



*Great Ideas  
Come in  
Small Packages*

## **Beautiful and Durable Countertops**

You can be ecologically sensitive, incorporate green building products in your home and still have the value of years of beauty and durability. Sustainable products are those which don't require petrochemicals or inorganic agents to fabricate. Manufactured locally, sustainable products reduce the carbon emissions from long distance transport. Ideally these products have a high percentage of recycled components in their make-up. Here are some of the choices for countertops.

One novel material called Paperstone® is a counter surface formulated with a composite of recycled paper and a water soluble resin. The material costs about \$45 per sq. ft. and is heat resistant to 350°F. Paperstone® is impervious to water and has good stain and scratch resistance. A light sanding removes surface blemishes. It is available in twelve colors, several of which resemble a leather finish.

A company in Berkeley uses recycled glass in a base of recycled concrete to create Vetrazzo® slabs. These counters cost \$65-90 per sq. ft. and will tolerate heat up to 750°F. It is highly resistant to stains and scratches so only a light sealer is needed for maintenance. Small glass chips imbedded in the white substrate give a subtle shimmer to the material's surface. Vetrazzo® and another similar product called Ice Stone® are available in slabs for counters, walls and floors. The color of the glass and the matrix can be specified by the customer.

Several companies are producing environmentally sensitive decorative tiles. Vulcanite® (\$90-150 per sq. ft.) is glazed volcanic lava (basalt) that withstands heat up to 500°F and is available in twenty colors. Oceanside Glass in southern California produces an extensive line of tiles and mosaics in various sizes made from 85% recycled glass. Many of their tiles have the shimmer of dichroic glass as metals are fused into the glass.

The best counter surface on the market is called Caesarstone® which looks like granite or limestone. Fabricated in Sacramento, it is composed of crushed quartz aggregate in a polyester resin. It is virtually non-porous, so it will not stain with wine and other acidic spills. Best of all, Caesarstone® does not require any special maintenance or sealing: just clean it with a mild detergent or Simple Green®. Hot pots can be set directly on the surface of this countertop.



Edges can be sculpted just like natural stone. It is as hard as granite and about the same cost at \$150 per sq. ft installed. Caesarstone® comes in 54" wide slabs (fewer seams and less waste on long counters) in thirty colors with either a polished or a honed (matte) finish. Since most granite comes from open pit quarries in China and is shipped long distances to the end users, granite counters have a huge carbon footprint. Additionally, the yearly polishing and maintenance of granite makes it a more expensive countertop over the long term than Caesarstone®. Clearly, a quartz countertop should be your first choice for a beautiful and durable counter.

**To view other green building options call Jean Cary at 593-9622**