

Fall HOME IMPROVEMENT

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What to know about kitchen countertop materials

Kitchens are the busiest rooms in most homes. Kitchens have become more than just places to prepare meals, with many functioning as gathering spaces and even go-to dining spots in homes that do not feature formal dining rooms.

So much time spent in the kitchen makes it worthwhile to invest in these popular spaces. Kitchen renovations are high on many homeowners' to-do lists, and there's many decisions to make once they commit to redoing the room. When renovating a kitchen, homeowners will have to choose which countertop material they want to install, and the following rundown of popular options can help sim-

plify that decision.

Quartz

Quartz is considered a low-maintenance and durable countertop material. The home improvement experts at This Old House note that quartz countertops are typically 94 percent ground quartz and now come with an honed, sandblasted or embossed treatment, which makes them appealing to homeowners with varying ideas on the ideal look of a kitchen countertop. Quartz can crack if it's not handled properly, and edges and corners can chip over time. Rounded edges can minimize the risk of chipping. Costs vary by location and product availability, but

quartz typically costs about the same as natural stone.

Granite

Consumer Reports notes that no two slabs of granite are the same, and that uniqueness has long appealed to homeowners. Tests run by Consumer Reports found that heat, cuts and scratches did not harm granite, though this material, like quartz, can crack around edges and corners. Granite is a durable material that, if properly maintained, can last several decades. Granite also is nonporous, which makes it resistant to bacteria.

SEE PAGE 8

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A guide to various types of home awnings

Homeowners recognize that upgrades can improve the functionality and comfort of their homes. Improving outdoor spaces has proven particularly popular of late. The National Association of Home Builders reports that outdoor living has been propelled to the top of homeowner wish lists. Plus, a recent survey conducted by the New Home Trends Institute found connection to the outdoors/nature and outdoor entertaining ranked high among desired home designs.

One way to make outdoor spaces more accommodating is through the installation of awnings. Many homeowners would like to enhance their homes with awnings but do not know where to begin. Learning about the various types of awnings can help homeowners determine which option best suits their needs.

Fixed awnings

Fixed awnings are stationary on a building's exterior. While the

awnings are generally stable, they can be damaged by snow or wind. It's key to find an installation expert to make sure the awning is installed correctly so that it can withstand weather and other issues. It's also important to know that fixed awnings remain in the same position and orientation, so its best to know exactly where to place it beforehand.

Retractable awning

Retractable awnings are the most popular type of awnings because they can be extended when necessary to keep a space cool or protected, then rolled or folded up when not in use. These awnings are advantageous because they can be retracted when bad weather hits to prevent damage.

Motorized retractable awning

Motorized retractable awnings offer the utmost convenience. Standard retractable offerings require a handle or hand crank to manually extend or fold up the awning. Motorized awnings can



be operated with a sensor, remote or even motion trigger. Even though they cost more, they're a favorite among homeowners.

Areas of use

Awnings can be installed in various locations. Patio awnings are much preferred because of their large coverage area, which typically spans entire patios. Door awnings are installed above the exterior door of an entryway to protect visitors and occupants from precipitation and to improve the home's look. Window awnings

can add additional shade and privacy. There also are side awnings, which are essentially wall-like structures that run across a patio, garden or balcony for wind or sun protection. They're also utilized to improve privacy.

Homeowners can choose from various types of awning materials, including fabric, metal, glass, and others. Working with a reputable awning company is the best way for homeowners to peruse possible products and find awnings that will suit their needs.

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The benefits of working with an interior designer

Homes require an investment of time, energy and money. The payoff of those investments is substantial, and the benefits of home ownership are more profound than even longtime homeowners may recognize.

A 2016 report from the National Association of Realtors indicated that home ownership boosts kids' performance in the classroom, leads to greater participation in civic and volunteer activities and improves health care outcomes, among other benefits. With so much to gain from home ownership, it's no wonder so many people across the globe are willing to commit the time, energy and financial resources necessary to own their own homes.

