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Next-level Countertops

Countertops are some of the hardest working surfaces in a kitchen. This collection of projects showcases how they handle it beautifully, too.

BY KIM BERNDTSON

All the surfaces in a kitchen are asked to perform in demanding and tough conditions. But those on the horizontal plane have to do it in particularly difficult circumstances. Consider all that is asked of floors and countertops. Fortunately, countertops are available in a variety of materials, colors, patterns and textures, which give them the ability to seamlessly function in challenging situations while being beautiful at the same time.

This month, *KBDN* asked designers to share projects that highlight a variety of countertop materials that add aesthetic and functional appeal to kitchens. ■



Photos: Tahvory Bunting, Denver Image Photography

NATURAL
STONE

MARGARITA BRAVO, CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER MARGARITA BRAVO — DENVER, CO Brilliant Black marble (island, perimeter)

Before delving too deeply into a project, Margarita Bravo discusses characteristics of any finish selections her clients are considering to gauge how they will fit into their lifestyle. With regard to countertops, conversations often focus on function and how materials will age with use.

"Some clients don't mind added character and natural aging of a material," she says. "Others want their kitchens to remain perfect. That's how we are able to determine if we use something like quartzite, marble, engineered stone and so on."

Bravo also stresses the importance of understanding degrees of wear and aging, especially when using natural materials.

"Everybody's expectations are different," she continues. "When we talk about something like scratching, it's important to gauge what that means to clients so they know what to expect."

In the case of this kitchen, the clients were comfortable with any time-honored patina that could come with use so a natural stone like marble, was suitable. While many marbles are white, these clients wanted a dark countertop. After researching options with Bravo, they chose Brilliant Black marble for the island and perimeter. Selecting a honed finish maintains the desired matte aesthetic.

"They wanted a farmhouse look that was edgy and a little moody," says the designer. "They were comfortable with black-on-black for the countertops and cabinetry, which we accented with brass hardware and lighting and plumbing fixtures to make it feel a little more elevated and to create contrast."

The designer also created contrast with the full-height quartz backsplash, which showcases the ultimate play on 'opposites' characterized by the black countertop with thin white veins and the white backsplash with bold black veins.





NATURAL
STONE



BETHANY ADAMS, NCIDQ, ASID, ALLIED AIA, PRINCIPAL BETHANY ADAMS INTERIORS — LOUISVILLE, KY

Platinum quartzite (island, perimeter)

Bethany Adams loves to use natural stone whenever possible for the countertop surfaces in her clients' homes.

"It lends such a sense of beauty and luxury to a space," she explains. "You can always identify natural stone, even from across the room."

For this kitchen she showcased Platinum quartzite for the perimeter and island, which spills vertically to the floor with waterfall edges.

Chosen for its durability, colorway and movement, the Platinum quartzite also complements other finishes in the kitchen, which is an addition to an early 20th century home.

"All of the finishes work together to create a really calm and natural-feeling environment," she continues. "The home is from the 1920s, so imbuing the addition with a Craftsman attention to materials and simplicity was really important. Even though the kitchen is modern, it relates back to the original home."

In particular, the stone's gray-blue color pairs perfectly with the navy blue perimeter cabinetry while contrasting with the walnut island and upper accent cabinets. It also adds brightness to the darker Ann Sacks Savoy Ribbed tile backsplash.

Additionally, the stone's veining pattern adds movement to the space.

"Both the backsplash and the glass in the upper cabinets are ribbed," says Adams. "The countertops are a foil to all of that rigidity. They have such beautiful veining that adds an organic element to break up all the verticality...much like a river."

To direct full attention to the quartzite, the designer purposefully omitted pendants over the island, choosing to include a trio of lights in front of the windows instead.

"I wanted to keep the vista of the countertop to the backsplash completely open so there wasn't a lot of competition for the view," she concludes.

**BYNN ESMOND, PRINCIPAL DESIGNER
BYNN ESMOND DESIGNS — SAN CARLOS, CA**

**Neolith Arctic White (island/perimeter)
Wenge wood (island accent)**

Low maintenance and durable were key characteristics that Bynn Esmond's clients requested when selecting finishes for their kitchen. With regard to countertops, that translated to Neolith's Arctic White.

