

ARCH CITY
GRANITE & MARBLE, INC.

The Complete Guide to Buying Stone Countertops



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I. Introduction

If you're like many homeowners shopping for granite, this is your first time purchasing granite countertops for your kitchen or bathroom.

My name is Govi Reddy, and I own and operate a Granite and Quartz Countertops fabrication and installation business in St. Louis, Missouri. In preparing this guide, I drew from my experience of supervising the fabrication and installation of more than 4000 kitchen and bathroom countertops for St. Louis area home owners.

I am hoping that this will be a helpful guide for home owners shopping for granite, Quartz, or any other stone countertops.

Granite or Quartz countertops are a substantial investment. They will last as long as the home in which they are installed, so it's important to choose right the first time around. Be careful and deliberate as you search for a granite or quartz that matches both your decor (cabinets, floors, appliance, etc.) and your budget.

II. Selecting a Countertop Material

One of the first steps in the purchasing process is to visit stone suppliers (the slab wholesalers) and fabricators (the company that cuts and installs the counters) who carry a wide range of granite, marble, quartzite, soapstone, and quartz slabs.

When it comes to higher quality counters with longevity, there are a number of different natural and manmade materials available. In order to make an educated choice, you'll need to be at least somewhat familiar with each.



Granite vs. Quartz Counters

Granite countertops are the top choice for many due to their durability, hundreds and hundreds of patterns, and the fact that each beautiful slab is unique. Granite has a wider range of options, from affordable entry-level granites to exotic and exclusive granites that are works of art in and of themselves. Quartz, a man made composite of crushed natural stones, has become a popular alternative to granite for those who want colors and patterns not found in natural stone, or a counter that is even more

maintenance-free than granite.

Granite is a 100% natural material cut from quarries all over the world, and the unique beauty of a natural material simply can't be replicated with man-made stones. However, that same natural pattern means that granite has inherent imperfections, like color variation and irregular mineral distribution.

If you like natural variation, then you will enjoy the unpredictability of granite with bolder patterns and colors. However, if you prefer consistent colors and patterns without "blemishes," then quartz countertops are a great option. They are produced from pre-set color and pattern templates in a manufacturing plant, ensuring that each slab comes out with the same hues, the same pattern scale, and no undesirable dark spots or unbalanced pattern areas. With quartz, you get total control.

The difference in maintenance between the two materials is small. Typically, granite counters need to be sealed once a year to keep water - and any other liquids that might cause a stain - out of the stone's pores. In recent years, several stone product companies have developed sealers that only need to be applied once every 15 years. Quartz does not have any natural pores, so it does not need to be sealed. It is made to be stain resistant without any extra treatments.

Last, but not least, there's the price difference between granite and quartz. Granite spans a larger price range than quartz; entry level granite colors (also known as Group A granite, or Level One granite) are less expensive than quartz countertops, while

exotic granites are often more expensive.

Is Marble a Viable Option for Kitchen Counters?

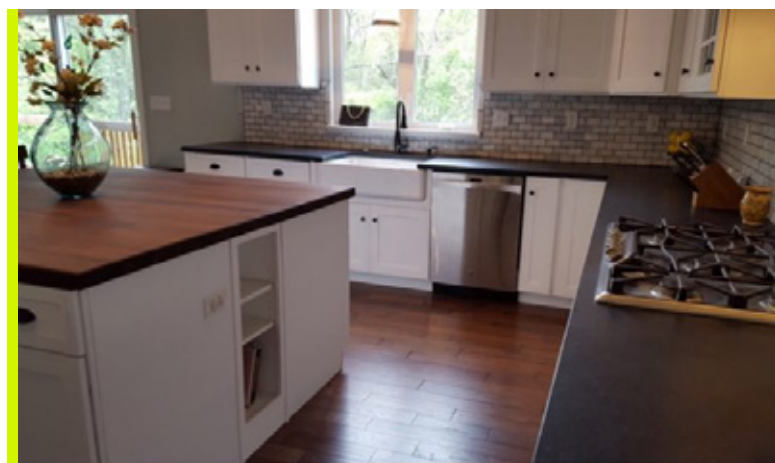
Marble is a softer stone than granite. Combined with its mineral makeup, this feature makes marble counters more susceptible to stains, scratches, and etching.

Etching happens when an acidic liquid like lemon juice or vinegar “eats away” the very top layer of polish, leaving a rough patch on your marble. Sealing can reduce the risk in part, but if you plan to use your kitchen for daily cooking (or you have kids that won’t be careful about cleaning up spills right away), marble may not be the right choice for your kitchen countertops.

Marble has been a popular countertop choice in Europe for a long time, particularly in Italy. This is largely in part because the spots and marks made by food and cooking are not considered blemishes. As the counter changes color and gets marks over the years (also called a “patina”), it’s considered a normal part of the natural stone’s beauty and often a sign of a good cook. This is not usually the case in the U.S., where a more pristine counter is the norm.

Even though it is more difficult to maintain, many love the look of marble and decide that it is worth the extra effort. They accept that their counter may get marks over the years. If you love the look of marble, and do not mind taking the extra steps needed to maintain it, then you can confidently install it in your home.

Don’t Forget About Soapstone!



Soapstone has been a popular architectural element in American homes since colonial times, and in the last few years, it has made a resurgence in American kitchens as a unique and dependable countertop choice. With a soft texture (like a dry bar of soap—hence the name) and a subdued natural beauty, it appeals to homeowners looking for something a little different.

The best advantages of soapstone are its resistance to stains and heat damage. Soapstone is non-porous, so you don’t ever have to seal it; it’s also a natural (mild) heat conductor, so it can withstand any heat (and doesn’t feel as cold to the touch in the winter as granite).

