



PHOTO PROVIDED BY TATIANA MACHADO-ROSAS

COUNTERTOP LOW-DOWN

MAN-MADE QUARTZ TOPS FOR EASY CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE

BY BETH WOOD

Does your kitchen need an update? If you aren't ready for a whole remodel, replacing the countertop can be a way to freshen up what often is the home's center of activity. For advice on sorting out recent developments in countertops, we turned to Tatiana Machado-Rosas, who is the senior designer and head of the design department at Jackson Design & Remodeling.

Q: The National Kitchen & Bath Association reported that manufactured quartz is the leading material for counter-

tops. Why do you think that's the case?

A: It's become popular probably because of its easy maintenance and that it's acid- and scratch-resistant. Because it's nonporous, there's no need to seal it. And man-made quartz imitates marble and natural stone, so it's a good option for people who like the look of stone, but can do without the upkeep.

Q: Are there any cons to man-made quartz?

A: Not really. The only possible disadvantage would be the heat. It may get damaged from heat above 300 degrees. It may get cracked. But people can use

a trivet.

Q: What other materials do clients ask for in their countertops?

A: One stone we're seeing a lot of is quartzite. It's natural and it looks like marble or stone. It's a good option for people who want real stone. Quartzite is as strong as granite. It doesn't stain as easily as marble. And it's beautiful.

It's definitely a higher-end product, so it's a little more of an investment. You still have to seal it. A sealer will prevent liquids from penetrating immediately, but don't let them sit. Wipe it off immediately because it could go

through the stone. You still have to be careful with red wine, grape juice, darker liquids.

Q: What other new trends in countertop materials do you see?

A: Man-made quartz is now available in satin and leather finishes. Quartz manufacturers found a way to make these finishes happen in their quartz. They take out the sheen and add a little texture. It gives that feel of satin or leather. Clients find it attractive.

Q: What do you recommend to people interested in eco-

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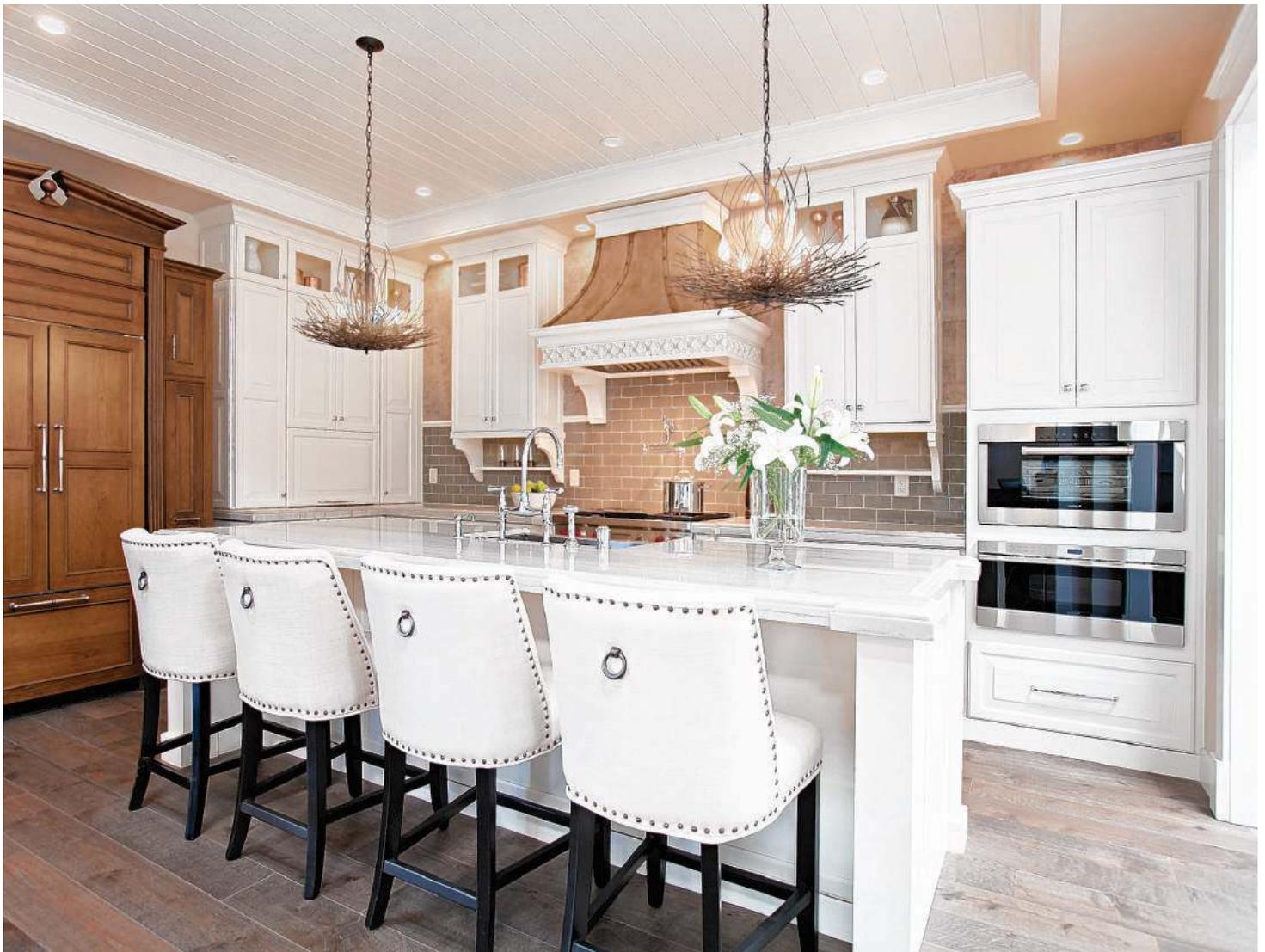


