



# COUNTERS WITH A CONSCIENCE

Recycled glass, paper and metal are finding new life in kitchen and bathroom surfaces

LISA KADANE  
CALGARY HERALD

Since Blue may be single-handedly responsible for bringing green countertops to Calgary. Last December, the 45-year-old Calgarian was picking up a gift basket at Sunterra Market on Elbow Drive. As he waited for his order he flipped through a home magazine and happened upon an ad for Vetrazzo, a surface material made of recycled glass primarily from bottle depots in California. It was love at first sight — Blue decided he had to incorporate Vetrazzo into the Hillhurst home he was in the middle of custom-building.

"I like the concept of it. I like the fact that it's recycled glass," he says. He also loves its look: almost mosaic in appearance, but polished and smooth like a traditional quartz or granite surface. Blue and his wife wanted something "green" but beautiful; something different, but not over-the-top. Vetrazzo was perfect.

The catch? No one in Calgary carried it. Many phone calls and conversations later, Blue convinced local shop ICON Stone & Tile to cut a slab for him shipped from the Bay Area.

"They ended up becoming the Canadian distributor of it," he says. Naturally, Blue chose Cobalt Skyy with patina, a striking dark blue shade of Vetrazzo made from recycled Skyy Vodka bottles. It looks stunning — and proves its versatility — as a tub surround in the master bathroom, as a vanity-top in the powder room and as the island bar counter in the kitchen.

A year later, Vetrazzo is still far from mainstream — and still on par with exotic granite slabs, price-wise — but it's been joined in Cowtown with a burgeoning number of counter and surface materials made from recycled or sustainable products. It's now possible to install vanities made from recycled paper (Paperstone), counters made from post-industrial metal shavings (Alkemi), or kitchen islands made from sustainably-harvested wood (Windfall Lumber).

Christina Ryan,  
Calgary Herald

**This modern kitchen counter in this Calgary home is a product called Paperstone, made from recycled paper.**



Courtesy, Icon Stone and Tile

A Vetrazzo countertop and, below, a fireplace surround are both features in a show home in Drake Landing, a sustainable-living community in Okotoks.

## FROM GI COUNTERS: Eco products bringing counter revolution

Vetrazzo even has competition: both Icestone and Trinity are other surface brands made from recycled glass and both are available locally. With all the products now on offer, it looks like Calgarians are ready for a counter revolution.

"The response has been really positive," says Jean St-Onge of ICON Stone & Tile, which officially started carrying Vetrazzo in October.

"People are really excited, first of all because it's a green product."

Vetrazzo surfaces contain 85 per cent glass by weight (the other 15 per cent is a cement binding agent that contains no petroleum derivatives) and 100 per cent of the glass comes from recycled sources, such as beer and wine bottles, glass water bottles, old traffic lights or even retired windshields. In addition to being environmentally friendly, it's also esthetically pleasing (different colours of glass have been combined to create a "palette" of choices), and St-Onge says Vetrazzo would sell even if it "was not green at all." It's that unique and beautiful.

Over at Riva's The Eco Store it's much the same.

Co-owner Andrew Mackie says even though customers know the products he carries are green, their first reaction is always to appearance — they either love Icestone because it looks more like quartz, prefer Paperstone for its matted finish and ability to blend into modern interiors, or want a Windfall Lumber butcher



Courtesy, Icon Stone and Tile

block counter for its natural beauty and warmth.

"With any of the products we have in the store, you're not making a sacrifice with function or esthetics," says Mackie. All the surfaces are durable, though with the wood or Paperstone counters scratching them could be a concern (they can be fixed by sanding or buffing, says Mackie).

You are, however, making a sacrifice when it comes to cost.

"We get a lot of people coming into the store saying, 'Wow, this is as much as granite,'" he says, noting that just because it's recycled doesn't mean it's going to be less expensive.

"You're getting more product (the slabs are thicker except for Alkemi, which is the same thickness as granite), a unique product, a more healthy product . . . and you're supporting companies that are trying to do a good thing. Most people are OK with that."

Riva's The Eco Store opened last February and started out carrying Trinity (a recycled glass surface manufactured in Seattle) in addition to other home products such as 100 per cent recycled glass tiles, zero-VOC paints and mattresses made of organic cotton and wool. The store picked up Alkemi

(from Maryland) in the spring, then Icestone (New York) shortly thereafter. Paperstone, out of Hoquiam, Wash., is Riva's latest green counter offering, available since the fall. Even though none of these products are produced in Calgary, all are manufactured in North America, which, from a green perspective, is better than originating overseas, says Mackie.

"It is something you have to care about and want," he says, though he often finds his store is as much an educator as a retailer, and that customers are often "boggled" with the growing variety of recycled, sustainable and non-toxic home products available.

Shaun Loewen, who reps Icestone and Paperstone products in Alberta and supplies The Granite Guys, is buoyed by the general public's interest in going green on tops. As products like Vetrazzo go from being a highlight in people like Vince Blue's home to being "normal," he's confident the price per square foot will drop, as has happened with granite.

Then, the question won't be granite or quartz; rather, Paperstone, bamboo or Trinity?



Photos, Christina Ryan, Calgary Herald  
Vince Blue poses on the Vetrazzo kitchen island in his Calgary home; the surface was made from blue SKYY Vodka bottles.



Blue's Vetrazzo vanity.



Harrison the cat stalks the ice-blue Vetrazzo tub deck at Blue's home.

### Where to find it:

ICON Stone & Tile: 525 36th Ave. S.E., 403-532-3383, iconstonetile.com  
Riva's The Eco Store: 1534 17th Ave. S.W., 403-452-1001, rivasecostore.com

The Granite Guys: 829 Highfield Ave. S.E., 403-243-2007, graniteguys.ca

### Online resources

■ Recycled glass surfaces: vetrazzo.com, trinityglassproducts.com, icesstone.biz

■ Recycled paper: paperstoneproducts.com

■ Sustainably harvested wood: windfalllumber.com

■ Recycled metal scraps (Alkemi): renewedmaterials.com