

GRANITE

Granite is one of the hardest natural stone surfaces available and is formed by molten material flowing into many different types of rocks which are then sliced and cut. It's formed from quartz in 20% and 80% from other types of minerals. Upon cooling and solidification process, numerous different patterns and colors become evident. Usually, no two slabs of natural granite stone are identical. Granite typically supersedes marble for its permanence and ease of cleaning. Granite comes in a few different textures: polished, honed or rough textured.



Pros and cons of granite countertops:

- It's a harder surface than marble making it more durable
- It's resistant to chipping and scratches
- Granite is a porous material
- There is a wide range of available patterns and colors
- It is resistant to high heat, however caution should be exercised
- Sealer application is required upon installation completion and resealing is recommended yearly to preserve the natural appearance. There are, however, a bit more expensive granite sealers available that provide 15+ years of stone protection.
 - Unsealed granite will soak up oils and acidic spills and over time stains will be quite noticeable

Cleaning your granite countertops:

- Clean with warm soapy water
- Rinse after washing with the soapy solution
- Dry completely with a soft and clean cloth to avoid streaks (microfiber cloth works great)
- Isopropyl alcohol solution can occasionally be used to shine and disinfect granite countertops:
 - The solution should be in 1:1 proportion containing water and 91% isopropyl alcohol
 - Spray solution on countertops and let it sit for about 5 minutes
 - Rinse with water and wipe dry with microfiber cloth
- The use of any harsh cleaning solutions (rough cleaning sponges, vinegar, lemon, bleach just to name a few) will make your countertops look dull and will damage the sealant
- Store bought granite cleaners should be checked for abrasive chemical content prior to application

MARBLE

Marble countertops come in a variety of types and colors and can be cheap or expensive. Marble is a metamorphic rock composed mostly of limestone. This rock is exposed to high temperatures and pressures which results in a variety of crystallizations in the rock. The final results are depended on the original content of marble rock, thus bringing about either veining appearance or speckled look. Colors can range from earthy tones to brighter or darker shades of rainbow tints. Marble comes in two textures: polished or honed/leather finish.



Cultured marble (a blend of stone particles with resins and different color pigments) is the cheaper and usually more affordable option, but homeowners need to know that it scratches easily and can't handle high heat. This might be the optimal countertop for bathrooms rather than kitchens. Cultured marble is typically used for ready to use prefabricated shower walls, vanity tops, bathtubs or sinks.

Pros and cons of natural marble countertops:

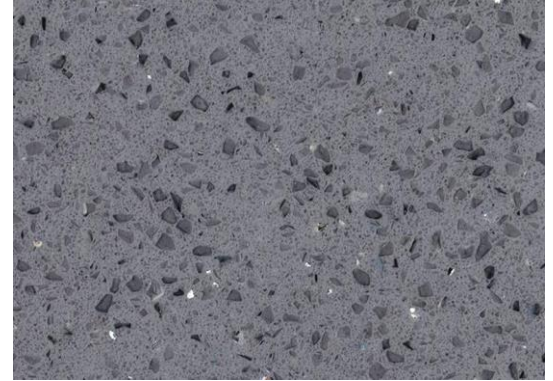
- Resistant to high heat (with the exception of cultured marble) however discolorations may appear after direct placement of hot pots
- Wide range of available patterns and colors
- Durable and great for use as dough preparation surfaces
- Sealer application is required upon installation completion and resealing is recommended yearly to preserve the natural appearance. There are, however, a bit more expensive marble sealers available that provide 15+ years of stone protection.
- Due to this stone's softness and calcium content, staining or etching (dull areas) are usually evident when exposed to acidic substances (i.e. lemon juice, strawberries, wine, etc.)
- Requires adequate maintenance and polishing to maintain the shiny look
- Polished marble has higher resistance to staining whereas honed marble has higher resistance to scratches

Cleaning your marble countertops:

- Fill a spray bottle with a soapy water solution (1Tbs of mild soap per average sized spray bottle)
- Spray the countertops with the prepared solution
- Wipe with a hot, wet soft cloth
- Dry completely with a soft and clean cloth
- The use of any harsh cleaning solutions (rough cleaning sponges, vinegar, lemon, bleach just to name a few) will make your countertops look dull and will damage the sealant.
- Store bought marble cleaners should be checked for abrasive chemical content prior to application

QUARTZ

Quartz countertops are durable, sleek and engineered to match whatever design you have in mind. Among others, colors include grey, red, green, brown, black or white. They can even have specks of glass or metal in them to add that granite-like appearance. This material is entirely manmade; however as the name suggests it is mostly composed of crushed quartz (typically 90% or higher) which is combined with resins and dyes (roughly 10%). The addition of resins makes quartz countertops exceptionally hard and thus stain, crack, and chip resistant. Also, quartz is hermetically sealed during the manufacturing process which means it never has to be sealed again. As a result, it is suitable for any and all indoor surfaces. Quartz is not suitable for outdoor use, as exposure to sunlight will damage and discolor the quartz countertops.



