

En-counters of the green kind

NICOLE MCLAWS, SUNMEDIA

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Laminate, butcher block and tile - all have been popular countertop choices over the years, but none offer the eco-minded sensibilities so important to homeowners.

So countertop manufacturers have jumped on the green bandwagon, creating kitchen and bath options that not only look good, but are durable, unique and of course, environmentally friendly.

That's why we asked the experts: What's out there in the world of eco-conscious countertop materials?

"Elements is a truly unique surface, unlike any other option available today," says Mark Hanna, president of Montreal based Leeza Distribution Inc., a North American distributor of premium countertops.

A combination of quartz, epoxy resin and recycled glass from items such as beer bottles, the material is a non-porous option that never requires sealing and is as smooth and solid as natural stone.

"Quartz is one of the hardest minerals found in nature and epoxy is inherently heat- and stain-resistant," Hanna says. "Elements is ideal for the discerning customer who desires a unique eco-friendly product for kitchen countertops, vanities, fireplace surrounds and commercial applications."

And, it's not just available in one hue.

Instead, the low-VOC material offers a range of stylish colours, from bone-coloured Dune, to classic black, to crisp white and contemporary grey.

"Elements is stylishly sleek with a distinctly silky feel that works beautifully with any decor," Hanna says. "From Old World to ultra-modern, it provides a look that is very unique, timeless and clean."

However, those looking for something with pattern needn't fret. Vetrazzo is another green endeavour by the countertop industry, combining recycled glass in a rainbow of colours to create eye-popping work surfaces that are as attractive as they are long-lasting.

Or, there's the ultra-luxurious Concetto, an Icon Stone and Tile product fusing the elegance of semi-precious stones with the usability of a countertop work surface.

"These are not simply rough stones, but hand-selected stones put together to create one piece that can be used in the same manner as you would marble or granite," says president Jean St-Onge.

Like marble and granite, St-Onge says this is a stone product that'll last as long as the rock it's made from, and that's what makes it green. Rather than replace hohum laminate countertops every few years - which, in turn, sends the old laminate to the dump where it'll languish for decades - homeowners can appreciate the look of their Concetto counters for a lifetime.

"We had to show its durability, and we have also been working to establish the category," St-Onge says.

"We want to get it to the point where people say, 'marble, granite and semi-precious stone.'"