A downside to soapstone is that it is a relatively soft stone. It’s easy to scratch it when dragging household items over the counters, and heavy object can cause small nicks and dents. The good news for soapstone lovers is that, unlike any other natural stone counters, it’s easy to remove these marks with a bit of soapstone

oil and, for the more severe scratches, a bit of fine steel wool. Soapstone will patinate over time, but you can reverse that process completely at any time by applying soapstone oil or wax to your counters. Soapstone is more expensive than most granite.

When purchasing it, you should make sure you select from full slabs and consider its unique maintenance requirements. This material may not be for everybody.



III. How to Begin Shopping for Granite Countertops

Taking Measurements of Your Countertops



The first thing you need to know before getting quotes is the surface area of your counters or other stone surface project. Granite is sold by the square foot, so you need to know the square footage of the countertops or have accurate linear measurements so that your fabricator can calculate the square footage for you.

If you are just replacing the counters in your kitchen, then you should measure the existing counters. Here's how:

- Tools: Have a pen and paper handy and use a regular tape measure that can extend the entire length of your counters.
- Draw the layout of your counters on a piece of paper, doing your best to accurately represent the proportions of the different parts of the kitchen.
- Measure the lengths of your counters (from left to right if you are facing the counter) along the side that touches the wall and mark the measurements on your drawing, making sure to put your measurements on the correct side of the counter in the drawing.
- Make sure you measure the depth of the

countertops from the wall to the edge of the countertop and not from the existing backsplash.

- Include the sink cabinet or cook-top cabinet in your length measurement. Sink and cooktop cutouts are taken from a continuous piece of granite, so they will count as part of the square footage. It is helpful to note separate measurements of these as well.
- Exclude free standing stoves (those which stand alone and are pushed back to the wall between two entirely separate counters).

If you want to calculate square footage yourself, here's how:

- For each unique (no overlap) piece of counter, multiply length by the depth (in inches).
- Take this number and divide it by 144. The result is the square footage of that piece.
- Do this for each part of the counters (marking each piece on your drawing) and add them up.
- Don't forget the backsplash!
- Keep in mind that regular cabinets are 24" deep. Stone countertops overhang 1.5" from the cabinet face, making the net countertop width 25.5". Laminate countertops are usually only 25" deep.
- Example: You have a 3' counter. Multiply the length (36") by the depth (25.5"). The result is 918". Divide that by 144 and you'll find out that this counter is 6.4 square feet.

If you are getting new cabinets, you won't have to make your own drawing. Instead, use the cabinet plans created by your kitchen designer or cabinet company to calculate your square footage. Use the

same math equation detailed above (multiply length by depth in inches then divide by 144), making sure to add 1.5" to the cabinet sizes wherever there will be any overhand (any sides that don't sit directly against a wall or appliance).

Finding a Reputable Stone Fabricator

After you have your measurements, the next step is identify a few reputable stone fabricators in your area. Initial research can be done online. Rank granite suppliers in terms of their reviews, physical locations, and number of years in business, examples of their previous work, etc.

A bit of online research and a few phone calls will help you get a good list to begin with, but you should visit fabricators in person before you make a decision. Anybody can make a decent website and claim to be a reputable stone supplier, so it is important that you personally meet with their stone experts and talk about their fabrication and installation process.

In addition, granite slabs can have the same name and still look quite different from one supplier to the other. It's important you see each fabricator's actual slab inventory.

Who Sell and Installs Granite Countertops?

There are several types of places where you can buy granite and have it installed:

- The contractor who did your kitchen remodel and installed your cabinets. They won't install your counters, but will sub out the work to a trusted granite fabricator.

- A big-box store in your area. They will outsource the fabrication and installation to a granite fabricator in the area. In this case, you will not have a direct contact with the fabricator.
- The cabinet company that supplied your cabinets. Like a contractor, they will outsource the actual stone work and installation to a granite fabricator.
- A local stone wholesaler. Select your granite and then choose a fabricator to purchase, cut, and install the granite.
- A one-stop granite company that stocks granite slabs and fabricates and installs with in-house teams.

Most of those options involve adding extra layers of profit and communication. The simplest and most cost-effective method to getting a quality stone countertop is to choose a local stone fabricator who stocks a wide variety of granite and quartz slabs. You'll get more personal service, have a straight line of communication with the experts cutting and installing the stone, and have a good working relationship with the company to fix any issues that may arise during the installation or down the road.



IV. How to Choose the Right Stone Pattern for Your Project

There's a lot to consider when evaluating different granite and quartz and ultimately deciding which pattern will go in your home. Plus, you'll have to factor in general appeal (does it look good to you on its own?) and coordinate the counter with your cabinets, appliances, wall color, etc.

To make things even a little more complicated, any decent fabricator will have many colors for you to browse. Just choosing from granite and quartz, you may have to narrow down over a hundred choices to find the perfect one for your project.

Tips for Narrowing Down Your Color Choices

Here are four great ways to quickly weed out the stones that won't work:

- Bring photos of your kitchen for easy reference.
- Bring along a sample cabinet or cabinet drawer to help you get a real sense for how well the wood will match with each granite or quartz slab.
- Bring samples of any floor and wall tile.
- If you still have leftover paint from your wall, brush a large sample on a piece of cardboard and bring that with you when you go stone shopping.

Here are a few things to ask yourself when you find yourself drawn to more than one type of granite or quartz:

- Does this beautiful piece of granite or quartz look as good to me when it's next to my cabinets? Or do I like it better on its own? It doesn't matter how great the granite is if it doesn't look good in your kitchen.

- Does this fit my budget? Of course, we all wish money were no object, but for the vast majority of us, we have a predetermined budget. If you put the time into finding the right stone within your budget, you'll enjoy your countertops more.
- Do I really love this color, or am I basing my opinions off of what other people think I should love? At the end of the day, you are the one who will live with your new countertops for many years. It's great to get input and advice, but make sure you are checking in with yourself to make sure that it's the granite you really want.

