



Silestone® natural quartz combines natural beauty, strength and easy maintenance.

Stone reigns in today's kitchens.

Romancing the stone! America has discovered what the ancient Greeks learned millions of years ago, along with Romans and the Egyptians, when they began to build their cities. It is incredible that it took over a hundred million years for the kitchen and bath industry to finally notice the wonders of nature. For years, architects and designers have adorned commercial spaces with the beauty of granite and marble. But never has it been as widely used as it is today. Quartz is the fastest growing countertop material in the United States.

Until recently, kitchen granite and marble have accounted for only a small part of kitchen and bath sales. Granite countertops were used only upon special request with most kitchen dealers. However today, especially in the past seven years, U.S. imports of natural stone and stone sales in general have risen dramatically. Not only is this a lucrative business for today's developers and builders, it is also profitable for designers, fabricators and installers.

STONE AGE

By Antonella Romano, Interior Designer

What makes this type of production so unique to interior designers is that the prospective homeowners are being offered something that they could only have dreamt of in the past! This trend has brought us back in time, but it is also taking us on a magic carpet ride into the future of our countertop and flooring choices!

CHOOSING STONE

Today, both professional designers and many consumers are aware of the colors and edges being offered by today's stone suppliers. Before granite became so widely requested, most designers, architects and consumers alike were not well educated regarding the correct

specifications needed for the proper fabrication and production of countertops. For example, selecting slabs at a supplier's warehouse is important. Consumers need to be educated about what size slabs they should be looking for. The right size slab will make or break the finished look of your kitchen design and

Dark granite complements natural wood stains. Granite by Romano and Son. Design by Joseph Salerno, Salerno's Custom Cabinetry, Saddle Brook, NJ. Photography: Peter Rymwid.



The quartz in Silestone® gives it a distinctive depth, sophisticated elegance, glimmering radiance and exceptional durability. Silestone® does not require sealing.

durability. Consumers need to be concerned with the color and the aesthetics as well as the function and lasting durability of their tops. The term “less is more” is correct in this case. The fewer seams the better. The larger the slab, the less seams you will have.

Natural stone does not come out of a chemical mixing vat or a factory. Stone is a unique product of nature, it's durable, economical and beautiful!

Selecting the correct material for the countertops is a key ingredient to any successful kitchen design. Not only is it critical to the overall appearance, but, also to the day-to-day activity and function in the kitchen.

Many people rule out stone as a design material because of a common misconception that it costs more than the other solid surfacing. This is not always the case. Depending on what type of granite or solid surface material is chosen, the price will fluctuate. There are varying ranges and degrees of both materials, for example some of the higher-end solid surface countertops can be more costly than granite. Also, another contributing



factor to the cost of granite is the amount of labor involved in the fabrication necessary. Naturally a square edge will cost less than a bullnose and an ogee edge will be more costly than a bullnose and so on and so forth. The same holds true for solid surface materials.

Now you may think that solid surfacing offers little limitations in terms of sizes, shapes and seams. It's true that a man-made material offers inconspicuous seams because it can be thermoformed to eliminate visible seams and voids. Solid surface tops can be shaped to create a coved backsplash, and they also offer sinks. We can do all of that and granite sinks too!

The inconspicuous seam is something that you won't find too often, only

the best of the best fabricators can produce that. When comparing the durability and finish of a solid surface material with granite, the chemical characteristics of both become critical. While man-made materials are mostly made up of acrylic resins and polyester plastics, granite contains feldspar and quartz as well as mica in some colors. On the hardness scale, the strength of granite is unmatched, with the

Your Waiter, Baker and Personal Chef, a playful mural by artist, Sheryl Vanderpol of Untapped Resources, Minneapolis, MN.



Artist, Sheryl Vanderpol of Untapped Resources, Minneapolis, MN, creates murals for any décor. Shown: Old World fruit still life on ceramic tile.



A combination of natural stone surfaces includes Travertine flooring and a marble countertop and sink. Design by Mick de Giulio, de Giulio Kitchen Design, Inc., Chicago and Wilmette, IL. Photography: Hedrich-Blessing.

exception of a stainless steel knife, but not even with that can you scratch some granite. The only thing that will scratch some granite is another piece of granite or quartz. Quartz surfaces are also extremely resistant to scratches.

STONE CARE

Another area of importance to granite care is the fact that it cannot be damaged with heat. A hot pot or pan can be placed on a granite top without causing any damage. A solid surface material will burn or melt.

