

“Home
wasn’t built
in a day.”

Jane Ace,
*The Fine Art of
Hypochondria*

home

renovation handbook:
cabinets and
countertops

Pull out and save this comprehensive **guide to
remodeling kitchens and bathrooms**—the
first of a series on sprucing up your home.

WRITTEN BY CAROLYN WEBER PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK LUND



cabinets

Cabinetry is essentially furniture for the kitchen and the bath. It sets the tone for the entire room, while providing much-needed storage.

before you begin

Walk around the room and consider what your needs are. Do you want to stow all your towels in the bathroom instead of the hall closet? If so, you might benefit from a few deep cabinets. Do you need a row of vertical dividers in the kitchen for all those cookie sheets? Think about how many drawers and upper and lower cabinets you would like, plus extras, such as open shelves, glass-front doors, and deep drawers.

consider your options

STOCK: Available in a limited number of styles and finishes, inexpensive stock cabinets are sold in home-improvement stores and can usually be taken home the same day. They generally come in three standard widths: 27, 30, and 33 inches.

SEMICUSTOM: These are sold in the same sizes as stock but come in a wider range of styles and finishes and offer features such as pot racks. Delivery time is four weeks and up.

CUSTOM: With handmade cabinetry, the sky's the limit—but you'll pay for it. "Elaborate molding finish could easily add 30 percent to the total," says Matt Aanensen, a remodeler in Kearny, New Jersey. Delivery takes at least six weeks.

keep in mind

Cabinet-box and shelving materials vary—from plywood to medium-density fiberboard (MDF) to particleboard, which may sag over time. You'll need to choose from four door styles: slab (little or no ornamentation), recessed panel (a center panel outlined with a frame; shown left), raised panel (a center panel raised for contrast), and glass insert (a center panel of glass, clear or frosted, that provides a glimpse of what's inside). As for the cabinet-door materials, there are many choices, the most popular of which are featured on the opposite page.



inexpensive wood

WHAT IT IS: Light- to medium-toned hardwoods, such as maple (shown) and birch. Oak, which has a slightly coarser grain, is also an affordable option.

PROS: Thanks to their strength and uniform grains, these popular varieties take paint well. Maple and oak mellow in color as they age.

CONS: Birch and maple may not absorb stains as evenly as midrange and expensive woods.

COST: Averages \$2,350 for a 10-by-10-foot room (stock).*



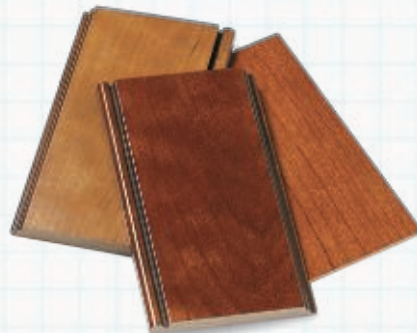
midrange wood

WHAT IT IS: Hardwoods with a pronounced grain, such as hickory (shown).

PROS: This type of wood is very dense and extremely strong and comes in a range of colors, from cream to reddish brown.

CONS: Some cuts are fairly uniform in tone, while others are not; one piece may contain several variations of the same color. But you can use a midtone stain to smooth out discrepancies.

COST: Around \$2,500 or more for a 10-by-10-foot room (stock).



expensive wood

WHAT IT IS: Premium hardwoods, such as cherry (shown) and walnut, known for their smooth grains.

PROS: It's hard and durable.

CONS: Cherry darkens as it ages, and walnut lightens over time, so consider this when coordinating the cabinetry with other finishes.

COST: Cherry and walnut are among the priciest species. Cherry costs about 10 to 15 percent more than midrange woods. Walnut can be twice as expensive as cherry.



laminate

WHAT IT IS: Layers of paper topped with plastic, then glued to plywood or medium-density fiberboard (MDF).

PROS: A ubiquitous cabinet material, laminate is affordable and comes in seemingly endless color and pattern options, from hot pink to polka dots. It's a great choice if you want to redo your kitchen or bathroom in a flash.

CONS: Door fronts come in slab styles only. It is prone to scratching.

COST: \$1,540 to \$2,000 for a 10-by-10-foot room (stock).



stainless steel

WHAT IT IS: Metal cabinets built with a sleek, frameless construction (the doors are attached directly to the cabinet box).

