

Fitzgerald Kitchens

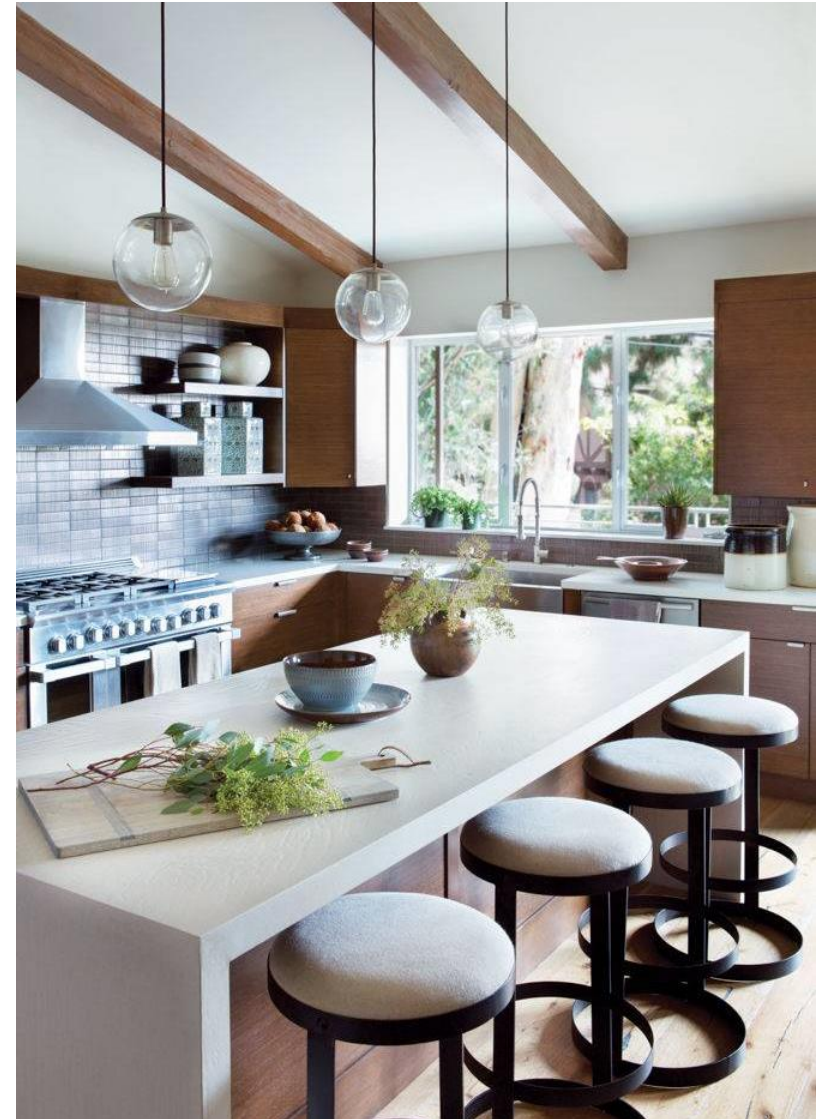
A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO CHOOSING WORKTOPS



INTRODUCTION

A kitchen renovation is a very big undertaking and the options of finishes and fixtures are so vast, that you may often feel completely overwhelmed. This guide will take you through the steps of choosing the right countertop for your kitchen, from the material and maintenance to pros and cons.

As always, it is easier to choose once you have identified what you like. The style of your kitchen will often narrow down the suitable countertop options, so start by gathering your ideas in a file on your computer, a notebook or on a platform like Pinterest.



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1. ASSESSING YOUR NEEDS

When choosing your ideal countertop, look, feel, properties and of course budget play a big role. But before we get to that, let's first look at how you intend to use your countertops as their function will often determine which materials are most suited.



COUNTERTOPS FOR COOKING

Do you cook every day?

Do you cook large meals or mainly heat and serve?

What kind of cookware do you use: heavy cast iron or stainless steel?