Picturing the Granite Installed

Granite can look different as an uncut slab than it does as counters installed in your kitchen. It's important to think about how the pattern will look once it is spread across your different countertops.

When it comes to this mental exercise, have your fabricator explain to you how they would cut the stone. Granite fabricators with experience will be easily able to estimate how they would lay out the stone in your home. Make the most of the experts on hand!



Make Sure to Choose from Full Slabs, Not Small Samples

Selecting natural stone based on small samples may lead to unpleasant surprises, to put it gently. Granite slabs, especially higher-end granite types like Typhoon Bordeaux or Alaska White, vary so much from one end to the other end that a small sample simply cannot give you a real idea of how the entire

slab looks. That's why it is very important that you see the actual full slabs of granite before you buy them.

(Quartz is made specifically to look consistent across the entire slab and from one slab to another, so while it's nice to see a full slab to get a better feel of how it might look on a large scale, it's not necessary to choose individual slabs.)



V. How Much Should Your Granite Cost?

Typical granite countertops cost between \$40 and \$100 per square foot, including installation. Prices for certain high-end and exotic granite varieties can end up higher, but anything under \$40 is likely of very poor quality.

Why Do Granite Prices Vary So Much?

The difference in granite prices comes down to supply and demand. Some granite types are found in abundant quantities in locations where it's easy to quarry large blocks and transport them to manufacturing centers. These more geologically available granites tend to have a more uniform look, with smaller, composite patterns. Some well known granite examples include Black Pearl Granite, Tan Brown Granite, and Venetian Gold Granite. While they may be in high demand, the price is kept low by the readily available supply of slabs.

On the other hand, extremely unique and exotic stones like Fusion Quartzite, Stone Wood Quartzite, and Blue Bahia Granite are far rarer, are found in smaller deposits, and are harder to quarry without breaking or compromising the blocks. They are both high in demand for their natural beauty and scarcer on the market, so quarries can ask prices at the very top of the usual range.

There are many types of granite that fall in between these two poles. These granite types are beautiful with uncommon variations and large deposits. While the unique patterns make these stones more expensive than the first category, their higher availability keeps them from getting too expensive;

this makes them a great choice for the average homeowner. A few examples of granite in this price range include Typhoon Bordeaux Granite, Alaska White Granite, and Delicatus.

Many people assume that higher prices equal a higher quality material. This is not usually the case with granite. In fact, less expensive granite colors like Black Pearl Granite or Coffee Brown Granite are often priced so affordably because, as mentioned above, they are denser and easier to quarry without damaging the stone. Small composite patterns often are stronger and harder than exotic stones, whose lines and colors are more difficult to quarry and fabricate.

Decoding Granite Quotes

There are a lot of different factors that go into the final price of granite. So there are a lot of ways for fabricators to make it seem as if they are cheaper to entice you to start the purchasing process with them.

The best way to make sure you are actually getting a good deal is to ask lots of questions. Here are the top things you should ask a fabricator before you make any final decisions.

What Colors Are Included in the Advertised Per Square Foot Price of Granite?

It's a common practice at some low-end fabricators to stock a few super cheap, commercial-grade granite colors so they can advertise really low price advertisements to get you into the door.

Of course, once you visit the store, you'll probably be more drawn to the higher quality granites, which are in higher price ranges. This is a classical bait-and-switch tactic.

Is it a 3cm Granite or 2cm Granite?

Find out if the advertised price is for 2 cm or 3 cm granite. 2 cm (3/4" thickness) granites are less expensive than the 3 cm (1 1/4" thickness) variety. Most of the stone installers in Saint Louis area use 3 cm because it is more durable and creates a better aesthetic.

Does the Fabricator Allow You to Choose Full Slabs of Granite?

Reputable granite fabricators will invite you to choose the slabs that go into your kitchen so there are no surprises during the installation.

Some granite suppliers, especially big-box stores, require you to choose from small samples. Selecting granite from samples is not a good idea; natural stone can differ significantly from slab to slab, and even from one corner to the other on the same slab. Your selection should always be based on the full slab.

The cheapest stone suppliers (cheap home improvement outlets) will even install your countertops from pre-edged granite blanks imported from countries with cheap labor. Simply, you can't get custom cuts and shapes for your kitchen countertops with this method. So steer clear of any companies who are using this trick to offer suspiciously low prices.

Does The Price Include Measurement and Installation?

Some granite fabricators publish lower prices but add a templating fee (measuring fee) and a transportation fee to make up for the difference.

Is Sealing of the Countertops Included?

Your counters have to be sealed, so make sure to ask if a fabricator's per sq. ft. price includes the application of a sealant.

Thanks to Nano technology, some very effective sealers have recently come onto the market. For example, Dry-Treat Sealer offers a 15-year stain protection warranty. Make sure you know what type of sealer your granite installer uses. A quality stone fabricator will always use the best sealers, even though the wholesale costs for these products are costlier.

Is the Sink Cut-Out and Undermounting Included?

When getting a quote, ask if the price includes cutouts and polishing for an under-mount sink, cooktop (if you have one), faucet holes, grommet holes for computer cables, and any other cuts you may need.

It is standard practice to add costs for cutouts, since some projects may need only a single sink cutout, while others have multiple cutouts required. But you need to make sure you know which are included in price quote.

Other cutouts to note are outlets. If your kitchen countertops have full height back splashes, there will likely be electrical outlets that require cutouts. This is a small detail that can add up before you know it if it's

not included.

Which Edge Profiles are offered for that Price?