"It was important for the homeowners that their kitchen be low maintenance and durable," she explains, adding that she also used the material as cladding for the cooking wall and island and as the perimeter countertop, which features waterfall edges. "It's such a high-use area that they knew from the start they didn't want natural stone. Instead, they wanted a very hard, dense material that could take day-to-day wear and tear and be resistant to heat and scratches. Neolith came to mind since it is engineered via a sintering process with high pressure and high heat in such a way that it is more durable and dense than typical porcelain slabs."

The Arctic White colorway came into consideration given that the homeowners wanted a white, modern, minimalistic look for the kitchen.

"The material and color is very consistent and monochromatic," she explains. "The Arctic White is also on the warm side, so it pairs nicely with the white cabinets, which have a cooler feel."

As well, the sintered stone's satin finish adds interest to the space and is an unexpected feature.

"At first glance, the countertops look plain white," she explains. "But they have a very nice feel. The material isn't smooth,



Photo: Agnieszka Jakubowicz Photography

SINTERED
STONE

but it isn't textured either. Its tactile surface is quite unexpected. It's similar to velvet...you always want to touch it!"

Although Esmond's clients wanted a white kitchen, they didn't want it to be too stark so including a wenge wood accent on the island warms up the space.

"It's a dense wood and the graining is minimal," she explains. "We also finished it in such a way that it's easy to maintain and wipe down."

SINTERED
STONE



Photo: Lindsey King

**KERRIE KELLY, CEO/CREATIVE DIRECTOR
KERRIE KELLY STUDIO — SACRAMENTO, CA**
Cosentino Dekton Portum (island, perimeter)

Although this home, the childhood residence of the wife of the family, had been updated a few times, there were still original elements that had never been touched. For instance, the entry closet and a couple of adjacent walls served as 'greeters' and blocked the visual into the rest of the home.

"After taking them out, you can now walk through the front door and see an entire open floor plan," says Kerrie Kelly. "Entering a space that carries you from front to back truly gives that breath of fresh air feeling with ample natural lighting and room for everyone to enjoy."

Of particular enjoyment is the renovated kitchen, which injects the family's love of blue and brass set against a foundation of white cabinetry and countertops. The latter, Dekton's Portum in a Velvet finish, serves as a durable work surface with a classic aesthetic.

"With the family's love of entertaining on a grand scale and the husband's appetite for cooking family-style entrees with all the fixings, we knew the countertop material had to be durable, as well as beautiful," Kelly says. "This material is ideal for supporting the family's lifestyle by being low maintenance and hard working."

"Aesthetically, it pairs well with mixed metals and the stunning blue and white palette," she continues. "Plus, its simple gray veining adds depth and interest to the dreamy white surface, creating a classic, understated finish that offers a sensational velvety soft touch. Its sculptural pattern, inspired by Portobello marble, set the tone for the entire home."

Kelly also carried the material into the mudroom, family room bar area and the game room's entertaining kitchen.

"It creates a cohesive aesthetic when sitting in the breakfast nook, working in the kitchen, enjoying a cocktail or playing guest perched on a bar stool," she relates.

QUARTZ

JEANINE YANCY, CAPS/SENIOR DESIGNER KSI KITCHEN & BATH — BRIGHTON, MI Solid Surfaces Unlimited Pompeii quartz (island, perimeter)

Given its low/no maintenance merits, marble-look quartz is a popular countertop material choice for many of Jeanine Yancy's clients who like the look of the natural stone but don't want the associated care. And, with an extensive range of choices available, everyone can find the right combination of color tones and veining patterns to suit their specific needs.

For this client, the Calacatta-type veining of Solid Surfaces Unlimited's Pompeii quartz offered the right amount of warmth, color and movement.

"Our biggest challenge with the material was finding the perfect color and pattern...one that wasn't too creamy or too gray, or one that didn't have too much or too little veining," she recalls, noting a collaboration with Haven Construction. "We went back and forth on several options before deciding on this one."

Part of the challenge was that, in addition to the horizontal work surfaces, the designer also featured the material on multiple vertical surfaces, including as a waterfall edge for the island and as a full-height backsplash behind the range.

While the medium-wide, warm gray veins add interest and offer a visual variation from the solid-colored finishes, they also tie into the charcoal-colored cabinetry, which offers contrast and a 'softer' take on black. The quartz's warm white, almost speckle-less background serves to brighten the room and complements the zellige tile backsplash and ventilation hood.



