

Topping Things Off

The hottest trends in countertop design and fabrication incorporate mix-and-match colors, materials and inlays with designs that are personalized and low maintenance.

BY JOHN FILIPPELLI

Call it a sign of the times, but simple, streamlined and low maintenance have become the buzzwords for today's hottest surface treatments. While consumers love the look of mix-and-match materials and unusual inlays to spruce up countertops and backsplashes, they still seem to be trending toward clean lines and looks that are as functional as they are fashionable, according to designers and fabricators interviewed by *Kitchen & Bath Design News*.

That doesn't mean customization and personalization aren't still high on consumer wish lists. However, function and budget equally important to many consumers, who increasingly are demanding beautiful designs that are not only easy on the eye, but easy to clean and maintain, too.

To that end, heat-, water- and scratch-resistant materials such as polished granite and acrylic solid surfaces are popular choices, with fabricators noting that they are integrating these materials into more and more projects in a variety of interesting configurations.

As far as edge treatments go, today's designs seem to favor elegant curves or simple honed edges.

Still, in some quarters, more elaborate designs prevail, such as the triple waterfall edge design created by Jason Borden, owner of Mesa, AZ-based BB Solid Surface, for his own personal kitchen. Borden lives and works with the motto: "Create an edge that has

never been done before," and his work is testimony to some of the innovative possibilities fabricators can bring to life.

Anna Maria Vona, v.p. of Philadelphia, PA-based Carmana Designs, also favors creative countertop design, citing a recent project which had mosaic tile inlaid in a pattern outlining the major sight lines of the kitchen.

The broad range of materials available today have also created greater color possibilities, with advances in fabricating technology making it easier than ever to combine colors and materials in unique designs and patterns.

"Color combinations are more creative and exciting today," points out Laurel Behning, ASID, CID of Plymouth, MN-based Laurel Behning Interiors, Inc. She adds, "The trend is definitely to mix materials and colors, such as pure quartz products or man-made products, like concrete, metal and glass, with granite, stone, wood and even volcanic ash."

Vona believes that "Consumers now have absolutely overwhelming choices to make, with the addition of glass and metallic inlays. It is our job to help steer them in the direction of appealing choices for their budgets, lifestyles and aesthetics."

On this and the following three pages, *Kitchen & Bath Design News* looks at some unique projects showcasing today's hottest fabrication trends.

Designer Uses Natural Materials to Help Overcome Kitchen Disaster



This kitchen remodel, designed by Philadelphia, PA-based Carmana Designs, features honed black absolute granite countertops with a simple, flat edge that complement the natural and organic feel of the space. *Photo: Barry Halkin*

Asked to soften the blow of a client's nightmare vacation, Carmen Vona and Anna Maria Vona of Philadelphia, PA-based Carmana Designs knew there was only one thing to do: Create a dream kitchen.

Says Anna Maria Vona, v.p. for the company: "The client had an existing SieMatic kitchen that was completely damaged when a water pipe broke while she was on vacation. Water had poured through the walls of her kitchen over a two-week period."

As a result, the entire kitchen had to be ripped apart from ceiling to floor.

For the remodeling project, the client had one very specific request. "She wanted the overall design theme to use completely natural materials wherever possible," Vona reports.

While the type of material was established, how the material was to be used was another issue. Vona explains: "The client insisted on having the black absolute granite with a simple, flat edge that was honed rather than pol-

ished. [Since she is an avid cook], our professional opinion was for the black absolute granite to be polished [to reduce maintenance]."

Vona notes that the wall area where the three convex pull-out pantry cabinets are located had an existing dry wall closet that had a tangle of existing plumbing lines and a fire hose encased in the wall. "The curved pantry doors were fabricated around the closet by building a false cabinet ceiling and then fabricating the doors to look seamless," she explains.

In fact, Vona notes that one door of the three pull-out pantry doors is actually the door to the old closet, which still services water lines for the kitchen.

"The triumph of design and fabrication was a trompe l'oeil effect. No one can tell that one of the pantry doors is the door to a closet," she says.

Accenting the countertops are custom cabinets with stainless steel pulls that create a warm, cohesive look to the space, Vona concludes.