PROS: It is durable and won't warp like wood. Colors include industrial silver and powder-coated red, green, and orange.

CONS: Stainless scratches and dents easily and shows fingerprints (unless it's powder-coated).

COST: \$3,330 to \$5,900 for a 10-by-10-foot room (stock).



Thermofoil

WHAT IT IS: A thin layer of vinyl molded to MDF.

PROS: It doesn't warp, so it's ideally suited to humid environments. Thermofoil cleans in a snap with soap and water and is competitively priced.

CONS: Since it looks more like plastic or enamel, you won't fool anyone into thinking it's wood. Cabinets positioned next to or above a hot oven can sometimes peel or yellow.

COST: \$2,000 to \$2,700 for a 10-by-10-foot room (stock).

tip Look for drawers that have sliding mechanisms underneath. They are roomier than drawers with mounts on the sides.

* Semicustom ranges from \$2,500 to \$9,000; custom from \$7,200 to \$10,000.



countertops

From meal prep to the occasional spill, these surfaces take a real beating, so it's important to know how the different types compare.

before you begin

Consider how you live in your kitchen or bath. If you tend to be a messy cook and want to wipe up spaghetti-sauce spills quickly—with just soap and water—look into easy-to-maintain laminate. If durability is your main concern, opt for engineered stone or granite; both are virtually indestructible. And if you're a neatnik, "you should probably think twice about marble," says Peggy Fruin, a kitchen and bath designer in East Hampton, New York. "It stains so easily

that you'll be a nervous wreck whenever someone puts a glass down on it."

consider your options

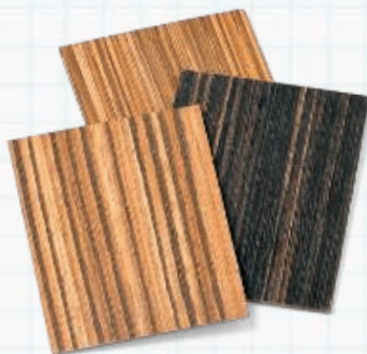
What type of sink do you want? If you're looking for an under-mount sink, which lies below the counter, you can choose any material except laminate, which is glued together and is therefore not 100 percent waterproof. With solid surface, stainless steel, and concrete, you can have a seamless sink, which is made of the same material as the counter.

If you prefer natural and engineered stones, remember that they can come either honed or polished. Honed counters offer a casual, matte look, but they absorb moisture, so they need to be treated annually with a penetrating sealer (about \$39 for a quart, www.stonecare.com). Polished counters are glossier and require less stringent care.

keep in mind

While shopping around, it helps to have a rough idea of how much material you'll need. (Multiply the length by the width, in feet, of the planned counter to get the square footage.) That way, you can guesstimate how much money you'll spend. For more information on the 12 most common countertop materials, see following pages.





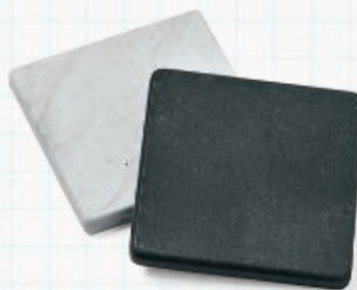
laminate

WHAT IT IS: Layers of paper topped with a thin coating of plastic, then glued to plywood or medium-density fiberboard (MDF).

PROS: Laminate resists stains and comes in a slew of colors and fun patterns, like zebrawood.

CONS: If you slice through the top layer, you'll need to replace the entire countertop. Laminate can buckle under high heat, and seams are visible where pieces meet.

COST: \$10 to \$30 a square foot.*



solid surface

WHAT IT IS: Molded resin.

PROS: Often referred to by the brand name Corian, it is stain-resistant and nonporous and ranges in color from bright blue to earthy beige. "Some shades mimic the look of smooth concrete," says Melissa Birdsong, vice president of trend, design, and brand for Lowe's.

CONS: Scratches can be gently sanded out, but the material may be scorched by hot pots and marred by knives.

COST: \$35 to \$80 a square foot.



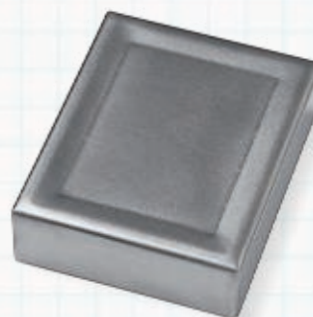
marble

WHAT IT IS: Crystallized limestone, typically with gray or beige veining.