All stone countertops need to have the edge profile shaped and polished. There are simple edges like Eased Edge and Half Round Edge, and then there are more decorative edges like Ogee Edge or Cove DuPont Edge.

Some granite companies charge extra even for standard Eased Edge, even though you can't get counters installed without an edge polish. Other fabricators offer 3 to 4 edges in the standard quote. Make sure you ask about this often-overlooked aspect.

Will You Have to Buy Your Own Supports for Overhangs?

If you have an island, upper bar area, or peninsula that overhangs beyond 10," it may need to be supported by steel braces. Reputable stone companies will advise you about the need of adequate support for granite with longer overhangs. This is important for the safety of your family and the durability of your new granite.

Some low-end fabricators may not even mention the need for supports. On the other hand, stone companies that care for your safety and their reputation will discuss the need for supports even if it adds some extra cost.

Is There a Warranty on the Final Installation?

Make sure you have written warranty on the final installation, so be sure to bring the subject up before making your final decision on a fabricator.

Last but Not Least

Many homeowners simply make phone calls to different granite companies in their area to check the granite prices per square foot and make their decision based on whoever is cheapest. They don't realize how many variable factors go into these prices.

By just calling around and getting prices per square foot, you are is not going to help your granite project. You need to know the real, bottom-line price for the entire installation in order to accurately price shop.



VI. Choosing an Edge Profile

Once you have chosen a fabricator and a type of granite, it's time to decide on the details; an edge profile is one of the most prominent details you'll decide on.

In the "old days," we had to fabricate all our granite edges completely by hand (go back a bit further and we had to polish all the surfaces by hand as well). Nowadays, thanks to CNC machines and other upgrades, a modern fabrication shop like Arch City Granite can combine custom craftsmanship and technological innovation. For our clients, this means a huge variety of edge types from which to choose.



You can see a full list of edges available on your fabricator's website or at their storefront, but as you are choosing, keep in mind these three basic criteria: Style, Material, and Design Context. We'll go over those soon, but first let's quickly cover the basic types of granite edges.

The simplest edge available is the Eased Edge, which is just polished with a tiny bit of rounding on the edges, so that it is not sharp.

If you want a bit more detail, check out these edges: Top and Bottom Rounded Edge, 1/4" Beveled Edge, 1/2" Beveled Edge, Roman Round Edge, Half Round Edge (also called Half Bullnose), and Full Bullnose Edge.

For an edge with a lot of character, take a look at the Ogee Edge, Elite Edge, and Roman Elite Edges. Last, but certainly not least, are Laminated Edges. Don't get confused by the name, the word "laminated" here refers to the process by which we affix an extra piece of stone beneath the edge of the granite to make the edge look like it is 6 cm (2 1/2") thick instead of the standard 3 cm (1 1/4").

Laminated Edges can be as simple as a 6 cm Eased Edge or as ornate as an Ogee over Ogee Laminated Edge.

Criteria #1: Style

The first criteria for selecting a granite or marble edge profile should be your own personal tastes and style. It doesn't matter how well an edge may or may not go with a stone or the space if you don't love it.

Start by looking at samples of edges and letting yourself evaluate whether or not each one is visually pleasing to you. Do you usually prefer straight lines and right angles? Or do you like more details and more going on?

Criteria #2: Material

Once you've gotten a feel for which edges appeal to your personal style, then it's time to consider how they work with your stone choice. We should note here that we recommend choosing your stone first

and then choosing an edge. Certain materials work well with certain edges due to historical significance or tradition. For example, soapstone is traditionally used with an eased edge. Marble, being used in more ornate contexts historically, is often finished with an ogee or laminated ogee edge.

Of course, knowing that might make you want to break with tradition and try a beveled edge on that soapstone or a half bullnose on marble. Either way, a careful consideration of the traditional use of a material will set you up well when deciding your countertops Edge Profile.

Some countertop choices may limit your edge choices because of their composition. While most stones can be fabricated with any edge, you may come across natural stones like Saturnia Granite. Granite is actually a misnomer for this stone - in strict geological terms, it is a Schist stone. The high concentration of mica and feldspar in this stone gives it its signature shimmer, but these minerals don't take well to more complicated edges like an Ogee Edge.

Make sure to talk to your fabricator about the unique qualities of the stone you've chosen before you choose an edge.

Criteria #3: Context

Last, but not least, carefully consider the aesthetic context of your countertops, or in other words, the style of the room.

If you have a contemporary space with lots of right angles and straight lines, then an ogee edge might look out of place. Similarly, if your cabinets have lots of details and the room has upscale, traditional accessories, then an eased edge might be too simple to blend well with the rest of the decor.

Note any angles on your cabinet doors or trim work. While you certainly don't have to match architectural features and granite edges, a bevel on your cabinets and on your counters, to give one example, could unify disparate details of the room.

Once you have considered these three criteria, it's time to go back to your "gut" instinct. Now that you have carefully evaluated the different qualities of your personal style, your chosen countertop, and your unique space, let this new information guide your decorating instinct. You, more than anyone, know what will look good to you years down the road.



Description of Stone Countertops Edge Profiles

Simple & Contemporary Edges

Eased Edge

A straight edge with a small 5mm radius on the top and slightly eased on the bottom. This is the most commonly used edge.



Top and Bottom Rounded Edge

This edge is very contemporary with a 5mm radius on the top and bottom of the profile.



¼" or ½" Bevel Edge

Another popular contemporary edge. It has an angular slanting edge with a modern look.



Roman Round Edge

Though this is called Roman Round, it is a very subtle arch that goes well with contemporary kitchens and can make the stone appear thicker.



Chiseled or Rock Edge

A naturally beautiful edge accomplished by carefully chipping the edge and smoothing the piercing projections that result. Then an Ager is applied to bring out the color. This edge goes well in outdoor and contemporary kitchens.



