

While it is impossible to totally replicate the natural complexities of real stone or marble, modern engineered worktops come very close. Dekton's Avant Garde series recreates luxurious marble while having the benefit of being highly durable, non-porous, and available in a range of thicknesses. Avant Garde in Laurent, from £450 per sq m.

THE
KBB
GUIDE TO

CHOOSING THE RIGHT WORKTOPS

Your kitchen surface is the hardest working part of your space. With so many uses, from dish stacking, breakfast bar, preparation station and chopping, it needs to be able to withstand the lot. Start with the material to find a look that suits not only your space but your lifestyle too >

Words: **Yvette Filer**



Practical and pretty, engineered quartz is a popular choice for work surfaces as the material benefits from the best of both worlds. Many designs achieve a look of marble or concrete, but come without the drawbacks of real stone in terms of wear and maintenance. 5171 Arabello quartz worktop, from \$410 per sq m, Caesarstone.

You've got a vision for your kitchen clear in your mind – the cabinet colours, sociable layout, and those new appliances you've had your eye on for some time. But when it comes to picking a worktop to pull the scheme together, it's not unusual to feel a little overwhelmed. "Choosing a surface should be something to look forward to – a real highlight of anyone's new kitchen journey – but homeowners often tell me they're stuck," says Howard Miller of H Miller Bros. "What material is best? Is it a pain to maintain it? What exactly is composite stone? And that's before you think about how well it complements your kitchen. It's no wonder some people feel they don't know where to start." Your final decision will come down to personal preference, but that's not to say there aren't several elements to consider. Cost, understandably, is the driving force for many of us, particularly when weighed up against practicalities. A worktop is undoubtedly an investment no matter what option you end up going for, so it is important to understand the difference between each type.

Natural materials, such as stone and marble, are luxurious and each slab has unique flecks or veining. While hard-wearing, stone needs care to keep it looking good, specialist installation and is heavy – plus, as a finite resource, these stones come with a significant price tag. To counteract this, many people opt to have a stone or marble on their island with a more affordable – and lower maintenance – surface elsewhere. This approach also works well for defining zones throughout your kitchen. "Consider mixing materials for visual interest and depth," suggests Alex Main, director at The Main Company. "For example, if the worktops are in granite, opt for wood for a breakfast bar or stainless steel near the range cooker or elsewhere. Change the level of the surface where the material switches, if possible, to add clear definition."

Engineered stone worktops are another choice. Made by binding strong crushed stone with adhesives, they often emulate the look of stone or marble, but have additional benefits. Often easier to maintain thanks to being non-porous, materials such as quartz are also very hygienic – an important

factor for those with busy families undertaking plenty of food preparation. "Unlike marble and granite countertops, quartz surfaces help maintain a high level of hygiene," explains Jonathan Stanley, vice president of marketing at Caesarstone UK & EMEA. "They do not soak up foods, liquids, or any other substance that might encourage the growth of harmful bacteria or mildew. This also means they can be wiped clean simply with a clean cloth and antibacterial kitchen spray."

Solid surfaces go one step further, with brands such as Dekton and Corian having created unique composite blends that are not only hard-wearing, heat resistant and hygienic, but can be made bespoke to perfectly fit your kitchen, without any joints or seams. These options are particularly popular if you want to create a contemporary look, as they can also be made to have a very slim profile, unlike natural stone and wood materials. Solid surface worktops will come with additional steps to accommodate for design and installation though, so it is always worth finding out early on if this is a viable option for you both in terms of costs and timescales.

And as we should look for ways to be more eco-conscious, consider environmentally friendly worktop options. "As homeowners are progressively getting more and more focused on sustainability and quality materials in their spaces, they are increasingly looking for attractive yet durable, eco-friendly, and practical surfaces so they can spend more time enjoying their kitchen," says Helen Myers, design director at The Myers Touch. Reclaimed wood, for example, is a great way to add character to your space and with proper maintenance including regular oiling it can last a long time. There are now also innovative materials such as Richlite, which is made using recycled paper compressed with resin to create a durable solid surface – plus look out for recycled glass options and stainless-steel or copper designs that are fully recyclable, too.