Now for the long awaited stain issue. According to many manufacturers, solid surface countertops are non-porous, and can better resist the permanent staining of foods and liquids compared to granite. However, I will assure you that with the proper sealant, granite can be protected from staining. Often, stain resistance on granite depends on the color selected, but most of the time it is due to the fact that most



fabricators do not pre-seal the stone before they deliver it to you.

Sealing the stone is a very important process and should be taken under consideration mainly by the fabricator and done several times before it is delivered to your home. Sealers work best when they are absorbed both from the top and the bottom of the slab.

What happens if a granite countertop stains? Despite the many sealants available in today's market, staining can occur. Most stains can be

removed. Various methods of stain removal include using acetone, or for the more difficult stains a poulticing method that works well when applied overnight. A liquid cleanser with bleach, household detergent, or ammonia can be used to filter and rinse out oil-based stains. Peroxide will often take out ink marks or marker stains on lighter colors. Sometimes just a little dry heat will bring the stain to its surface.

Remember that granite does not hold a stain. It will come out with time. If left alone, most stains will disappear in a few weeks. Or you can contact the Marble Institute of America. They will send you a list of methods that can be applied to nasty stains.

Aside from all the sealing procedures, daily maintenance for granite is not to be a concern. Regardless of the countertop chosen, all tops require the proper care to keep them looking great. Our little secret to maintaining a well-sealed and well-polished top is very simple, by just using lemon pledge once in a while to maintain the shine, and keep the pours closed so that

The Green River Stone Co. creates one-of-a-kind surfaces with genuine fossil stone including fish, palm fronds, birds, turtles, etc.



In the Old World tradition... granite countertops with stone backspash. Design courtesy of Peter "PJ" Salerno, CMKBD, Salerno's Custom Cabinetry, Saddle Brook, NJ. Photography: Peter Rymwid.

the sealer will not evaporate into the air. Therefore your top will not have to be resealed as often, if ever in some cases. For any severe stains, call your fabricator. He or she may send someone to remove it.

Beware that, although granite is granite and marble is marble, not all fabrication is the same. There are so many details that are overlooked in the rush to put granite and marble in our kitchen and baths today. One example that comes to mind is something that I, as a fabricator and an Interior Designer, cannot tolerate, and that is a kitchen island that is not polished on both the top and bottom.

Let me reinforce that not too many fabricators are interested in the quality that they were producing in the past. The demands and deadlines are just too great to pay attention to such small details.

Make no mistake—the trained eye will notice a well-planned fabrication job versus a poorly planned one. There is a distinct difference! Before choosing a fabricator, make sure that you have seen their work, visited their showroom and, possibly, their fabrication facility. Ask questions!

ACCENTING WITH STONE AND TILE

Mosaics can be used as murals on a wall behind a cooktop or a sink to create a focal point. You will often see these stylish mosaics made into fruit bowls, flower bouquets or scenery. These are a nice compliment to any kitchen. I like to use these accents along with the porcelain splashes, and then border them with a large stone edge, giving it the look



of a picture frame. I will produce this look taking the edge finish from my counters and applying it in 1¼-inch strips into my splash. The result is a beautiful complement to the counters, and while providing a frame for the picture.

Many ideas can be rendered with the mixing of materials in a kitchen splash. The most important factor to remember is to make it as easy maintenance as possible. Anyone that has tumbled limestone or marble backsplashes, that cooks a lot, will tell you how hard it is to maintain such a backsplash. So make your life easier and select tumbled porcelain for your splashes. Any backsplash that is porous especially needs to be sealed to allow for easier maintenance.



Antonella Romano has over 20 years experience in the tile, granite and marble industry. As an interior designer specializing in stone surfaces, Ms. Romano journeys to Italy frequently attending international stone fairs. Her travels allow Ms. Romano to stay abreast of new approaches, designs, styles and colors of stones in order to meet the needs of her discriminating high profile political and celebrity clients. Recently, Ms. Romano was the guest of honor at an award ceremony in Italy where she was presented with the "Key to the City" by the region of Calabria.

THE 21ST CENTURY KITCHEN

Designing kitchens in today's market is much more complicated than it was in the past. The detailing of the various design elements in today's kitchens has become much more involved. This complexity has led to a new approach in design. Kitchens have become the living room of the 21st century. With the little time that families have to spend together, they usually spend it cooking and eating. These kitchens must not only have more space and larger islands, but they must have a total look with warmth, and softness with a lot of personal taste to make it practical for everyday living, and functional for today's lifestyles.