Transitional Edges

Half Round or "A" Profile Edge

This edge has a 15mm radius on the top and a slight eased edge on the bottom. This is popular because it can go with both contemporary and traditional style kitchens. It is a clean look that is easy to clean and highly resistant to impacts that may cause chipping.



Full Bullnose Edge

This edge goes well with any style kitchen, but it is most popularly used for countertops that have upper bar areas

**Roman Elite Edge**

This is the same as the Elite edge, however, the curvatures are different. It is also usually used on islands or as a part of a laminated edge.

**Traditional Edges****Ogee Edge**

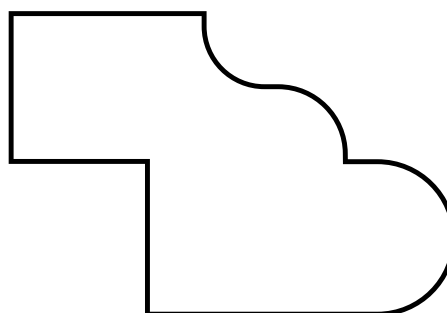
This is the second most popular edge because of its beauty and elegance. It is a great way to enhance the beauty of your granite. Kitchen designers use an ogee edge on the kitchen island and a half round on the perimeter countertops to accent the island.

**Elite Edge**

It is a 3 stepped edge and very beautiful to look at. It is usually used on islands or as a part of a laminated, or stacked, edge.

**Laminated/Stacked Edges****Ogee Edge**

2 1/2" thick, this edge is composed of two slabs that are both 1 1/4" thick. They are attached, or laminated, together to give the granite the appearance of a much thicker countertop. We can combine two different single edge profiles to give you a very dramatic and carved appearance to the stone. This style should not be confused with actual laminate countertops. There are many combinations of the laminated edges. These include: Roman Elite over Ogee, Elite over Full Bullnose, Elite over Ogee, Double Chisel, and Ogee over Full Bullnose, any over Eased, Ogee over Half Bullnose, and Ogee over Ogee.



VII. How to Choose a Backsplash

Every kitchen, bar, or bathroom vanity top needs a backsplash. Backsplashes prevent water, food or any other debris from falling or spilling behind the cabinets where they can cause mold or mildew in unseen areas. Another important function of your backsplash is to hide the variation in walls that aren't 100% straight (and believe us, no wall is 100% straight).

The most common three backsplashes are tile, four-inch-high granite backsplashes, and full-height granite backsplashes. Sometimes, you will see a four-inch granite backsplash paired with tile on the rest of the exposed wall (typically a total of 18 inches from counter to bottom of upper cabinets), but most professionals would recommend choosing one or the other for a cleaner look.

Four-Inch (Standard) Granite Backsplash



A Four inch granite backsplash is the easiest and most cost-effective solution. These pieces are cut from the same slab as your counter, and quality fabricators will - whenever possible - cut the slab so that the pattern continues from the counter up the backsplash. The amount of extra granite needed for a four-inch backsplash is relatively small, and the cost of labor is mitigated by the fact that the fabricator will

already be cutting and installing for you, making the overall cost of a standard backsplash quite low.

If you are replacing laminate counters, you may need to slightly increase the height of your granite backsplash in order to cover the line made where the laminate was glued to the wall.

Full-Height Granite Backsplash



If you prefer to have the entire wall behind the counter covered, you can opt for the standard tile backsplash or go off the beaten path with a full-height granite or marble backsplash. While more expensive than the average tile, a solid slab of stone on your wall will last longer and won't ever need to be re-grouted; you can avoid grout lines, and smooth stone is much easier to clean.

Many choose to have their full-height stone backsplash cut from the same slabs as their counters so that the pattern runs in one continuous line up the wall. Some choose a different material to create a bit of contrast in the kitchen. For example, you could pair a solid honed white marble backsplash with a standard polish Absolute Black Granite counter.

Another variation on full-height backsplash is to put solid granite only on the wall-area behind the stove or cooktop, using tile on the rest of the walls. This is a great alternative for those who want tile, but also want to show off their granite or keep their wall safe from grease and food splashes when cooking.



VIII. How to Choose a Sink

Another important (and often overlooked) part of buying new countertop is your sink.

The fabricator will be cutting a custom hole in the right place for your sink, so you have to have it picked out and delivered before they start cutting.



Stainless Steel Sinks

Stainless steel sinks are by far the most used sinks with granite and quartz kitchen countertops. They match most faucets, don't rust, chip, or stain, and are easy to clean and maintain.

Typically, a satin finish is preferred over a high-gloss finish. The satin finish goes well with most appliances and shows fewer scratches compared to a high gloss finish. Since more and more companies are now making faucets with a satin finish, it's easy to find a faucet that matches.

One important thing to know before you buy a stainless steel sink is the "gage" or thickness. The lower the gage, the thicker the steel. The common industry standard for kitchen sinks is 18 gage stainless steel, but at Arch

City Granite we use 16 gage stainless sinks for all our kitchen countertops, since they are more durable in the long run.

Stainless steel sinks come in two main varieties: undermount and drop-in (or topmounted). Most homeowners are familiar with drop-in sinks, since they are always used with Formica and other laminate counters that are not strong enough to hold undermount sinks.

Whenever possible, an undermount sink is the best choice. It looks higher-end, and it makes the whole sink area easier to clean (no rim to catch debris). Plus, you also gain an extra 1 1/4" of depth once it's attached to the underside instead of a drop-in sink. If you decide on an undermount sink, you'll want to ensure that you choose a quality material; once your sink is installed under the cabinet, you won't be able to replace it without taking out the front of the cabinets, and even then you'd have to replace it with the exact same sink shape. Basically, don't pinch pennies on the sink or you'll regret it later.