When thinking about your worktop, take your time, chat to your designer, and ask what material they'd recommend for your lifestyle. The right choice will ultimately depend on how much cooking you do, your cleaning habits and willingness to care for a material, and how many people use your space. >

5 things to remember...about worktops

1 When it comes to choosing and installing your worktop, ensure you have enough material so joints are away from your sink and appliances. Your fitter should be able to advise on measurements.

2 Look at samples of a material in person before committing. Most showrooms will have a selection for you to see. If you are opting for a real stone, visit the quarry to pick out a particular slab.

3 While engineered worktops can be costly, they allow you to achieve a seamless design. If you have an unusually-shaped kitchen layout and want a contemporary look it may be worth investing into engineered surfaces.

4 Marble is a very heavy material, so make sure your kitchen cabinets are reinforced to withstand the weight. It's also best for these

worktops to be installed during the final stage of your kitchen installation, when the pipework and electricity have been put in place underneath.

5 Make sure you understand how to take care of your worktop to prolong its lifespan. Wood, for example, only needs regular wipe downs with warm soapy water, whereas engineered materials can usually withstand stronger cleaning products.



Here's what caught our features editor's attention this month...

Freshen up

A handheld device that dissolves odours when run over clothes, refreshing them instantly without water, solvents, or detergent? I need this in my life. FreshUp. £249, from Bosch.



On Georgina's RADAR

Large scale

These Flocks white porcelain terrazzo tiles have been given a super-sized boost - and I'm here for it. Piced. £50.40 per sq m, from Porcelain Superstore.



Statement shower

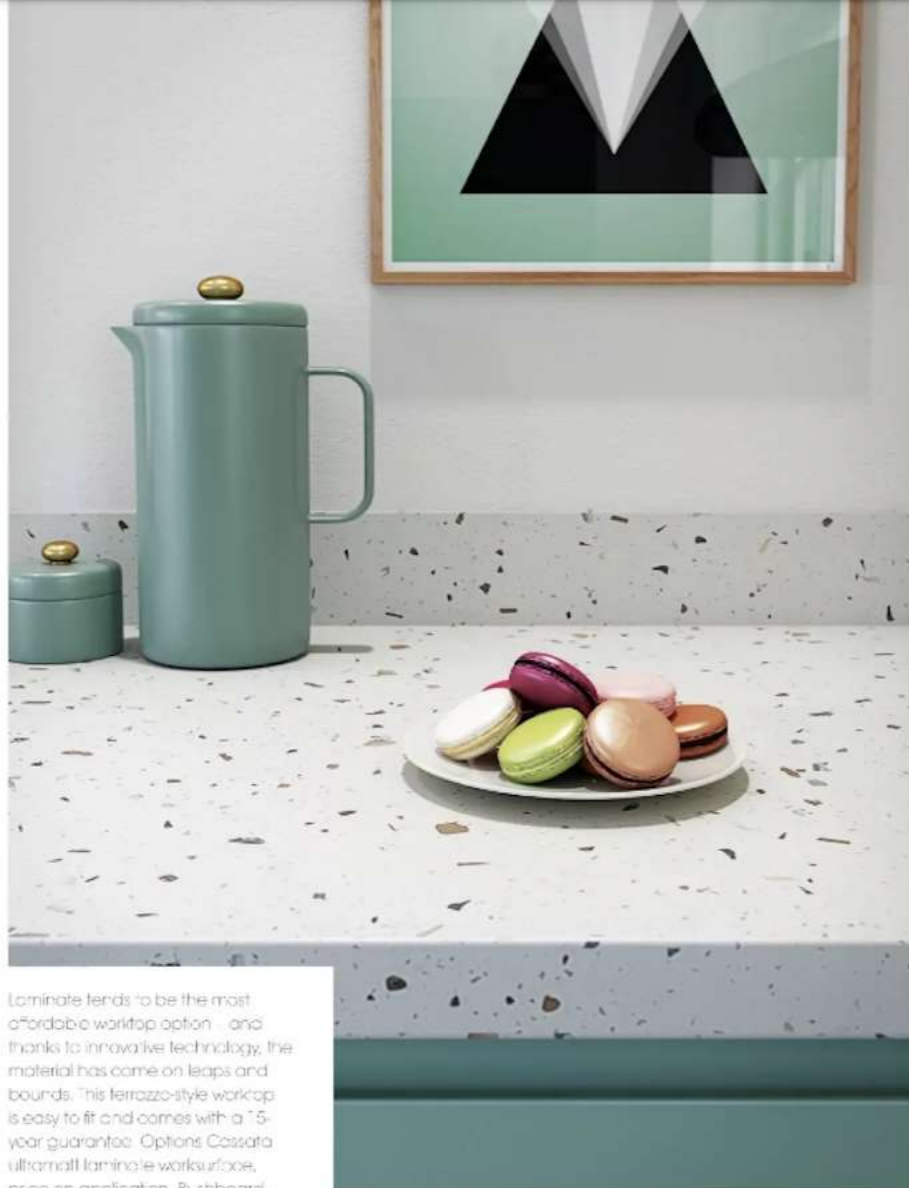
Want a piece with serious wow factor in your bathroom?