Homes are undoubtedly a point of pride for millions of homeowners, and that sense of fulfillment is even greater when interiors are up-to-date and welcoming. Home trends come and

go, and busy homeowners can be forgiven if they're not able to keep up with the latest interior design styles. That's the job of a skilled interior designer. Working with such professionals when redoing a home's interior can make all the difference and increase the already profound sense of pride many homeowners have in their homes.

- Interior designers can help narrow down the possibilities. A simple internet search prior to beginning a home renovation project will turn up millions of results. That can leave homeowners' heads spinning as they try to identify their own style and plan a project that coordinates with their preferences. Experienced interior designers can help homeowners identify their style and offer practical insight as they work with clients to choose elements to incorporate into spaces they aspire to renovate.

- Interior designers can ensure

a room doesn't stick out like a sore thumb. Just because a design looks good on the internet does not mean it will work well in every home, particularly if only one room is being renovated. Interior designers recognize that and can steer homeowners in the direction of designs that will fit the larger theme of the home while still offering a fresh look and feel.

- Interior designers can save homeowners money and headaches. Renovation projects can be pricey, and that price tag only goes up when mistakes are made. Interior designers advise clients on furnishings and other design components, and that advice can save homeowners money in the long run. Furnishings may be returnable, but such returns typically come with sizable fees. By directing clients toward furnishings and other components that fit the overall design scheme, interior designers are saving homeowners the cost and



headaches associated with fixable yet expensive mistakes.

- Interior designs are up-to-date on the latest trends. Real estate and design trends come and go, and dated designs can adversely affect what homeowners recoup at resale. Homeowners who want to update their home interiors with the ultimate goal of selling their homes can work with

experienced interior designers who know which trends are in and which are out. That knowledge can make it easier and more lucrative to sell a home.

Homes are a significant investment, and investing in the services of an experienced interior designer can ensure homeowners maximize the value of their homes.

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Trendy Takes on Kitchen and Bath Design

(Family Features) Designing a new home, remodeling your own or simply rethinking aesthetics and decor all require a little imagination and a lot of inspiration. A quick online search brings up hundreds if not thousands of thoughtful ways to make your kitchen or bathroom match your desired style from modern to traditional or anything in between.

All those results can be slightly overwhelming, however. Rather than having a go at it alone, rely on the professionals to guide you toward looks that are all the rage and fit a variety of budgets. Consider these on-trend design ideas from the kitchen and bathroom experts at Wellborn Cabinet, whose whole-home solutions double as functional and beautiful.

Kitchen Trends

Let it Flow: Open concepts have become quite common as it allows the kitchen to feel like one large room where loved ones and guests can intermingle as opposed to an enclosed space. This flowing openness lends continuous visibility to the area ranging from the (seemingly) always active kitchen to gathering spaces in the dining and living rooms. An open floor plan also helps connect design aesthetics from each room to the next.

Opt for Concealed Storage: Pots, pans, knives and all your favorite kitchen gadgets need hidden somewhere. Rather than taking up valuable pantry space, turn to a stylish storage solution from Wellborn Cabinet's line of pullout cabinets that give you the room you need. With options ranging from pullout peg boards to sleek tray dividers, these clever contraptions can help you stay organized while making functionality beautiful.

Incorporate Smart Tech: Trends aren't exclusively about aesthetics - practicality via technology is equally important for those looking to update their kitchens to the 21st century. Devices like smart refrigerators that allow you to take inventory from an app, smart lighting that brightens and dims to save on electricity and voice assistants that help you keep track of recipes are all trendy paths toward a top-of-the-line kitchen.



Bring in Organic Touches: Organic modern is in, which means adding organic touches using natural materials like stone and wood in your cabinets, countertops, flooring and more. Achieve a warm vibe with these organic elements paired with a neutral color palette (soft whites and earthy tones) and natural light.

Bathroom Trends

Add Accents that Pop: Obvious accents like bold pops of color and unique patterns come to mind, but you can also make your bathroom stand out by experimenting with materials, accessories and shapes. Think eye-catching cabinet hardware, fun mirror shapes and open-shelf decor that grabs attention without overdoing it.