PROS: It's classic. "Like the Parthenon, marble gets better with age," says Matt Aanensen. It is heat-resistant and features a cool-to-the-touch surface that's ideal for rolling dough.

CONS: It's prone to chipping, and acidic foods, like lemons and tomatoes, can cause stains and deep scratches. It should be sealed annually. You'll have to apply a poultice to suck stains out.

COST: \$40 to \$100 a square foot.



stainless steel

WHAT IT IS: Sheets of metal.

PROS: Stainless-steel surfaces are heat-resistant and nonporous, so they will stay bacteria-free. "There's not much you can do to hurt it, and the look never goes out of style," says Tracey Overbeck Stead, an interior designer in Austin, Texas.

CONS: It's generally a fingerprint magnet. However, smudges are not as noticeable on a brushed or matte finish. Stainless steel can also scratch easily.

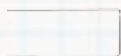
COST: \$70 to \$120 a square foot.

tip Marble and granite vary from slab to slab, so if you're particular, **visit a stone yard to pick out your own piece.**

** Price ranges include installation.*

edging options

There are many decorative edging treatments that can add character to a natural-stone, engineered-stone, solid-surface, or wood countertop. (Some materials, such as laminate, can be spruced up with edgings in another material, like a strip of aluminum or wood.) The following are the most common types.



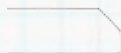
SQUARE, OR STRAIGHT EASED

As basic as it gets. True to the name, it has sharp 90-degree edges.



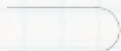
BIG EASED

A square option with slightly rounded edges.



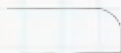
BEVELED

A square edge with an angled top or bottom, or both.



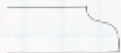
BULLNOSE

Rounded on the top and the bottom, this type is unlikely to chip and is ideal for households with small children.



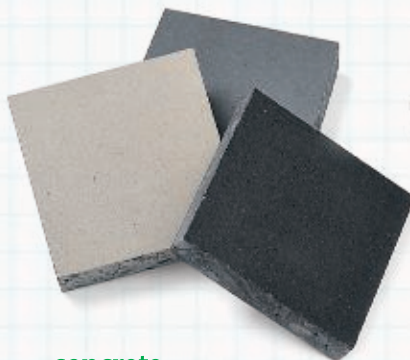
HALF BULLNOSE

A curved top with a straight edge on the bottom.



OGE

More elaborate than bull-nose, it curves in an S shape.



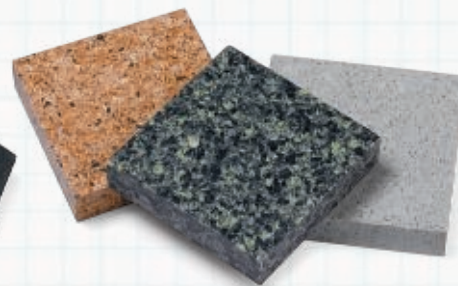
concrete

WHAT IT IS: Cement, water, sand, stone, and pigment formed into a slab.

PROS: “The surface is incredibly smooth,” says Paula Flanagan, an interior designer in Chicago. And it’s customizable. Tint it to match a paint color, embed it with shells, and choose any thickness.

CONS: It may crack when exposed to extreme temperature changes. It also needs to be sealed annually and waxed every couple of months.

COST: \$80 to \$120 a square foot.



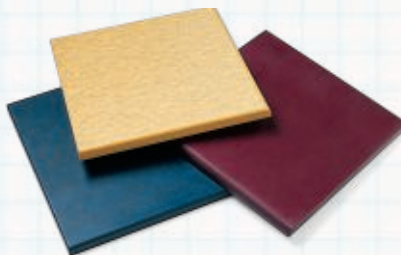
engineered stone

WHAT IT IS: Ninety-three percent quartz particles mixed with various resins and pigments. Brands include CaesarStone and Zodiaq.

PROS: It’s as tough as nails. There’s minimal variation from slab to slab, and it comes in bright colors, like race-car red and aqua blue. It won’t scratch or scorch, and it never needs to be sealed.

CONS: Seams are visible, and the edges may chip.

COST: \$45 to \$90 a square foot.



