

## **Kitchen Countertops – More than a place to put the coffeemaker.**

From stone to stone-look laminate, from marble to concrete, from tile to solid surface – countertop choices are extensive – and that can be confusing! Here’s a look at what your appliances can be sitting on.

### Laminate –

Today’s laminate is much harder than in the past. It’s durable, stain resistant, and available in an extensive array of colors and textures, including granite, marble and other natural looks. It can be shaped and molded fairly easily to match the dimensions of your kitchen cupboards. The backsplash and front edge of the countertop can be laminate as well, or some builders customize by using hardwood accents. Affordable and easy to care for, laminate doesn’t support mold or bacteria growth, so bleach and harsh cleansers aren’t needed. It can be scratched or burned, so some care must be taken. Because this is the most affordable countertop material, there’s always the option of changing colors and styles in a few years at a minimal cost.

### Ceramic Tile –

Ceramic tile is a step up from laminate. Cost depends on the type of tile, the pattern, and whether decorative accents are used. For example, tiles could be laid in a horizontal pattern (standard for most builders), or laid in a diagonal pattern (which requires extra cutting and more skilled application). Tile is scratch and heat resistant, but grout must be sealed regularly to protect it from stains. Grout seal is easier to apply than ever before – it comes in aerosol cans and dries quickly. Grout itself is now available in a wide variety of color choices to accent any tile, and is much more stable and longer lasting than earlier products.

### Solid Surface –

Corian is a good example of a solid surface countertop. A mid-priced option, solid surface countertops are heat and stain resistant. They are actually made of resin, an acrylic or modified polyester, color pigments, a fire rating filler, and added particles to give the appearance of veins or textures. Hundreds of finishes and colors are available, with varying rates of glossiness. Corian can be scorched, but is generally resistant to scratching (though cutting boards should be used on any countertop).

### Granite –

Granite is a natural product, harvested from quarries worldwide. Colors and patterns are unique. They depend on geological processes in specific regions, and are priced accordingly, starting at about four times the cost of laminate. Buyers can select from samples representative of a type of granite, or they can choose a unique individual slab from which their countertop will be carefully cut. Natural stone countertops do have seams, and must be sealed to protect from stains. They should be resealed about every five years. Granite is fairly resistant to heat and scratches, and if damaged it may be possible to polish the countertop back out, since the countertop is made of the same material throughout. A

variety of edges – including bullnose, radius, straight, and bevel – are available at no additional charge, while upgraded edges can include a full bullnose and ogee (graceful serpentine curve).

Marble –

Marble is another 100% natural product. It is not as popular for kitchens, because it is lime-stone based and thus is less resistant to stains, particularly oils and acids. It has most of the same benefits as granite; each piece is absolutely unique. Sealing is important for marble, and it too has seams. Cost is about the same as for granite.

Quartz, or Engineered Stone –

This is one of the newest countertop products, and is becoming increasingly popular. Quartz is actually a quartz composite, made of quartz, colored pebbles, polymers, and epoxy. Actually, about 97% of the composite is quartz, while the other seven percent is pigments and resins. Natural granite is only about 50% quartz, which is very high on the hardness scale (only diamonds, topaz and sapphires are harder!). While still providing a stone look, quartz comes in many more colors than natural stone and has a more even pattern. The cost is very similar to granite. It doesn't need to be sealed, and is more resistant to stains, scratches, and other damage. There are still seams (as in just about every type of material), but they are less noticeable due to the consistency of the pattern.

Stainless Steel –

Stainless steel appliances have become quite common – so it's not surprising that steel countertops are being installed in homes. Once only seen in restaurant kitchens, this contemporary look has special benefits. This is one of the few countertop materials that can be safely bleached, and heat will not hurt it. Brushed and/or textured finishes are available to help hide scratches. In some cases, the sink can be created with the countertop for a totally seamless one-piece installation. All this comes with a price tag – steel countertops cost about twice as much as granite.

How is Cost Determined?

All countertop pricing is determined by the square foot. Most standard countertops are 2 ¼ feet wide. Take the length of the countertop, and multiply by the width. Then multiply the total square footage by the cost per square foot for the desired material. But there are additional considerations as well. Backsplashes must be added, and cost is dependent on material and style, whether the same as the countertop or complimentary (such as a tile backsplash with a granite countertop). The edge of the countertop generally is offered in both standard and upgraded selections, depending on the amount of additional material or work needed. And the type of sink helps determine the final bill as well – an under counter mount requires a more finished edge around the sink, which raises the cost for some materials. Additional sinks or other cut outs can add to labor and installation expenses.

With experts on hand to answer questions and help you choose a countertop that will reflect your personal taste, Stanton Homes offers a variety of materials and styles to fit any budget. Whether your

new countertops are quality laminate with our signature hardwood backsplashes and corbels, or natural granite with a detailed tile backsplash, you'll be glad you came home to a Stanton Home.

Throughout the Research Triangle region of North Carolina, Stanton Homes is building a reputation of quality, through outstanding craftsmanship you'll love to call home. Call 919-278-8070 or 919-418-9536 to find out more.

