



Dream topping

Whether you're charmed by composites or swayed by stone, choose a hard-wearing worktop that will both last and look the part for years to come

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Previous page (p51): Combining white veins of quartz and mica clusters, this brushed Black Cosmic granite unites the ripples of marble with the durability of harder stone. It is priced around £800 per linear m at Welchome.

Right: Raw Concrete Caesarstone quartz from the Classico range mimics contemporary industrial-style concrete while being more durable and easy to clean. From £500 per sq m as shown.



Buying worktops is about more than simply choosing a coordinating colour. What they're made from will be the deciding factor in how well your kitchen withstands wear and tear. Some will be more suitable for specific areas, such as around sinks or hobs, while others will require regular oiling or sealing. Your lifestyle is often a deciding factor. For example, granite tends to be favoured by keen bakers because it is cool and therefore good for pastry, while surfaces with antibacterial properties are practical for busy families.

Since worktops cover a significant area, their appearance is key. Generally, ornate profiles and natural materials tend to suit a traditional design, while sleek schemes can be given a contemporary edge with slim, high-tech manmade surfaces or a more classic look with stone. They range in price, so your budget will impact on your choice. Buy the best you can afford – not only will good-quality worktops enhance the appearance of affordable cabinetry, they'll help keep the kitchen looking beautiful for longer too.

Templated versus fixed length

Worktops can be fitted either by templating and then being manufactured to the right shape off-site, or cut to size and fitted on-site using a fixed length of material. Templating means that a guide is made of the surface your worktops will cover, taking into account any uneven stretches of wall, cut-outs for the hob and sink, and overhangs. This ensures that the measurements are as precise as possible.

"When a worktop is templated it will be manufactured in the best possible conditions – made by a specialist fabricator using CNC tools, ensuring that the fit is as tight as it can be," explains Daniele Brutto of Hub Kitchens. Another benefit of choosing templated over fixed length is that the dusty work

of shaping and finishing is carried out elsewhere rather than in your home. However, templated worktops can take up to two weeks between taking measurements and having a finished kitchen, plus they tend to be costlier. A fixed-length worktop, on the other hand, can be installed quickly and cheaply.

Generally, stone or granite, most composites, stainless steel, glass and ceramic will need to be templated and made to measure, while laminates, some ready-to-fit solid surfaces and timber come in fixed lengths and can be fitted as soon as your cabinetry is installed. Other materials, such as concrete will need to be templated too, but they are poured on-site.

Where to buy

Most worktops are bought with your kitchen, but there are other options. Specialist suppliers, such as stone yards, may have a wider choice of materials, while there's an increasing amount of companies that specialise in cast concrete and can supply colours or decorative inclusions. Similarly, metal suppliers may be able to offer zinc, copper or different finishes of stainless steel. When comparing prices, check whether the cost includes templating, delivery and fitting, and that they have experience in fitting worktops. "Remember that you need to compare like for like," says Michael Wright of Michael Wright Kitchens & Interiors. "A wooden top could be sourced from a sawmill but it needs to have been properly seasoned, otherwise it will continue to dry out and warp once installed."

Exercise caution if you're buying online. It's hard to get an impression of finish and colour, and a fraction of a shade can make all the difference if you're matching or contrasting with other surfaces. It's inadvisable to buy granite or stone without seeing it in person as each slab will be different, plus having your supplier or fabricator on hand in case of problems is invaluable. [KBB](#)



Above: This 30mm Mediterraneo Silestone composite quartz features a stunning pattern that can be backlit as shown, from £450 per linear m, from 1909. (01325 505539 or www.1909kitchens.co.uk)

Left: Thanks to its lightweight properties, laminate lends itself well to mobile applications, such as this sliding breakfast bar in 80mm Natural Plank Oak set on top of a 40mm white laminate with stainless-steel edging. It costs £751.20 from Neil Lerner Kitchen Design. (020 7433 0705 or www.neillerner.com)



Natural worktops

Pure and simple, these raw surfaces bring the beauty of nature into your home.

1 Timber comes in multiple varieties and staved widths, from hard-wearing oak to naturally water-resistant iroko.

Pros: Timber worktops are affordable and can be fitted straight away. Small dents and marks can be sanded out.

Cons: Porous and damaged by heat, wooden worktops need oiling or waxing when fitted, with periodic re-oiling required to keep them watertight.

Cost: Zebrano hardwood, shown, has striking figuring, priced £225 for a 2m length, with hotrods from £20 at Worktop Express. Wood can cost from £70 for a 3m length up to £500 per sq m for exotic timbers.

2 Slate, limestone, basalt and travertine are alternatives to marble or granite.

Pros: Properties vary, for example slate is almost completely non-porous and heat-resistant, while limestone may have fossil inclusions.

Cons: Softer stones, such as limestone, tend to scratch, are prone to damage from acids, and may stain or discolour. All will require sealing and resealing and have visible joints.

Cost: The rarer the type of stone, the higher the price, from £200 to £900 per linear m. This Real Shaker kitchen by deVOL features a 50mm Belgian Blue Fossil limestone worktop, price on request.

