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# Not Your Ordinary COUNTERTOP

Designers share countertop creations that make kitchens extraordinary.

**T**hey can be show-stopping or supportive, historical or modern, and everything in between. When it comes to countertop materials and design, it seems nothing is off limits these days, as shown by several designers *KBDN* visited with this month who have used everything from artisan and crystallized glass to reclaimed barn wood and graphic granite to copper with a living finish. The assortment of countertop materials they've used in the designs they shared proves that countertops are anything but ordinary.



**DESIGNER:** Jason Landau, owner/designer, Amazing Spaces, Briarcliff Manor, NY

**MATERIALS USED:** polished Stone Wood granite (island); Espresso Caesarstone (perimeter)

**DESIRED LOOK:** This client wanted a kitchen that leaned toward the modern side of transitional. “She also has slightly funky taste and she likes to have something different than everyone else. When she saw this granite slab, it really struck a chord with her.”

**ACHIEVING THE LOOK:** Resembling petrified wood, Stone Wood granite features dramatic variations of yellows, golds, creams and browns and is anything but ordinary. “Granite can be interesting, but you have to look for it. The good stuff comes and goes. I try to keep unique slabs in mind for projects, and I like to suggest the unusual. It’s always fun when I find the appropriate person.”

Landau wanted to create a strong focal point in the kitchen when viewed from the adjacent family room, so he complemented the island top with a backsplash cut from the same granite. “We both liked the idea of a striking graphic image, then sprinkling it around elsewhere in the design.”

The designer balanced the visually ‘strong’ granite with Espresso Caesarstone quartz for the perimeter countertops. “Generally, my rule of thumb is that, when mixing countertop surfaces, you only have one that is a pattern. You don’t want too many patterns competing with something that is very graphic such as the Stone Wood.”

**MOST CREATIVE ASPECT:** Two ideas transform this kitchen, he notes. One is the graphic nature of the granite. The second is that Landau color-matched a few cabinet pieces with the appliances, and this harmonizes with the quartz as well as some veining in the granite and adds depth and interest. “It’s no longer just another white kitchen. This space would look a whole lot different with a more ‘average’ granite.”

**COUNTERTOPS’ ROLE IN A KITCHEN:** “Countertops can do a number of different things. They can take center stage, like in this kitchen. Or, they can play a supporting role to the cabinetry or other design elements...to be a nice balance or blend to the overall recipe of the kitchen...a little bit of cabinetry, a little bit of countertop, a little bit of flooring and backsplash.”

**TRENDING COUNTERTOP MATERIALS:** Quartzite is coming on strongly, which has a density close to granite, but has a more marble-like appearance, Landau notes. “A lot of people love the idea of marble, but they’re afraid to use it because it’s more porous, less dense and, therefore, more prone to damage, especially to staining.”

Porcelain slabs are also gaining popularity, especially those that resemble granite.

Landau also likes to use NeoLith countertops for clients who prefer the industrial look, while concrete offers a lot of flexibility to control the aesthetic since it can be custom colored or imprinted.

**MOST UNUSUAL COUNTERTOP MATERIAL USED:** Although it isn’t necessarily unusual, Landau doesn’t do a lot of glass countertops. “We tend to do more in the way of woods, metals and interesting marbles and granite.”



**DESIGNER:** Angela Otten, WmOhs Showrooms, Denver, CO

**MATERIALS USED:** Organic White Caesarstone (perimeter/islands); slumped artisan glass (curved island)

**DESIRED LOOK:** The wife wanted something monochromatic while the husband wanted something with color. Their solution ended up being this mix of neutral Organic White Caesarstone quartz with light blue slumped artisan glass contrasted against dark walnut cabinetry. This combination also meets the homeowners’ desire to move the previously very traditional space toward something with a much cleaner look – “contemporary but warm and livable. They wanted it to be a fun place to live and entertain in.”

**ACHIEVING THE LOOK:** Because Otten wanted a thick top, the glass needed to be finished with a special technique that allowed for its 1.5” depth. Additionally, because of its extended length, the top needed to be two pieces of glass. To provide character and help conceal scratches, the bottom of the glass is textured, except where the stainless steel standoffs are attached. “Between templating the curve and positioning the standoffs, there was a lot of measuring.”

To provide for comfortable seating, Otten also cantilevered the glass top, cutting a hole through the quartz and into the cabinet to accommodate the angled standoffs.

**MOST CREATIVE ASPECT:** Otten used a combination of several countertop materials in tandem. The quartz serves as the canvas and offers a neutral base from which to build the design. “We needed something neutral because

there were so many other things going on in the kitchen, material wise.”

The light blue raised glass countertop serves as the highlight and adds interest as well as a hint of color, while keeping the space visually ‘light.’ “The island is very large, so the glass – being transparent – isn’t visually heavy.” Otten also backlit the glass for a unique and exciting ambiance, especially while entertaining.

The glass top’s curve matches the rounded island that, in turn, matches the tray ceiling detail above. “It brings the architecture into the kitchen design. It also plays off the ‘bubble glass’ backsplash behind the range, which is the same material, bringing the color throughout the design.”

**COUNTERTOPS’ ROLE IN A KITCHEN:** The main use of a countertop in a kitchen is for prepping food, but counters are also used for dining, such as an island overhang or for setting out food or beverages for easy access such as a bar area, Otten says. “I like to specify the main counters in a very durable material, and if the design calls for it, add in other materials in special areas.”

**TRENDING COUNTERTOP MATERIALS:** “I use quartz and marble on a regular basis, but it really depends on the design and whether it is traditional or contemporary.”

**MOST UNUSUAL COUNTERTOP MATERIAL USED:** Otten finds countertop products offered by Antolini to be beautiful and unusual, offering natural stone materials that include marble, granite, limestone, onyx, travertine, shell stones, precious stones and even gemstones.