

'Green' countertops catch on

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FOR HOME RENOS

Many people are looking to "greener" alternatives when it comes time to renovate their homes, and that includes seeking eco-friendly options for new kitchen and bathroom countertops.

A growing number of manufacturers offer products that use recycled materials ranging from reclaimed quartz to glass — even retired traffic lights.

"There seems to be a new market emerging in Calgary: the eco-conscious consumer," says Sophie Belanger, vice-president of marketing with Icon Stone & Tile.

"They're becoming more educated about it, and all the products on the market that are sustainable.

"And there's been an adaptation from manufacturers about what needs to be done."

For example, the Vetrazzo line of countertops is made from 85 per cent recycled glass, providing strong heat, scratch and stain resistance.

"There's no end to recycling glass — glass can be recycled over and over, and it never loses its translucency," says Belanger, noting as a result of using recycled glass, each Vetrazzo countertop has a unique look.

"Vetrazzo recently found decommissioned red traffic lights and has done (colour) mixes with them — they use a lot of stuff that would otherwise end up in landfills."

Denca Cabinets Ltd. worked with Folio Homes, a Calgary-based design company specializing in sustainable homes, to develop the one of the first kitchens to achieve platinum LEED certification.

"Almost every customer wants an environmentally

friendly kitchen," says industrial designer Lisa Wells. "A lot of people will look at recycled content, but the most important thing is transportation.

"You can have an Italian-made countertop with 40-per-cent recycled content, but if the materials are coming from all over the world, who cares?"

Wells says almost as important as what the countertop is made from, is its durability.

"The biggest problem at the local level is what's going into landfills," she says.

As such, even a stainless steel countertop is a good option.

"Most stainless steel countertops are custom-made by sheet-metal workers, so the manufacturing is 100-per-cent local, and (later) you can take it back for recycling," says Wells.

Other examples of companies using recycled materials for countertops include Canadian manufacturer Hanstone and ThinkGlass, which uses post-consumer recycled glass.

CaesarStone is an example of a brand that takes pains to reduce environmental impact, says Belanger.

"They came up with a line made of reclaimed quartz, post-consumer glass and post-consumer mirror," she says.

Yet another is Elements, a surfacing option that provides contemporary, solid colours, yet is once again made from post-consumer recycled glass.

Belanger says consumers are learning that these products, although made from recycled material, are just as durable and scratch- and stain-resistant as countertops made from "virgin" materials.

"The three lines (Vetrazzo, CaesarStone, Elements) are very low-maintenance," Belanger says. "Vetrazzo is as hard as granite, CaesarStone as well, and Elements is a surfac-



Courtesy, Icon Stone & Tile

Countertops made of recycled materials are gaining in popularity for their eco-friendliness and style.

ing material that's been used in chemical labs — you can drop acid on it, it's very resistant. And it doesn't require any sealers."

With LEED certification now available for residences, choosing an eco-friendly countertop is one way to gain LEED points, while helping the environment

by reducing your environmental footprint — something to think about while enjoying your morning cereal or brushing your teeth.