Show Off Wood Vanities: As an important area you'll use to get ready for each day, vanities should be purposeful and practical but can also brandish your personal style. Types and sizes may vary but one look seeing an upward trend, according to Wellborn Cabinet's design experts, is the use of natural tones and textures like woodgrain to complement the rise in popularity of warm colors in recent years.

Go for Decorative Lighting: The same tired light fixtures in bathrooms can feel drab and dreary. Evaluate the amount of natural light available (often at a premium in bathrooms) and decide



SEE PAGE 8

DESIGN FROM PAGE 7

if you can go more subdued or need to effectively and efficiently illuminate the area. Bell-shaped, wall-mounted sconces next to mirrors are in vogue, as are glass globes to complement ample natural light. For a true touch of modern flair, consider dramatic accent lighting like underlights on a floating vanity that do double duty as a convenient nightlight.

Make it Spa-Like: Lavish luxury is the goal with a spa-like bathroom in the comfort of home. Organic materials, natural light, traditional decor and, maybe most importantly, an oversized soaking tub are at the core of this look. While it may sound counterintuitive, you can actually create your own oasis with some simple, budget-friendly aesthetics. The first step for many is to incorporate more storage using sleek cabinets, shelves and wall-mounted hooks to achieve a decluttered look. Next, simply replace your old showerhead and faucet with spa lookalikes and stock up on plush, fluffy towels for that luxurious appearance without a complete remodel.

Find more design inspiration by visiting Wellborn.com.



COUNTERTOP FROM PAGE 2

Laminate

Laminate countertops appeal to budget-friendly homeowners and Consumer Reports notes that they're easy to install. Home Depot also notes that laminate countertops come in a wide range of colors, textures and designs. Laminate countertops also are durable, which helps budget-conscious homeowners stretch their dollars even further. Laminate countertops are easily maintained, though it's also easy to permanently damage them with knives, so Consumer Reports recommends always using a cutting board when preparing meals on laminate.

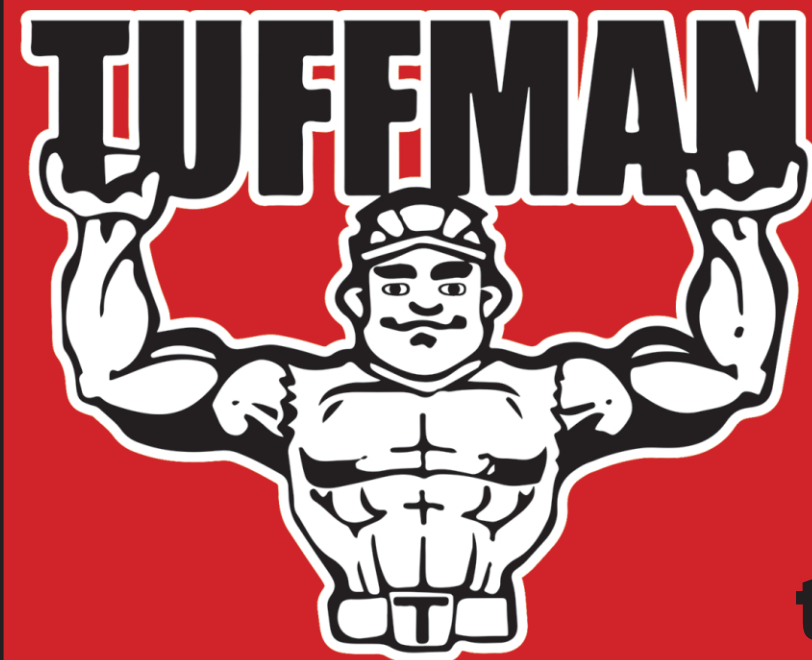
Butcher Block

Butcher block countertops are among the more unique options homeowners may consider. Sometimes referred to as "wood countertops,"

butcher block countertops are made from wooden strips that are fused together. The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that butcher block is among the more affordable materials, but the final cost will be dictated by location and availability. BobVila.com notes that butcher block countertops are highly sensitive to liquid, so exposure to moisture should be limited. Sealing butcher block countertops immediately after installation can help protect against bacteria and warping. Though butcher blocks can be high maintenance, many homeowners find the unique look is well worth the extra elbow grease.