Photo: Martin Vecchio Photography

"She didn't want an all-white kitchen, but she did want it to be bright, updated and modern...and different from what her friends and neighbors were doing," Yancy indicates.



QUARTZ



Photos: Ryan Hainey Photography

MARISSA SCHULTZ, INTERIOR DESIGNER/OWNER DESTINATION DESIGN — RACINE, WI Silestone Sunlit Days Arcilla Red quartz (island, perimeter)

Maintaining the authenticity of this mid-century modern home, originally built by architect Hans Geyer in the late 1950s, was an important consideration in its most recent renovation. Marissa Schultz transformed its 1970s kitchen from a dark, uninviting and cave-like space into an updated room with a fresh look and focal-point countertops.

The clients' initial aspirations focused on a palette of white and gray with marble-look surfaces, but Schultz encouraged them to reconsider.

"Those choices wouldn't bring out the architecture of the home," she says. "And, they made everything blend together."

The homeowners held steadfast to gray for the cabinetry, which now serves as a quiet backdrop that sets the stage for the jewel of the space...Silestone Sunlit Days Arcilla Red quartz countertops.

"The kitchen is small with low ceilings, which we couldn't raise," she explains. "There isn't a lot of cabinetry either, so we

knew it wasn't going to be the focus of the kitchen. Instead, we decided to make the countertops the star. Bringing the attention to countertop level also makes the space feel less closed in."

As for the color, Schultz felt that it fit well with the era of the home. Plus, it perfectly matches one of the color chips in the new Terrazzo-look floor.

"When I saw this color, it felt nostalgic and reminiscent of the colors of the mid-century," she explains. "It has a real earthiness to it, which fits in well with other natural materials used in the home. It's also a consistent color throughout, which is something that would have been used in original mid-century modern design. Yet, it has an edginess that spoke to an updated look."

The quartz's suede finish is 'soft' to the touch and minimizes excessive glare from the expansive windows, which allows the colorful countertops to shine.

WOOD

CORTNEY BADOR, WOODSTOCK KITCHENS & BATHS — ESSEX JUNCTION, VT

Walnut butcher block (island)

MSI Surfaces Calacatta Laza quartz (perimeter)

Cortney Bador often gets requests for renovations with an ageless aesthetic, such as in this kitchen where she combined shades of white with wood.

“These clients wanted a high-end look that was classic and timeless,” she relates. “They didn’t want any finishes that would fade out, or colors that would change or trend.”

To oblige, cream-colored shaker-style cabinetry allows the kitchen to be light and bright while serving as a neutral base that is easy to pair with other finishes, including the walnut butcher block that sits atop the expansive island.

“Walnut brings in a different texture and tone,” she explains. “It also grounds the space and adds warmth and variation to the lighter elements.”

The walnut, protected with an oil finish, will also develop an expected and welcomed patina that adds richness to the space.

“These clients, like many, are okay with the wood getting a lived-in, worn look,” she indicates. “But, if they want it to look new again, they can refinish it by sanding it down and re-oiling it.”

Bador repeated the natural material as floating shelves that flank the window.

“When we bring in a wood element, we try to bring it in in at least two places,” she says. “In this case, it’s the island top and shelves. Other times it might be a mantel piece over a stove or an



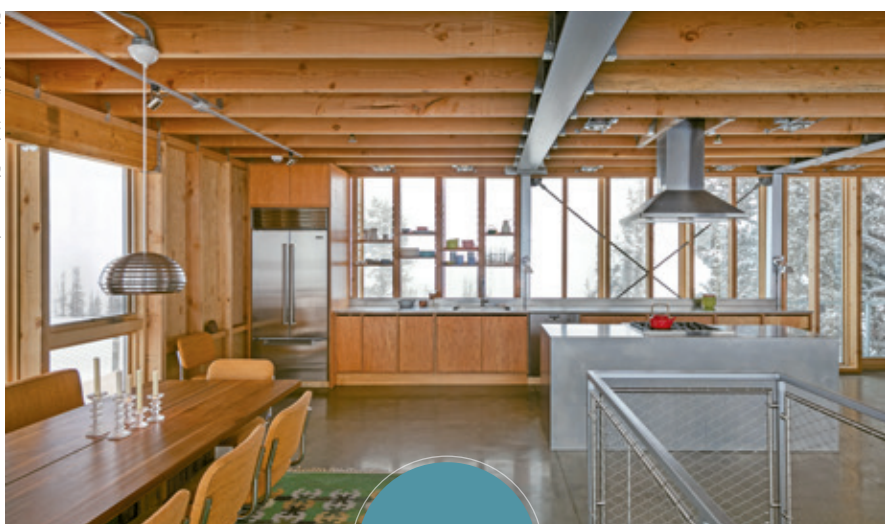
Photo: Jen Cypress: Dwelling Photography