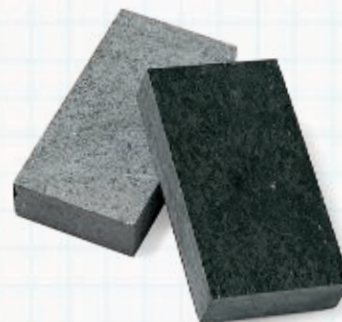
paper composite

WHAT IT IS: Paper pulp bonded together with water-based resins. Richlite is one of the main brands.

PROS: It’s made from a renewable resource. It’s also heat- and scratch-resistant and exceedingly smooth to the touch (you won’t believe it was made out of paper).

CONS: Red wine, juice, and mustard may stain it (they can be tackled with warm water and a scrub pad).

COST: \$90 to \$120 a square foot.



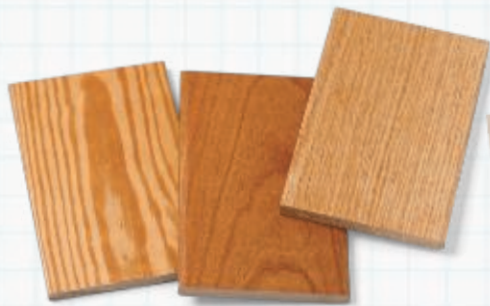
soapstone

WHAT IT IS: A natural, porous stone, usually gray in color. You might remember it from high school chemistry class, as it was used to top those old lab tables.

PROS: It can handle hot pots and doesn’t stain.

CONS: You’ll have to smooth out scratches and help the stone oxidize (or darken) evenly by occasionally applying mineral oil. The stone is soft and thus susceptible to chipping.

COST: \$50 to \$100 a square foot.



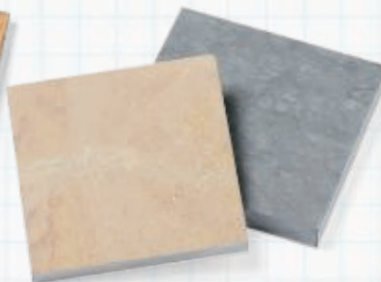
wood

WHAT IT IS: Solid slabs of hardwood (usually maple, oak, cherry, walnut, or teak) or butcher block (pieces of hardwood glued together). Wood certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) comes from sustainably managed forests.

PROS: It takes on character as it ages.

CONS: It can warp, stain, burn, and scratch and must be sealed annually. Wood absorbs bacteria; disinfect it after exposure to raw meat or fish.

COST: \$40 to \$65 a square foot.



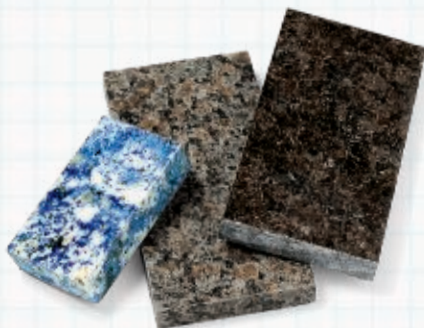
limestone

WHAT IT IS: A sedimentary rock consisting mainly of calcite.

PROS: Limestone features minimal veining and varies from slab to slab. It can withstand high heat.

CONS: It stains easily and must be sealed at least once a year. You'll need to use a poultice of baking soda and water to draw out tough stains (like the rust ring from your husband's shaving can). It's also prone to scratches, nicks, and chips.

COST: \$60 to \$100 a square foot.



granite

WHAT IT IS: One of the hardest natural stones on earth, ranging in color from basic black to pink.

PROS: Granite has become the up-grade of choice in kitchens and baths for good reason. It is nonporous and extremely durable and can hold its own against hot pots. The varieties are endless, and no two slabs are exactly alike. A few types come presealed.

CONS: Seams are visible. Most granite needs to be sealed annually.

COST: \$40 to \$100 a square foot.



recycled glass

WHAT IT IS: Ground-up glass mixed with concrete.

PROS: This eco-friendly material can withstand heat, resists scratching, and comes in many colors and thicknesses.

CONS: Dropping a heavy pot or pan on a recycled-glass counter could cause the surface to crack or chip—and the damage can't be repaired. Some kinds are slightly bumpy. You'll need to seal it once a year, and it can show fingerprints.

COST: \$100 to \$190 a square foot.



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