Composite Granite Sinks

This newer type of sink has become increasingly popular in the last few years. Composite granite sinks are manufactured with a mix of 80% crushed natural granite powder and 20% epoxy resins and coloring pigments.

They are highly durable, heat resistant up to 280 degrees Celsius, extremely scratch resistant, very hygienic, and easy to clean. They are available in many colors, sizes, and varieties.

Composite granite sinks used to be more expensive when they were first introduced, but as more manufacturers began making them, prices have dropped. A good granite composite should cost between \$350 and \$495.

Cast Iron Sinks



Cast iron sinks are elegant and durable. They used to be the go-to choice for higher end homes, but with the introduction of lighter and more cost-effective options like granite composite sinks, the popularity of cast iron sinks has gone down. They are still beautiful, albeit expensive, options.

Over time, the enamel coating on cast iron sinks can begin to peel off, exposing the black cast iron below. They are also incredibly heavy, and need additional bracing to support their weight.

If you choose a cast iron sink, the contractor who installs your cabinets will need to mount the cast iron sink with proper supports before your fabricator arrives to install the counters. Granite and other stone countertops sit over the rim of the cast iron sink, and the slight gap is filled with silicone to keep water out. Unlike most undermounted sinks, cast iron sinks are not attached to the underside of the stone countertops.

Farm House/ Front-Apron Sinks



Farmhouse sinks are easily recognizable by their "apron," the front part of the sink that is unusually wide and extends down in front of the cabinet for several inches. This style of sink comes in many materials, including stainless steel, copper, and cast iron. They need to be installed by your contractor before your countertop measurement technician arrives to take final measurements.

Sink Bases and Sink Width

Once you decide on a sink type, you need to make sure the one you want will actually fit in your sink base cabinet. Typical sink bases range from 30" to 36." Most popular sink styles will fit in a 36." To find out your sink base size, measure on the inside of the cabinet from left to right.

If your sink cabinet is smaller than 33," you'll likely need to consider smaller single bowl sinks. This choice should be discussed when you are making final granite decisions and reconfirmed once again after measurements are done by your stone fabricator.

Often, your fabricator will trim down the side cabinet walls to accommodate a sink that is even just a hair too wide for your sink base.

Trimming the side walls does not compromise the strength or durability of the cabinets, but should be done by a trained carpenter or granite installer who is familiar with the task.

Making Sure the Sink Fits Front to Back

Most standard undermount kitchen sinks measure 16" from front to back, leaving plenty of room for the faucet in the back.

In case of 60/40 and 70/30 proportion sinks, the larger side will usually extend further back, requiring the faucet to sit behind the smaller side.

If you want a sink that's bigger front to back, you need to consider bumping out the sink cabinet in the front so that there is enough space for faucet. Obviously, you need to plan for this as you are designing your cabinet.



IX. How to Choose a Faucet

Most faucets work just fine with all types of natural and manmade stone countertops. If your existing faucet is in good shape, you can reuse it. Faucet holes are standard sizes, so if you ever want to replace your faucet, you can do it at any time without affecting your granite counters.

It is a good idea to have the faucet on site when the measuring technician comes to your home. He will make sure that the faucet you choose fits with the sink model and cabinet depth. This will also help you avoid any uncommon issues related to long decorative faucet handles or other unforeseen concerns.



X. Countertop Overhang and Supports

Standard kitchen cabinets are 24" deep; your new granite countertops will be 25.5" deep, including an overhang of about 1.5" from the face of the cabinets. This is important because laminate countertops are usually only about 25" deep.

If you are getting your countertops replaced, it's the perfect time to consider extending the overhang for your peninsula, island, or bar top. Any time you can add seating areas to your kitchen, we strongly recommend it. There's nothing more convenient than guests or children being able to comfortably sit in the kitchen while you are cooking - or just to avoid carrying food over to the table for a more convenient meal time.

A 12" overhang is ideal for comfortable adult use with bar-height chairs or stools. Some homeowners

extend up to 18" for even more leg room.

The standard rule for stone countertop overhang is this: if your stone countertop is more than one-third of the total counter length, you need to have extra support added (such as corbels or brackets). For example, if your kitchen cabinets are 24" deep, you can have stone countertops up to 35.5" deep without adding support (practically, that's a standard 36" counter).

This rule is for normal granite and quartz colors strong enough to withstand normal usage. Some exotic granite colors with lot of veins may need to be supported, even with a 10" overhang. An experienced granite fabricator will be able to tell you exactly how many (if any) supports you need for your specific project and material.



XI. Getting Professional Measurements Taken



The new granite countertops need accurate measurements in order to fabricate the best fitting counters. The new countertops are not fabricated based on the drawings that you provide during your purchasing process. Drawings that you provide will be used for price estimation purposes only.

Stone fabricators need a much more precise set of measurements - marked to a sixteenth of an inch. So, once you have chosen a stone and put down your deposit, they will send out a measurement technician to get the exact dimensions.

In the past, all measurements were taken using physical cardboard or plastic templates. Today, many fabricators measure your countertops using digital or laser devices. Digital templating offers precise measurements and eliminates most human errors.

Not many walls are straight, and most of the average kitchen's corner angles are not perfectly square; digital measurements record these imperfections so that the backside of the countertops can be scribed to conform to the true silhouette of the wall.

Digital measurement takes about 45 minutes for the average kitchen. The technician will spend another half-hour with you discussing the measurements and your detail options, and answering any questions you may have.

How to Prepare for Your Measurement Appointment

If you are replacing existing countertops, they need to be removed before the measurement appointment. This is necessary so that the technician can accurately assess if your cabinets are leveled. In order to keep your granite strong and secure, your cabinets need to be have no more than 1/4" height difference over a length of ten feet.