accent in an adjacent room. Repeating the material makes it more purposeful and brings continuity.”

As a complement to the cabinetry and a contrast to the wood, Bador included MSI Surfaces’ Calacatta Laza marble-look quartz for the perimeter work surfaces and backsplashes.

“We wanted to include some finishes with movement,” she explains. “This quartz has long striations and bold veining so it really brings some movement throughout the kitchen, but in a very subtle way. The contrast between this beautifully patterned quartz and the rich, warm and inviting wood makes the space feel special.”

Photos: Melissa Kelsey Photography



METAL



WON SHIM, PROJECT ARCHITECT LLOYD ARCHITECTS — SALT LAKE CITY, UT

Stainless steel (island, perimeter)

Set amidst a collection of small, sustainably constructed residences within a preserved mountain ecosystem, this simple hillside cabin is designed to be unadorned and pure. Partnering firms Lloyd Architects and Schemata Architects, based in Tokyo, Japan, carefully thought through and crafted every exterior and interior detail, from the cabin’s galvanized steel frame and exposed marine-grade plywood exterior to its drywall-free interior, plywood millwork and clear anodized aluminum windows. Even the decision to include stainless steel kitchen countertops, set atop custom plywood cabinetry, speaks to its austerity.

“The cabin is mostly glass, steel and wood,” explains Won Shim.

The satin finish stainless steel wrap tops all the counters. As well, it sheaths the front and side faces of the island, reinforcing the intended vibe.

“Stainless steel counters provide an industrial, common commercial kitchen feel that is hard working,” Shim relates. “The kitchen is heavily used and it serves as the core of the main living space on the upper level. It anchors the dining and living room and is oriented toward the glazed faces of the building in two directions.”

The stainless steel also matches the aesthetic of the rest of the project and coordinates with the stainless steel appliances, ceiling beams, stair railing and even the visible conduit wiring that snakes along the cabin’s walls.

Additionally, its inclusion reinforces the desire to include sustainable materials.

“Stainless steel is 100 percent recyclable,” Shim indicates, “and it is often created from recycled material.”



RECYCLED
MATERIAL



NICOLE WHITEHORN, DESIGNER WATERVIEW KITCHENS — TEQUESTA, FL

Vetrazzo Cool Titanium (island)

Cosmos Calacatta Vintage quartz (perimeter)

Some homeowners aren't afraid to mix it up when it comes to creating their perfect space. Such was the case in this kitchen where Nicole Whitehorn's clients chose an array of finishes and materials that make an eclectic statement.

"There is a lot going on in the kitchen, but all the different tones, woods and finishes all come together to create a space that pops," indicates the designer.

From the start, they wanted a multi-toned kitchen, which is accomplished via painted dark gray and white perimeter cabinetry and a stained rustic hickory island.

They also wanted to include materials that were easy to take care of and maintain. Those that were good for the planet, such as the recycled glass island countertop, earned bonus points.

"They love that the glass is a recycled product," says Whitehorn, in reference to the Vetrazzo Cool Titanium work surface, which utilizes tasting glasses and condiment jars as its glass sources. "They also love how its gray color contrasted against the island. It really pops against the rustic wood."

Inspired by tough, high-end metal alloys, the island top with its diverse range of gray tones also ties into the highly decorative, intricately detailed Notting Hill Saddleworth antique pewter bin pulls on the base cabinets. It also complements the dark gray perimeter cabinetry, which is topped with Cosmos' Calacatta Vintage quartz.

"She wanted surfaces that were super functional, and both the recycled glass and the quartz are non-porous," she relates.