Kitchen countertops can define how the room looks, and homeowners have many options to choose from when designing a new kitchen.

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CALMING COLOR

Design inspiration for a comforting, relaxing home

(Family Features) Updating your home can provide the perfect opportunity to explore new design styles or refresh living spaces with a new color scheme. In fact, a coat of paint can help set the mood for entire rooms in your home.

By turning to nature-inspired designs, you can create a sense of comfort and relaxation. A hybrid color, like Valspar's 2024 Color of the Year, Renew Blue, is gentle and airy with a touch of blue to set a restful and meditative mood. The grayed sea green - inspired by fleeting things such as fog, mist, clouds and glacier lakes - is a seasonless and versatile hue that features a mid-tone blue with warm undertones and can be used in outdoor living spaces and four-season rooms alike.

"This mid-tone shade has become popular for wellness environments over the years due to its low saturation level, which evokes a sense of rest and calm," said Sue Kim, Valspar's director of color marketing. "The harmonious green and blue open the possibility for outdoor applications, blurring the boundary between interior and exterior."

To help elevate the mood in your home, consider implementing Renew Blue into one of these popular design trends that can update the look of nearly any of your indoor or outdoor spaces.

Coastal

Coastal looks are timeless designs that have remained relevant for years because of their positive correlation to calming beach locations. Perfect for outdoor spaces like the backyard, you can implement a more curated and personal take on the trend by shifting from "typical" coastal design that pairs beachy hues with natural textures like rope, driftwood and wicker to something more classic and natural like the Cape Cod variation by working in some nautical touches like anchors, oars or seashells.

Modern Farmhouse

In the entryway, using beautiful and functional decor, such as unique ceramics and handwoven textiles, helps usher in a modern rustic style. By using timeless tones and accents, as well as layering heritage art, you can create visual mystery while elevating the ordinary to make your home feel warm and welcoming to guests

from the moment they walk through the door.

Nordic Comfort

Modern Traditional is a style that came together over time, and the Hygge look is a refined take. It pulls elementary cues from traditional farmhouse style but has shaker-inspired elements mixed in and is done with a slightly modern twist. It can make a larger space like the kitchen feel welcoming, open, carefully curated and warm.

Modern Boho

Boho is a nature-loving and free-spirited style connected to earthy and botanical elements. From handmade decor to vintage metallic finishes, this style reimagines the past and elevates everyday spaces like bathrooms into personal retreats designed with wellness in mind.

Pastel Wabi-Sabi

Leaning into the modern sentiment of "less is more," this style reflects a naturally minimalist design aesthetic and showcases color coordination with mood-boosting hues and joyful color. Perfect for nurseries and other spaces that should be bright and welcoming, pieces with pared-back, welcoming shapes and silhouettes that allow quality natural materials to shine are perfect for decorating the room.

Visit [Valspar.com](https://www.valspar.com) to find more on-trend home design inspiration and order up to 10 free paint chips to be delivered to your home to see how your favorite colors will fit your space.



EXPLORING COLOR PAIRINGS

If a concept like color drenching - using one color from the baseboards to the ceiling and decor - isn't what you're envisioning, pairing a gentle and airy color like Renew Blue with other hues may be just the trick to create the space of your dreams. Consider these popular Valspar pairing options:

Perfect Backdrop: The familiar, natural tone of beige has returned strong, balancing warm and cool shades to create comforting spaces that harmonize well with various design styles.

Dusk in the Valley: A barely-there, grayed pastel that is soothing to the senses, even amid constant changes. Layering pale tints

in various materials can create a sense of calm and relaxation.

Personalized Advice for Your Space

If you're unsure where to begin your color search - or need advice on color matching, building your painting confidence or troubleshooting complicated projects - the experts at Valspar offer free virtual advice. Simply provide details about your space, lighting and style preferences using the questionnaire at [valspar.com/en/color-consultation](https://www.valspar.com/en/color-consultation) and by uploading photos of your space and any inspiration to receive personalized recommendations directly to your account.



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