Malki's new EauZone Mesh glass shower screen is sure to be a conversation starter. Shown here in silver mesh, prices start from £3481.20.



Cosy carpet

I can really imagine snuggling up on Cosy Coco's Diamonds rug. £396, with an issue of KBB and a steaming cup of tea - can't you?

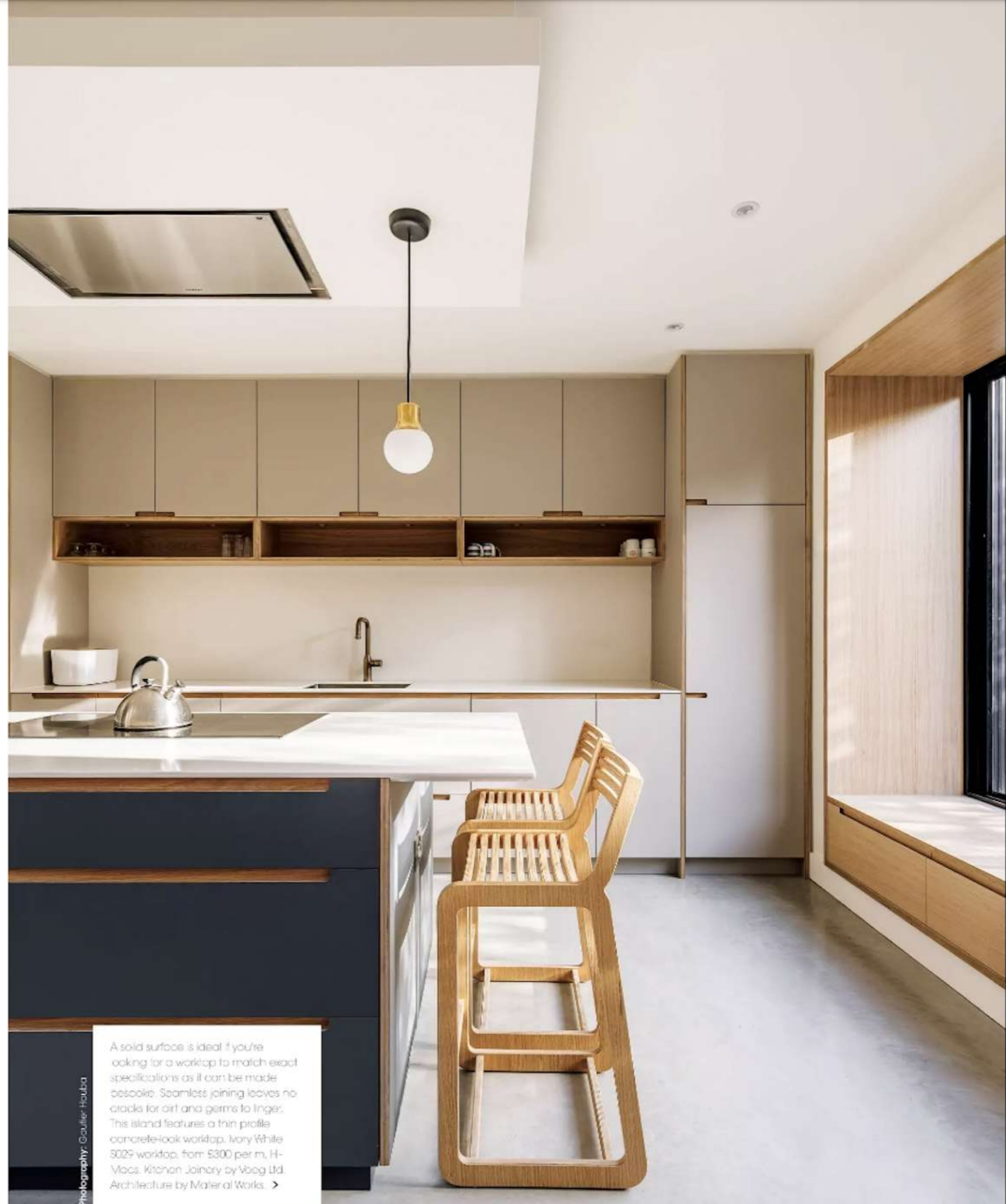


Laminate tends to be the most affordable worktop option - and thanks to innovative technology, the material has come on leaps and bounds. This terrazzo-style worktop is easy to fit and comes with a 15-year guarantee. Options: Cassara ultrathin laminate worktop, price on application. Bushboard.

The worktop on this kitchen island is made from a recycled paper solid surface known as Richline. Available in a number of earthy tones, the shade comes from a combination of the paper's colour and the deep amber of the resin. FSC-certified recycled paper solid surface worktop, from £790 per sq m. Richline. Kitchen by Sheffield Sustainable Kitchens.



Photography: Dug Wickham



A solid surface is ideal if you're looking for a worktop to match exact specifications as it can be made bespoke. Seamless joining leaves no cracks for dirt and germs to linger. This island features a thin profile concrete-look worktop, Ivory White 5029 worktop, from £300 per m, H-Macs. Kitchen Joinery by Vobeg Ltd. Architecture by Material Works. >

Photography: Gauthier Hauba



Though the most costly, pure stone worktops are a cut above so may be a worthy investment. A 100% natural option, these types of surfaces are scratch, water, and stain resistant, and incredibly heat resistant. This is the Lundhs Antique worktop, from £970 per sq m, from Lundhs Real Stone.



Solid acrylic surfaces have come a long way, opening up the opportunity for bespoke design. Here, Staron's Tempest Genesis solid surface, from £350 per sq m, has been made into a curved design for an ultra-modern look. The material is available in more than 150 colours and natural-looking finishes.



Brass or copper worktops will make a statement and are known to have antimicrobial and antibacterial properties. Be aware that they will develop a natural patina over time and require frequent polishing and maintenance. Sustainable Kitchens' Bespoke Shaker cabinetry starts from £30,000.

A highly veined marble can make a wonderful design statement on a central island. There are many colours, and looks to choose from – you may even be able to visit a quarry to pick a slab out yourself. But while marble looks luxurious, it can be prone to staining so will need careful maintenance. White Beauty marble, from £560 per sq m, Cullifords. [KBB](#)