Removing the existing countertops (before measuring) allows the technician to properly record any variation in the back wall. Last, but not least, the technician can make sure that none of your cabinet walls need to be reinforced. Overall, it means a better measurement and no bad surprises during the actual installation.

We understand that a non functioning kitchen can be an inconvenience for homeowners, so we strongly advise you to have the date of installation scheduled before measurement. That way, the gap between the tearing out of existing countertops and installation of new countertops can be minimized. few days without your countertops is certainly a hassle, but if installers arrive for the installation and find uneven cabinets, they would have to reschedule; additionally, if your counters are improperly installed, they are at risk

of cracking. Long story short, taking off the counters to measure is worth having your kitchen temporarily out of commission.

Things You Need to Do on the Day of Your Measurement Appointment

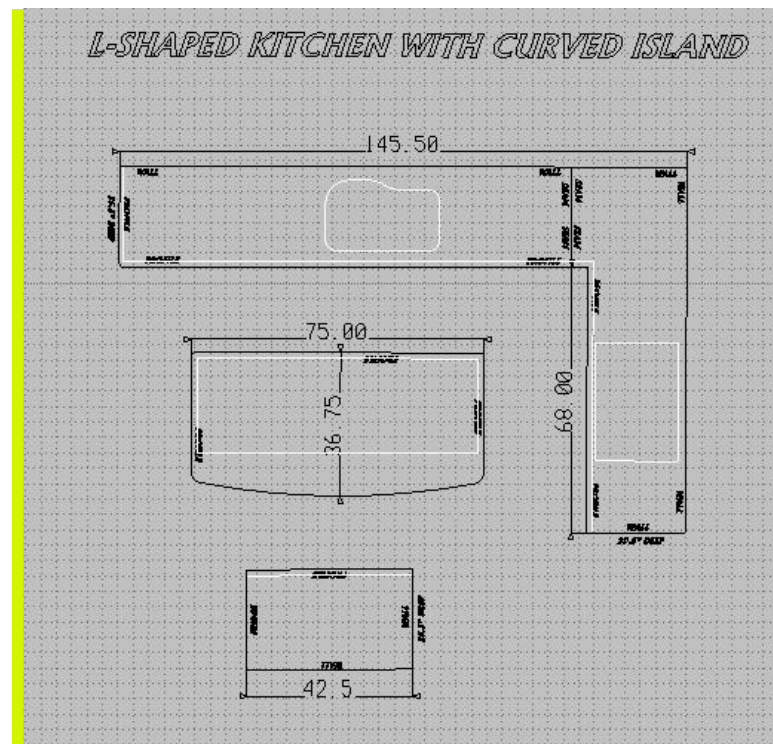
Here's a pre-measurement checklist:

The dishwasher and the stove need to be in place. Some stove models need the granite to go under the side lips. Other stove models also may need a small strip of stone behind the stove and the wall (known as a "stove rail"). We need the appliances in place to make sure all variations are taken into account. If your stove has a pop-up vent (also known as pop-up downdraft), it needs to be installed in its permanent place as well.

If you have a cooktop, make sure it's onsite. The technician will measure the physical cooktop to make sure the cutout is precise for a flawless fit.

You should also have your sink onsite so that the technician can take it back to the fabrication shop. The undermounting is done before the stone is brought back for installation.

Faucet holes for the kitchen are usually drilled on-site during installation, but we still recommend having the faucet there during the measurement to make sure there won't be a problem with placement. This is true for bathroom faucets as well. If you are using a farm sink or cast iron sink, they'll need to be installed before the measurement technician arrives.



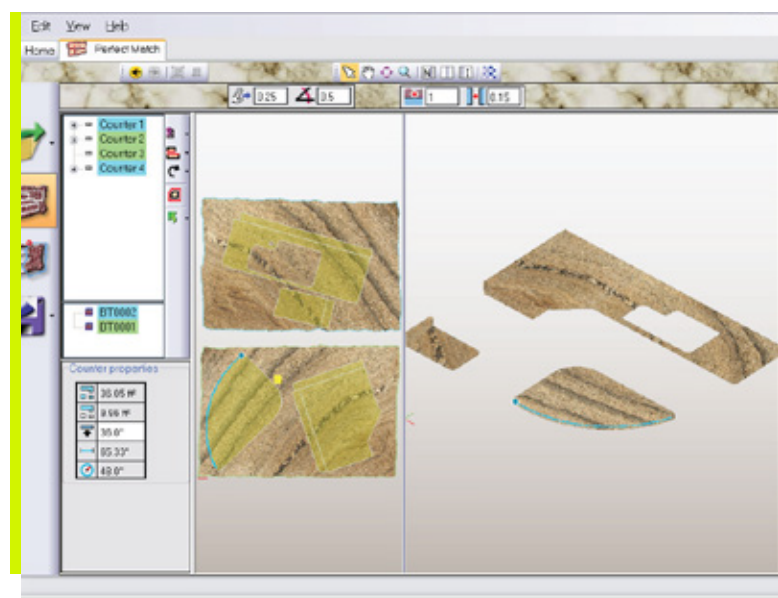
XII. Deciding on the Layout of Your New Granite Countertops

Once your measurements have been taken, you and your fabricator can plan out exactly how your counters will be cut from the slabs. If you have a consistent stone like Uba Tuba Granite or Black Pearl Granite (or quartz colors with tight patterns), you'll be able to skip this step; it won't matter from which side or direction the fabricators cut.

However, if your stone has variation across the slabs, there is an opportunity to design the pattern and placement of different counters on the slab. The end result may vary with different cuts and layouts. In order to make sure the homeowner gets the best possible final result, a reputable fabricator will ask for the homeowner's input before or during the layout/design process. For example, if the island can be cut from the right or left side of the slab, the fabricator will let you make that choice.

