAM LANE, DULUTH, GEORGIA 30096, 770-849-0920 • FEBRUARY 2003 •

How To Choose Countertops?

We are building a new house and cannot decide on the type of countertop to use in our kitchen. The prices range from inexpensive to extremely expensive. How do you decide on cost versus value?

The following information should help you with the differences between the different types of countertops, and you will need to decide how much you are willing to spend.

Maintenance and Use Factors

Maintenance on most countertops is minimal—but fail to do it and permanent, or at least difficult-to-reverse damage can occur. There are preventive maintenance (mopping up spills, using hot pads, working on cutting boards) and long-term maintenance (which usually involves applying some form of

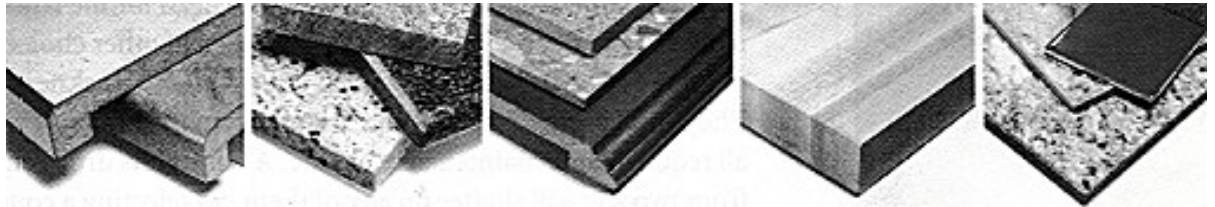
sealer or finish). Ask yourself, how careful (*really*) are you and your family? What do you expect your top to look like in five years? Does it make more sense to stick with laminate until the kids are out of grade school?

Aesthetic and Tactile Factors

If budget and maintenance aren't decisive factors in your mind, how the top looks and feels are the true deal makers. Both you and your countertop have a personality; select one that you can get along with. Texture, aesthetics, glossiness, "warmth," how natural the material looks and feels, and how it fits in with the design of your kitchen and home are all part of the final equation.

One of the beauties of today's trend toward multiple countertop surfaces is, when torn between two tops, you can install them both!

Wear and Maintenance



Plastic Laminate

Granite

Solid Surface

Wood

Tile

| | <u>Plastic Laminate</u> | <u>Granite</u> | <u>Solid Surface</u> | <u>Wood</u> | <u>Tile</u> |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|--|---|---|
| REPAIRABILITY | Edge repairs are simple; surface repairs are hard to blend | Difficult to repair in place | Damage can be sanded out or professionally patched | Damage can be sanded; wood must be resealed | Individual tiles can be replaced (buy/save extras) |
| EASIEST WAY TO INFLICT DAMAGE | Sharp knives; acidic or abrasive cleaners; hot pans; water in seams | Cutting; severe impact | Hot pans can pop seams and discolor surface | Cutting; letting water seep into end grain at sink or seams | Staining grout with acidic foods; chips from cast iron pans |
| LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE | Keep seams sealed | Apply penetrating sealer every 6 to 12 months | Can resand every 5-7 years for "new" look | Reseal tops with oil-based finishes every 4-6 weeks | Keep grout lines sealed |
| SEAMS | Mitered seams, visible | Square seams; visibility depends on pattern | Square seams; mostly hidden | Mitered or square; must be very well sealed | Larger tiles mean fewer grout lines |
| UNDERMOUNT SINK | Difficult, but possible | Yes | Yes | Not recommended | Difficult, but possible |
| THE "CLEANLINESS FACTOR" | Non-porous, easy to clean | Easy to clean; dark colors show water | Non-porous, easy to clean | Can absorb grime and liquids if severely neglected | The tile is easy to clean; grout is difficult |
| TYPICAL WARRANTY | One year | Usually provided by installer | Ten years | One year | Varies with installer |
| COST Square Foot | \$8 to \$20 | \$75 to \$150 | \$50 to \$100 | \$35 to \$55 | \$10 to \$25 |

The three most common and most popular products are plastic laminates, solid surface and granite.

PLASTIC LAMINATE

Plastic-laminate tops may not grab headlines, but they still account for 75 percent of the market. They're inexpensive, durable, come in lots of colors and can be installed by do-it-yourselfers. The laminate sheets can be made into countertops in two ways. It can be post formed at a fabrication plant to create tops with the rounded "unibody" backsplash and nosing. Post-formed tops can be purchased off-the-shelf at home centers in limited colors or special ordered. This style top is the least expensive, easiest to clean and quickest to install. They can also be custom fabricated into an extraordinary range of styles.

SOLID-SURFACE

DuPont introduced the first solid-surface countertop, Corian, to the world 35 years ago, and the category continues to thrive. There are currently more than a dozen manufacturers offering countertop materials in hundreds of colors and designs. Most, if not all, solid-surface tops are handled by trained pros who have been certified to fabricate and install that specific product. Solid-surface tops are normally 1/2 in. thick and made of acrylic, polyester (or blends of the two) along with fillers. Edges are built up with two or three layers of material for a thicker appearance. Some have labeled solid-surface tops the "near-perfect" product. They're non-porous, making them ideal for food preparation. They're difficult to stain. They can be formed into nearly any size and shape. Because they're of uniform material through and through, light scratches can be buffed out, deep scratches and burns can be sanded out, and severely damaged areas can literally be cut out, replaced, then blended to be darn near invisible. Sinks can be undermounted and backsplashes can be integrated into the top, making them seamless.

GRANITE

Although granite's been around for millions of years, it's still

considered the new kid on the block. Ten years ago granite fell into the "exotic" or "extravagant" category. Today it's become more accessible and affordable. In its natural state, it resists most stains and when sealed becomes tougher yet. Many edge styles can be crafted: most commonly bevel, radius, half-radius, ogee and square. A natural material; it comes in a wide range of colors, patterns and depths. Each top is absolutely unique. Sinks can be undermounted, and it can handle hot pans.

Source: The Family Handyman, October 2002



If you have a question, change of address, comment, home tip or would like to send *Home Tips* to your clients, send your letter to *Home Tips*, Christian Building Inspectors, Inc., 3697 Habersham Lane, Duluth, Georgia, 30096-6111. You can also E-Mail your questions to us at rodharrison@christianbuildinginspectors.com. We reserve the right to edit questions for length.

Quote Of The Month

"THE ONLY WAY TO HAVE A FRIEND IS TO BE ONE."

- RALPH WALDO EMERSON

A Tip Of The Hat To:

Steve Bing
Platinum Place Properties, Inc.
5435 Sugarloaf Parkway, Suite 2203
Lawrenceville, Georgia 30043



Thank You

● CHRISTIAN BUILDING INSPECTORS, INC. ●

● Member: ASHI, GAHI, MAIA, ICC ●

● ICC CODE CERTIFIED CABO ONE & TWO FAMILY DWELLING INSPECTOR No. 1619 ●

● Fully Insured With E&O, Liability and Worker's Compensation Insurance ●

● Office: 1-888-257-0365 or 770-849-0920, Fax 770-849-0540, Cell 404-697-4129 ●

● Web Page: www.christianbuildinginspectors.com Email: rodharrison@christianbuildinginspectors.com ●



- Site
- Drainage
- Foundations
- Floor Slabs
- Crawl Spaces
- Basements
- Structural
- Interior
- Exterior
- Appliances
- Ventilation
- Electrical
- Plumbing
- Heating
- Air Conditioning
- Attic
- Roofing
- Radon
- New Homes
- Warranty
- Construction