Do you like placing hot cookware directly onto a countertop or are you happy with using pot stands?

Are you prone to making a mess while you cook or do you clean as you go?

Do you use a lot of equipment and appliances that could scratch a work surface?



REMEMBER:

Cast iron is an amazing material for cookware, but it can cause serious heat damage and scratches to softer surfaces. If cast iron is your cookware of choice, make sure that you choose a surface material accordingly.



COUNTERTOPS FOR BAKING

Do you need special cool surfaces like marble for dough and fondant?

Do you prefer working on a stainless steel surface for ease of cleaning?

Does the surface need to be able to withstand the heat from baking trays?

Do you use a lot of food colouring that may stain counter surfaces?



KEEP IN MIND:

While marble is great for baking, it might not be the best option for the entire kitchen. Consider installing marble only on an island or other smaller surface to accommodate your baking needs.



COUNTERTOPS FOR ENTERTAINING

Is your kitchen a social space where you entertain regularly?
Do you eat / entertain at the countertop or is it mainly a working space?
Do the counters have to accommodate other uses as well, like homework, sewing or crafts?



TO CONSIDER:

If your kitchen is quite a social space, keep in mind that not everyone will be as careful with your countertops as you may be. Rather choose tops with greater durability and stain resistance.



2. THE AVAILABLE OPTIONS

Choosing which surface to go for is the first step, but with so many options available, it can be a daunting task!

Often, the style of your kitchen will determine which material you go for: a very traditional and formal kitchen will be enhanced with marble or granite, while a farmhouse kitchen will look great with wood. Similarly a modern kitchen will look great topped with solid surfacing while an industrial kitchen will work well with either stainless steel or concrete.

Each material has some intrinsic properties that you need to be aware of before you choose, so let's look at those first.



PRO TIP:

Don't be too concerned if you can't decide between 2 materials – combining kitchen surface materials is very trendy and we'll show you how to do that as well!



MARBLE

A sophisticated and very trendy option, marble is extremely durable and resistant to heat, cracks and breakage.

Marble can be honed and filled to make it less porous, otherwise the stone can stain if liquids are absorbed. Acids are particularly damaging – take care with acidic cleaning products, citrus fruit and juices, coffee and alcohol.

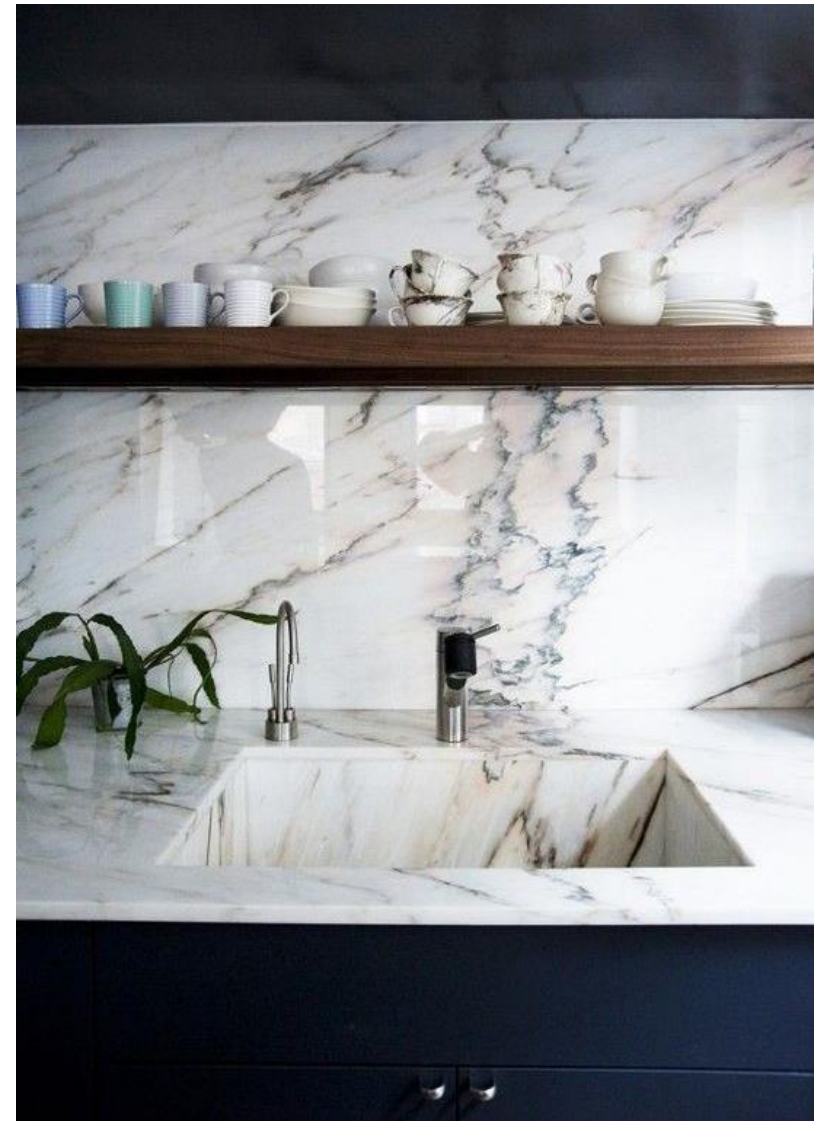
If it is sealed regularly and cleaned with the correct products however, it will keep looking great for many years. Marble is a suitable option for both traditional and contemporary kitchen styles.