Of course, there are some limitations as to what you can rearrange without wasting material or buying an extra slab. So, rather than ask you exactly where you want each part of the slab, your fabricator will give you several options in areas that can be rearranged.

When it comes to laying out the slab design, the latest and greatest development in the industry is SlabSmith software. Only a few fabricators across the United States are using this software, but those that do see unmatched results. We use SlabSmith software because it lets our clients see a digital picture of their kitchen with the new countertops, ensuring that everyone is on the same page before we start cutting.



XIII. Fabricating the Stone

After you approve the layout, your granite slabs will be cut and polished. Once the large sections are cut from the slab, sink cutouts are removed and the edges are shaped and polished with your chosen edge profile. Before the finished pieces leave the fabrication tables, a supervisor will test the countertop sections to make sure the seams align properly.

The finished countertops will then be carefully inspected to make sure they are completely up to standard. Any further adjustments are made by the senior polisher. Finally, sealer is applied, and the new countertops are ready to be loaded into the trucks and taken to the client's home.



XIV. Installing Your New Countertops

On your scheduled installation day, a team of installers (two people for an average kitchen) will arrive at your home with your new countertops. The average kitchen installation takes about four hours. Larger and more complex kitchens can take up to six to seven hours.

Getting Ready for the Install Team to Arrive

Before the installers arrive you should:

- Make sure there is a clear pathway between the job site and the closest entrance to the house. Stone is heavy, so installers will try to minimize how much maneuvering they need to do while carrying the individual sections of countertop.
- If you have small children, keep them safely away from the work-site. Again, stone is heavy, and there will be sharp tools around.
- If you have a cooktop cutout, there will be cutting done on site, and you may need to cover nearby items like paintings, furniture, etc. to protect them from dust.
- If your home is new or undergoing large renovations, other artisans may be working simultaneously. They will need to stop their work at least until all the stone pieces are carried in and placed on the cabinets. Make sure to discuss this with them before the installation.
- A homeowner or their contractor (who can make decisions on behalf of the owner) needs to be present during the entire installation process.

What Should You Do During the Installation?

If you have any questions, ask them before the installers start bringing in the granite or wait until after they have finished setting the seams. Installing

stone countertops requires a lot of focus and precision and a tight time table (to avoid anything drying too fast). So, it's best to allow the stone craftsmen to work uninterrupted. Of course, most fabricators encourage you to watch or you stay nearby in case any questions come up during the installation.

Removing the Existing Countertops



If you or your contractor have agreed to remove the old countertops, this will need to be done before the installers arrive at your home. Only the cabinets should be visible. If your installer is removing the countertops, their team will carefully separate them from the cabinets, trying their best to avoid any damage to the cabinet or wall. If you have laminate counters with backsplash, sometimes a bit of the wall plaster may come off with the old counters. Don't worry! Usually, your new granite or tile backsplash will cover up those marks. If not, your contractor can easily patch them.

Leveling the Cabinets and Installing the Sink Clips

It's important that the cabinets are as level as possible and completely secured to the wall before the granite is put in place. In case of free-standing islands, all the cabinets of island need to be securely anchored

to the floor. This protects the stone from causing a tipping hazard.

The installers won't need to spend as much time with the level tool if your cabinets are new, but this is still an important step for any installation. When it is done correctly, you won't have to think about replacing your stone countertops for the lifetime of your home. Small variations in the plane will be offset with small, wood shims as the granite or other surface is laid down (a shim is a thin, wood wedge cut specifically for the home improvement industry).

If your cabinets are completely out of level and the unevenness cannot be rectified with shims, then the installation will be postponed so that the cabinet contractor can come back to level the cabinets. At this point, if you have chosen an undermount sink, the installers will attach a rail or clip system to the cabinet to keep the sink nice and snug up under the granite.

Putting the Granite in Place, Setting the Seams, and Caulking

Once the cabinets are level, installers will lay each piece of the granite in place on the counters. Then, they will use an epoxy at the seams to cement the pieces of marble, granite, soapstone, or quartz to each other.

There are two types of epoxy: a clear epoxy and a neutral color. These are blended onsite to carefully match your countertop color. As soon as the seams are dry, the excess epoxy is carefully skimmed off with a razor blade. Then, the granite will be further secured to the cabinet with attachment blocks called 'bondo blocks' that have been prepared onsite.

It's important to note here that no wall is perfectly straight, not even in brand new homes. No matter how high-end or high-tech the tools used to measure and cut are, you may still see some gaps between the

backside of the granite counters and the wall. These are almost always small enough that your tile or granite backsplash will cover them up completely. If you have ordered a matching granite backsplash, the installers will probably need to make some minor adjustments to those pieces before installing them and setting the seams in the same way as the decks (the main, horizontal pieces of countertop).

Finishing the Cooktop Cutout

If you have a cooktop (as opposed to a slide in range), the installers may need to do the cutout onsite.

With many stones, it is risky to try and transport the stone all the way to your house with that large of a cutout. So before the stone is taken to your house, the fabricators will usually create notches where the cuts should begin. The installers will finish the cuts for cook-top after the stone is set on the counters. If they need to do it inside, a quality fabricator will use at least one shop vacuum to collect the dust as they cut. However, you may still end up with a bit of dust in your home.

Wrapping up the Details and Cleaning Up

Once all the stone is secured in place, the installation team will use acetone or denatured alcohol to remove any excess epoxy, caulk, and dust leftover on the counters. They will clean and seal your counters, clean up the job site as much as possible, give you instructions on how to clean and care for your counters, thank you for your business, sign the job approval, and leave you to admire your new countertops.

We recommend having the plumbing reconnected the next day. The extra time allows the sink attachments to completely cure for full strength.



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