3 Granite is the strongest natural stone. Each slab will have a unique pattern to personalise your design.

Pros: Granite is durable, heat- and water-resistant and easy to maintain.

Cons: Requires templating, plus it's heavy and can crack during installation. Joints will be visible. Once damaged, it can't be repaired, plus it'll need resealing annually.

Cost: Granite generally costs between £60 and £400 per sq m or more for rare varieties. Book-matched to showcase the veins of gold, this 30mm Black Tremendal granite costs £1914 per sq m and is supplied by Molten Kitchens, with this design by Pascoe Interiors.



4 Marble is enjoying renewed popularity due to its distinctive patterning.

Pros: Reasonably heat-resistant and durable, marble cuts more smoothly than granite so can be sculpted to shapes and edges easily.

Cons: It's porous, can scratch and be damaged by acids, even if sealed. Requires resealing and spills need to be wiped up immediately.

Cost: Marble costs between £100 and £400 per sq m or more for rare varieties. This Arabescato Oribico Rosso marble worksurface with a shark-nose profile is shown in a bespoke kitchen by Roundhouse, which would be priced from £40,000.



Above: Encore solid surface comes as a fixed-length, installer-ready surface that can be fitted on-site in around two days. Shown in 27mm Mocha Stone, £158 per linear m, Bushboard.

Below: Made by compacting minerals under pressure, Franke Stone by Lapitec is a non-porous sintered stone that is stain-resistant and easy to clean. Available in large sheets to reduce joints, it is also resistant to acids, heat, UV and bacteria. Shown in Ebano with a Satin finish, Lapitec costs £589 per sq m for a 12mm thickness from J Rotherham.





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Manmade worktops

Fabricated to be fabulous, the latest technology has gone into these innovative surfaces.

1 Porcelain and ceramic surfaces are relatively new options.

Pros: Both can be created in slim depths and are scratch-, heat-, stain- and acid-resistant and non-porous. The joins between sheets tend to be barely visible as they can be cut with precise edges.

Cons: Pricy and not stocked by all showrooms, so it may require research to find them on display and to find specialists to fit them.

Cost: Porcelain and ceramic cost around £400 to £600 per sq m. Seen here is 24mm-thick Black Fossil Kerlite porcelain by Modulnova, £1020 per linear m, DesignSpace London.

2 Stainless steel is a staple of professional kitchens and ideal for incorporating sinks and hobs, while brushed finishes reduce the unavoidable signs of wear.

Pros: Non-porous, heatproof and hard-wearing, steel is easy to keep clean and low-maintenance.

Cons: It will scratch, may show fingerprints (although mark-resistant surfaces are available) and its commercial look isn't for everyone.

Cost: Prices range from £300 to £600 per linear m. Seen here is 60mm Record Cucine brushed stainless-steel worktops, £500 per linear m, shown with 40mm solid walnut, £350 per linear m, Hub Kitchens.

3 Concrete is ideal for an industrial look. It can be poured on-site or precast, but both will need sealing.

Pros: Concrete can be cast in almost any colour and shape, even used to form sinks, and is heat- and scratch-resistant.

Cons: Poured worktops will need time to dry out before being polished. Concrete is porous, so will need to be resealed or it'll stain.

Cost: Concrete varies in price with pre-fabricated from £300 per linear m and poured from around £300 to £800 per linear m. Pictured

is pre-cast sealed concrete, which is priced around £540 per linear m from Lowinfo.

4 Composite materials are a popular choice for worktops, available as solid surface or quartz composite, also known as engineered stone. Solid surfaces are made from acrylic or polyester resin to create a seamless worktop with consistent colour throughout. Quartz composite is a mixture of quartz crystals and binders, such as acrylic, for a more natural, stone-like look.

Pros: Hard-wearing, easily repaired and stain-, heat- and water-resistant, each composite will have different properties. For example, Corian can be moulded into curves or incorporate integral sinks, while Silestone has anti-bacterial properties.

Cons: Pricy, and some won't be suitable for ultra-skinny worktops.

Cost: Depending on design and finish, solid surfaces, such as Corian, range between £280-£420 per sq m, while quartz composites, such as Silestone, range between £250 and £550 per sq m. Pictured is Corian in Arrowroot, with Glacier White Corian Spicy sinks, from £310 per linear m.

5 Laminate is available in a range of colours and textures; high-pressure laminates cost a fraction of the materials that they resemble and modern printing techniques mean they look better than ever before.

Pros: Easy to fit, laminate is good value and can be made to match cabinetry doors for a monolithic look.

Cons: Can be damaged by heat, may scratch and is not repairable. May have visible joins and not be compatible with undermounted sinks.

Cost: Laminate typically costs between £45 and £250 per linear m for multi-layered versions. Ikea's double-sided grey/white Ekbacken worktop, shown, costs £50 for a 2.46m length.



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Above: Dekton's XGloss nanocoating finish gives it extra resistance to stains, water-repellent properties and a glossy shine that enhances the colour. Shown in Lumina, Dekton by Cosentino starts from £450 per sq m.

SourceBook

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