Pros:

- 1) Highly durable
- 2) Variety of colours and finishes
- 3) Adds value to your home

Cons:

- 1) Pricey
- 2) Can stain and scratch easily



GRANITE

A very versatile and beautiful option, granite comes in many different colours and finishes. While having similar qualities to marble, it is much denser and therefore highly stain resistant as well.

Surfaces can be polished to a gloss finish or honed for a matte look. The stone should be sealed annually to prevent damage.

Because of the large variety of finishes, granite tops are suitable for traditional and contemporary kitchens, whether they are formal or more informal.

Pros:

- 1) Highly durable
- 2) Heat, stain and scratch resistant
- 3) Variety of colours and finishes
- 4) Adds value to your home

Cons:

- 1) Pricey
- 2) Requires annual re-sealing



SOAPSTONE

Another beautiful natural stone product, soap stone is a great choice where stain-resistance is a high priority. It is highly resistant to acids and heat. While it is slightly softer than other natural stone tops, soapstone can be sanded or oiled to remove damage and scratches.

Countertops have to be oiled regularly with mineral oil to maintain them. Over time, the oil will change the colour of the stone from a beautiful grey to a dark charcoal or black.

Pros:

- 1) Very durable
- 2) Heat and stain resistant
- 3) Adds value to your home

Cons:

- 1) Pricey
- 2) Requires regular oiling
- 3) Not scratch-proof



ENGINEERED STONE / QUARTZ

Made of natural quarts and resin, these surfaces are non-porous, stain- and scratch-resistant, and practically maintenance-free. While they possess the basic qualities of granite and marble, they don't ever have to be sealed.

They are entirely heat-proof however so care should be taken with very hot cookware.

Brand names include Caesar Stone ®, Zodiaq ® and Silestone ®.

Pros:

- 1) Highly durable
- 2) Maintenance free
- 3) Variety of finishes and colours

Cons:

- 1) Not heat-proof



SOLID SURFACING

Manufactured solid surfacing like Corian®, Formica®, and Staron® are very durable and requires virtually no maintenance.

A great advantage to this surface is that any scratch marks and surface damage can be buffed out. Another unique quality of solid surfacing is that it has the ability to be made seamless so sinks and splash backs can be integrated into a single surface without any joins.

While they are quite an investment, these tops have a long lifespan and often come with an extensive warrantee that will outlive your kitchen if cared for properly.

