

Important Things to Know when Getting a Countertop

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As a component of owning a home, there are times when it's required (or desired) to invest in upgrading or renovating certain aspects of your property. And one of the rooms that are on the top of list is the kitchen. However, while we all would love to simply gut the whole thing and replace it with our own dreamy designs, it may not be in our budget to do so. So the first thing that people notice when walking into a kitchen and what can completely transform the look and design is the countertop. In this article, I will give a brief checklist of all the important things to know when going through the process of getting a new countertop.

When you begin shopping for a new countertop, an obvious decision factor is money. There are many materials out there and even more colors and designs to choose from. So to narrow it down, you need to decide about how much you are willing to spend. Once you have decided, you can begin the process of picking and choosing what you want and what you can afford. And although replacing a countertop seems like a fairly simple task, there is actually a lot that goes into it.

Generally speaking, when you finally pick out a material and color that you want, the vendor would like to have a few more things decided as well. As part of the fabrication process, cut outs of any kind need to be known, specifically what sink and faucet you have, what type of stove you have (specifically if it is a cook top), and any other custom holes or cutouts that you want. The vendor would also like to know what edge detail you want since some edges require more time to fabricate, and hence, more labor cost. And lastly, if you want a backsplash, what height you want. Backsplashes can be very simple and relatively cheap, or highly custom (wrapping around windows and appliances, electric plug cutouts, full height splashes, window sills, etc.), so it is very important to indicate what height you want and what is on your wall, i.e. tile or drywall, etc.

The last thing to note is that a vendor can offer (if applicable) to remove and dispose of your existing counters and backsplashes. It is important to mention what material is already installed since this may factor in to the price. For instance, granite is more difficult to remove than laminate. So be sure to indicate whether or not you want your existing top and/or backsplashes removed, and what material it is.

Once you have most of these details figured out, it is now time to put down a deposit and begin the process of getting your custom countertop. The first thing a vendor will need is a template. In order to get one, a templater is sent your home to create a physical template which will be used to fabricate your material. There are only two things you need to do to prepare: you **MUST** have your cabinets installed already and your existing counter (if applicable) clean and cleared off. In most cases, a templater will be able to template over your existing countertop. Some cases will make this more difficult. For example, if you have an existing top and backsplash and you are only getting a top with no

backsplash; this means there is almost no room for even the smallest mistake which could have been hidden by the backsplash.

In almost all cases a template is required since this work is custom and requires much attention to detail. To get the desired design, most vendors require a professional templater to make a template. However, there are some cases where the job may be small and simple enough where no template is required. In those cases, the home owner is completely responsible if the fabricated product does not fit. It is highly recommended not to decline a template to try and save a few bucks on the template fee.

When the templater is going over your particular kitchen, it is helpful to go over with him what you envision your new countertop to be. He can also offer suggestions about any support issues if, say, you have a large overhang, or if you wanted any corners rounded off, or if your sink cabinet will fit your new sink. If a cabinet rests on your existing top, you may want to ask about the thickness of the new material compared to your existing top so that we can factor that in when installing the new top. Depending on the size and shape of your kitchen layout, a seam may be required in your countertop. If so, the templater can let you know what options you have for placement of the seam. But be sure to ask if there will be a seam in your top and if it will be visible (some materials require seams but are not visible, making seam placement a moot point). Once the templater collects all this information and confirms with you that this is what you want, then the template is brought back to the shop.

Now that the vendor has the exact dimensions and details of your job, they will go over the original proposal and make any necessary adjustments. If there is a price change, the vendor will go over this with you until you are satisfied and give your permission to continue. Generally speaking, most vendors are not very picky about small changes in the price and template. The only cases where the price could noticeably jump are where you decided to add a vanity top to the price, a full splash, your original kitchen measurements were way off, or something of that nature. But in those cases there is no surprise that the price will change.

After everything is confirmed, it is all sent to the floor to be fabricated. At this point, you cannot change anything. The vendor now orders the amount of material they need and begins the delicate process of fabricating an exact replica of what you want from the information taken at template. While the job is being fabricated, you are given an install date of when the vendor can come install the new countertop. Now all there is to do is wait.

On the day of install, it is very important to have a clear pathway from outside to your kitchen. It is also very important to have your plumbing disconnected. Most vendors do not offer anything related to plumbing, gas, or electric since these are fields of expertise which, if something went wrong, the installer may not know how to fix the problem, nor be certified to do so. When the installer puts in the new countertop, he will also mount the sink, faucet, and (if applicable) the cook top or other appliance. But again, once the installer mounts it, it will be your responsibility to hook everything up. When it comes to the sink, you may

want to ask the installer when to connect the plumbing to the sink since the adhesive attaching the sink and countertop may need time to dry. This is important especially when also attaching a garbage disposal which adds to the weight pulling on the sink.

Once everything is looked over by the installer and yourself, you are now the proud owner of a new and beautiful countertop! If for whatever reason you are not satisfied with the installation, it is important to voice your concern as soon as possible to the vendor so that they can take the appropriate action to resolve any major or minor issues. If your material is covered under warranty, the vendor will register your job. Be sure to ask for the warranty information which the vendor will have on file. But remember, the vendor/fabricator/installer must be certified by the manufacturer of the material for you to be covered under warranty. Lastly, be sure to ask about how to maintain your new counter, especially if annual sealing is required. Generally speaking, as long as you are aware of the dos and don'ts of your particular material, you can expect the counter to last for the duration of the home. So now that you have your new countertop, everything is paid for, and your counter is protected, you can sit back and enjoy your new countertop!

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