

Energy Efficiency in the Home

Trim Tips for Doors and Windows

# Extreme How-To

The Enthusiast's Guide to Home Improvement

## KITCHENS IN FOCUS

- Choose the Right Countertop •
- How to Install Tile •
- Design Your Dream Kitchen •

May 2009

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\$4.99US \$4.99CAN

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*Shetkastone is an environmentally friendly material manufactured primarily from recycled paper. Shown are three samples, including "Counterfit Green—Shredded," which appears to be made from shredded money.*

As far as cons, stainless steel countertops are very expensive and require professional installation, running about \$100 to \$150 per square foot, installed. Stainless steel is also prone to scratches and dents, and can easily show fingerprints.

## CONCRETE

Concrete countertops are one of the fastest growing segments of the countertop industry. They can be constructed in unusual shapes, textured, etched and stained in artistic colors or patterns. Concrete countertops are usually cast in place inside the kitchen. Although, the high price of professional installation may be an obstacle for some (\$80 to \$120 per square foot, installed), the do-it-yourself approach can save a great deal of money. Construction requires creating forms, mixing and dyeing your

own concrete mix, and troweling the surface to a glassy finish. There are several how-to books and articles on the subject, and companies such as Quikrete now offer a Countertop Mix, which is a flowable, high-strength concrete mix specially formulated for pre-cast and cast-in-place concrete countertop applications. Concrete resists heat and scratches, and new treatments and finishes can reduce porosity and help prevent cracking.

On the downside (aside from the installation cost), cracks can develop in a concrete countertop, but this can usually be minimized with skillful installation and the proper sealing techniques.

## RECYCLED GLASS

For the green-minded remodeler, Vetrazzo, Inc. manufactures countertops made from 85-percent recycled glass. The largest

proportion of glass comes from curbside recycling programs, while other glass comes from post industrial usage, windows, dinnerware, stemware, automotive windshields, stained glass, laboratory glass, reclaimed glass from building demolition, and other unusual sources such as decommissioned traffic lights. Available in dozens of striking colors and designs, recycled glass countertops are smooth, just like highly polished granite, and they're comparable in strength, scratch resistance, thermal resistance, durability, and care and maintenance to granite. However, Vetrazzo panels must be fabricated to your specific dimensions before installation, and the company does not sell directly to homeowners. This means you can expect a high installation and material cost, much like granite.

## RECYCLED PAPER

Another environmentally friendly material is Shetkastone, an innovative countertop material engineered with interlocking fibers from recycled wastepaper, cardboard and cloth to create a beautiful, durable surface that is non-toxic and has no off-gassing. Shetkastone machines like wood and is a scratch-resistant, stain-resistant, water-resistant, and class "A" fire-rated product. Similar to solid surface materials, the colors are the same all the way through, so it can be refinished to its original appearance in the unusual case of any surface damage. Shetkastone is available in a growing variety of colors and styles. The countertops are shipped finished and ready to install, and the price falls between solid surface materials and granite. In other words, it's a very nice, unique material, but also expensive. **EHT**