Pros:

- 1) Seamless solution to countertops
- 2) Variety of finishes and colours

Cons:

- 1) Can scratch and stain



STAINLESS STEEL

Sleek and ultra hygienic, stainless steel is a great choice for a commercial, industrial or modern kitchen. Easy to clean and completely heat-proof, it is also resistant to stains. It can show scratches over time, but with the right care these should be minimal.

It does however show every fingerprint and grease smear so requires constant cleaning to keep it looking good.

Pros:

- 1) Ultra Hygienic
- 2) Maintenance-free

Cons:

- 1) Needs constant cleaning to prevent grease smears
- 2) Noisy



WOOD

While solid wood is not unheard of, it is an expensive and rather risky option since it can be prone to warping.

Butcher block however, is an affordable alternative that adds warmth to a kitchen space.

It can be used directly as a chopping surface without posing a risk to knives, but it should be oiled regularly and sealed with a food-grade sealer to prevent bacterial growth.

Wood is prone to scratches, heat damage and stains, although to remove these is easy enough with a sander. Wood is also prone to getting dark water stains around taps and sinks.

Pros:

- 1) Great as a work surface

Cons:

- 1) Needs maintenance and care to prevent scratches and stains
- 2) Porous, so can harbor harmful bacteria if not cleaned sufficiently



HIGH PRESSURE LAMINATE / POSTFORM TOPS

Formica® has been around for many years and great strides have been made in the durability of laminates for kitchen countertops. The tops are manufactured by applying a resin-impregnated laminate onto a 30mm or 40mm thick board through intense heat and pressure.

Definitely the most affordable option, these countertops come in a large variety of colours and patterns. They are easy to install and are scratch, heat and stain resistant. While originally laminates were not very durable and prone to cracking and heat damage, the updated postform tops will last a lifetime. If they are not waterproofed correctly around basins and faucets, they can be prone to water damage causing them to warp.

Pros:

- 1) Affordable
- 2) Durable
- 3) Easy to install

Cons:

- 1) Not as luxurious as other options
- 2) Can warp if edges are not protected against water



CONCRETE

Concrete is another affordable solution that offers great customization possibilities and comes in 3 different finishes: trowel finished to provide a smooth surface, sanded to expose the aggregate and texture, and pressed to achieve almost marble-like veins.

Since it is a custom-cast product, it is also possible to integrate a splashback and sink into the design of the countertop.

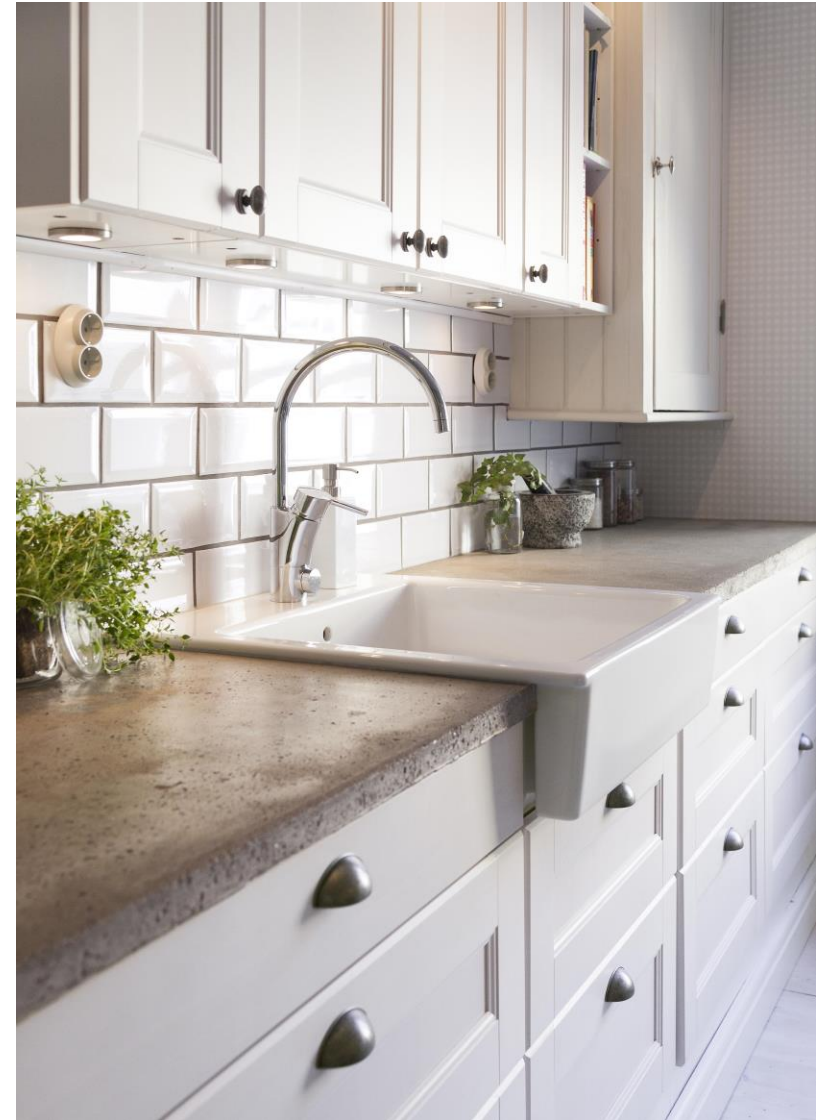
It is advisable to get an expert to cast and install concrete tops since they are prone to cracking if not done correctly. They must also be sealed correctly and waxed often to prevent water and chemical damage.