Pros and cons of quartz countertops:

- It's a harder surface than marble or granite making it more durable
- Quartz is resistant to chipping
- A cutting board should be used to avoid scratches
- The use of trivets or hot pads is recommended - quartz itself is heat resistant, but the resin additives (usually plastic) are not heat resistant. Prolonged exposure to heat or sudden temperature change can cause the quartz countertops to crack.
- Wide range of available engineered patterns and colors - glossy or dull
- No sealing is required
- Quartz is hard and non-porous thus tends to be bacteria impermeable
- Created to last; resistant to fading and discolorations when used indoors
- Quartz is not recommended for outdoor use as constant exposure to direct sunlight will result in color fading and countertop splitting

Cleaning your quartz countertops:

- Clean with warm soapy water
- Rinse after washing with the soapy solution
- Dry completely with a soft and clean cloth to avoid streaks (microfiber cloth works great)
- The use of any harsh cleaning solutions (rough cleaning sponges, vinegar, lemon, bleach just to name a few) will make your countertops look dull over time and will eventually disintegrate the bond between quartz and resin

QUARTZITE

Quartzite is currently one of the most popular materials for countertops. It's a metamorphic rock known as quartz sandstone which is converted into quartzite through natural heating and pressure processes. In its purest form, it's white; however due to impurities in the rock, many different colors and patterns are revealed. Quartzite is harder and stronger than granite, marble or quartz and is stain, chip and scratch resistant. Altogether, quartzite countertops have the splendor of marble countertops, but are a lot sturdier and long lasting. One thing to keep in mind is that many vendors falsely sell marble (quartzite look alike) countertops and label them as quartzite for a higher return on investment.



Pros and cons of quartzite countertops:

- It's a very hard and durable surface
- Due to limited availability, pure quartzite countertops can be quite pricey
- There are many quartzite look alike countertops (usually marble) sold as natural quartzite - the differences are:
 - Pure quartzite countertops won't etch (lose its luster or fade) when exposed to water and acid and faux quartzite will etch
 - Pure quartzite will leave a noticeable scratch on a piece of glass whereas faux quartzite will not
- Pure quartzite doesn't chip, scratch or stain
- Sealer application is required upon installation completion and resealing is recommended yearly to preserve the natural appearance - unless long lasting sealer is used

Cleaning your quartzite countertops:

- Clean with warm soapy water
- Rinse after washing with the soap solution
- Dry completely with a soft and clean cloth to avoid streaks (microfiber cloth works great)
- There is no need for use of any harsh cleaning solutions

SOAPSTONE

Soapstone is also known as steatite. It is a durable material that doesn't stain, and is heat-absorbent. It is available in colors ranging from light to dark grey with blue and green undertones which tend to darken overtime. It also can have light appearing veins which can become more evident over time. Soapstone is believed to be denser than marble or granite and is non-porous. Soapstone's main ingredient is talc, so it is a softer material that can be scratched or nicked with sharp objects. Soapstone countertop does not need to be sealed and requires minimum maintenance.



Pros and cons of soapstone countertops:

- It is a soft, but dense and elegant surface
- Soapstone countertops are durable and heat-absorbent
- These countertops do not absorb liquids, thus are stain resistant
- Surface is not scratch resistant - application of mineral oil can camouflage soft scratches, deeper scratches can be sanded down with fine sand paper (reapplication of mineral oil is recommended after sanding)
- Application of sealer is not needed
- Soapstone countertops tend to be cheaper than its other natural counterparts

Cleaning your soapstone countertops:

- Clean with warm soapy water
- Rinse after washing with the soapy solution
- Dry completely with a soft and clean cloth to avoid streaks (microfiber cloth works great)
- Apply mineral oil every 2-3 months to create a protective barrier and to prevent countertop scratches
- Harsh cleaning solutions should not be used