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Durability and ease of care are priorities in kitchen countertops. Neutral colors from white to black continue to be popular.

Countertops

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friendly countertops?

A: The environmentally friendly countertops - usually recycled glass - are still pretty pricey. It makes it difficult because it's quite an investment.

But the way quartz is manufactured now is pretty eco-efficient. The manufacturers salvage the debris and use less water in the process. The manufacturing has improved in this way. Clients can get something eco-friendly without putting in a huge investment.

Q: What do you recommend to your clients in terms of finishes?

A: The fabricator installs the countertop and puts on a sealer

for granite or marble. You can get sealer kits from Home Depot or Lowe. It's an easy application. There are other types of sealing materials. Nanotech material, for example, repels solutions or acids from penetrating through the surface. But those are more expensive.

Q: It looks like integrated sinks are becoming more popular. Are you seeing this at Jackson Design?

A: No, we don't see it that much. But we do see people who don't want to deal with stainless steel scratches. We offer engineered sinks - the best are by Blanco and Elkay. They are composite materials with added color. They are extremely durable and almost scratch-resistant. You'd have to take a big knife and purposely try to scratch the sink. You'll see no scuffmarks like you

do on cast-iron or steel. And the fact that it comes in many colors is attractive. It gives the look of an integrated sink, because it can blend in with the quartz.

Q: What colors are trending when it comes to countertops?

A: You'll continue to see neutrals. We're seeing a lot of gray. No bright colors are coming from manufacturers. When people remodel, yes, they want to personalize, but it's best not to go over the top. They should have resale value in mind. If you decide to go with orange, violet or red, you're stuck. And you can get tired of a bright color. Neutrals are strong, but that doesn't mean necessarily light. It could be black or charcoal gray. Those are neutrals, too.

Q: What are the trends in backsplashes, in terms of countertops?

A: It's all over the place. It depends on the style of the kitchen and what people like and if they feel comfortable with color. You can't go right or wrong. The backsplash is something people get to put their signature on. They can personalize it to create a focal point.

We are seeing ceiling-high backsplashes. Some have patterns like subway tiles in different sizes or concrete tiles with plastic hand-painted patterns, sometimes over-scale. Aged materials are popular - chipped, older or burned on the edges so that the backsplash looks aged. Other popular backsplashes have large-format porcelain tiles with an abstract design. We also see some metallic finishes in different patterns on glass.

Beth Wood is a San Diego freelance writer.