Pros:

- 1) Durable
- 2) Heat and scratch resistant
- 3) Integrated countertops

Cons:

- 1) Needs regular maintenance to prevent damage
- 2) Prone to cracking
- 3) Must be custom cast



SURFACES CHEAT SHEET

To help you make the right choice, [download this cheat sheet here](#).

	Marble	Granite	Soap Stone	Eng. Stone or Quartz	Solid Surfacing	Stainless Steel	Wood	HPL/ Postform	Concrete
Heat Resistant	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Scratch Resistant		✓		✓				✓	✓
Seamless					✓	✓			
Integrated Sink					✓				
Undermount Sink	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Coved Splashbacks					✓			✓	
Easily Repaired			✓		✓		✓		
Non-porous			✓	✓	✓	✓			
Low Maintenance		✓		✓		✓		✓	
Affordable								✓	✓
Colour Variety		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Stain Resistant		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Chemical Resistant		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	

5. EDGES

Now that you have chosen which top you prefer, you will have to choose how the edge is going to be finished.

Flat / Square



Ideally suited to simple and modern styles, a square edge can be achieved with most countertop materials.



Bull-nosed



Softly rounded, this edge is slightly more traditional and suitable to most materials.



Half Bull-nosed



With a curve at the top and a square profile on the lower edge, this is the perfect combination between square and bull-nosed. Most postform tops have this edge finish.



Mitered



Visually increases the thickness of a countertop by applying a mitered downstand around the countertop. A great option for a big surface.



Beveled



A diagonal line to the top edge allows for a clean and modern look that is perfectly suited to wood and stone tops.



Reverse Beveled



An inverted diagonal line creates a very sharp and clean edge – perfect for a minimalist or modern kitchen.



Eased



A square profile with softened edges that can be used in both contemporary and traditional kitchens.



Ogee



A routed top edge ending in a bull-nose on the lower edge, this is a great edge treatment for stone and wood.



Cove



A routed top edge ending in a square profile on the lower edge, this style is ideal for traditional kitchens.



6. MIXING MATERIALS

Can't decide between finishes? Combine them! There isn't any rule that says you only have to have one kitchen countertop finish. In fact, it's very trendy to mix materials. Here are a few tips:

- 1) Let the function of the workspace dictate the finish: if you prefer to eat on a wooden surface, then install it on the island seating area.
- 2) Try to stick to no more than 2 finishes, 3 if you have a very large kitchen.
- 3) To have 2 different finishes directly next to each other on the same level is risky. Rather choose to install finishes on different heights or in different areas of the kitchen.



7. A FEW EXTRA NOTES

There are many different fixtures and fittings that can be installed directly onto your new countertops. Here are few of them that will impact your decision:

1) Sinks

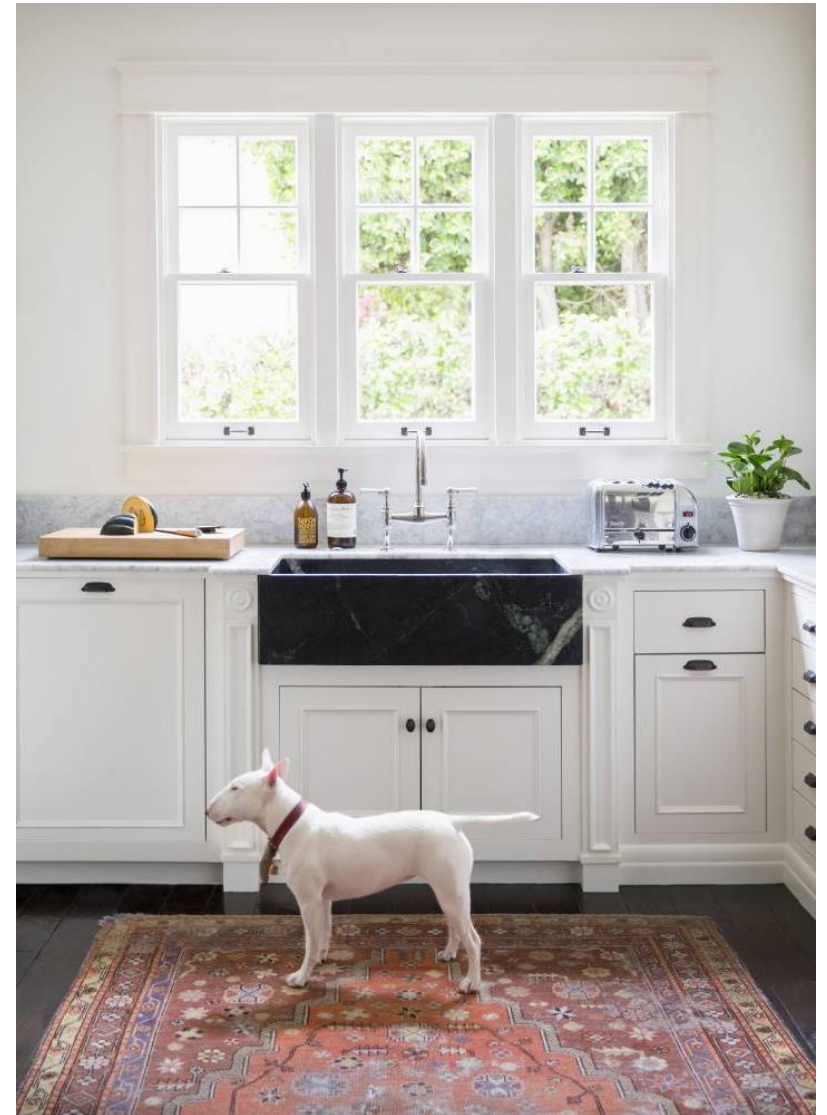
A sink can be integrated into the countertop, installed into it or installed underneath it (undermounted). The look you want to achieve will determine which material will be best suited. Solid surfacing and stainless steel tops allows for the sink and splashback to be a seamless part of the countertop while stone allows for custom sinks.

2) Taps

If your taps are installed in the countertop as opposed to on the wall over the sink, care should be taken to sufficiently waterproof the area around the installation to prevent water damage to wood or laminate tops.

3) Appearance

If you are very particular about aesthetics, then having a seamless installation will be a great choice. This allows all counters to appear as one without any join lines.





CONTACT US

Call us on: 01 230 0336

Dun Laoghaire

129 Oliver Plunkett Road
Dun Laoghaire
Dublin

Tinahely

Lugduff Tinahely, Co. Wicklow



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