

## TRIB ARTICLE COMPARING COUNTER TOP STYLES

### Quartz challenging granite in kitchen, bath designs

By [Bob Karlovits](#), PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW  
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#### Challenging granite

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Choosing a countertop is a decision that is not necessarily to be taken for granite. While suppliers such as Jeffrey Backus at Manor House Kitchen and Bath in Jeannette and Brent Hugas from Cranberry-based Splash see granite as "still the boss" when it comes to countertop selections, they also see quartz giving it a stony stare. In a report on countertop design, the New Jersey-based National Kitchen and Bath Association said granite still is the clear-cut leader, but quartz is recommended as a choice "by nearly three quarters of NKBA kitchen designers."

Popularity varies, but even when granite is king, the growth of quartz is obvious. Backus said he sells 95 percent granite countertops to 5 percent quartz, but has seen "quartz growing in the past few years." Nancy Sudsina from Leggett Kitchens in Lawrenceville and Wexford said she sells 60 percent of her tops in quartz and 40 percent in granite while five years ago granite was capturing 70 percent.

Lorenzo Marquez, vice president of marketing for the Texas company that produces Silestone quartz, said the company has seen "double-digit" increases each year since 2006-07. Stacia Smith from the Minnesota-based Cambria, a quartz firm that installed a suite in PNC Park on the North Shore this year, said all of its markets nationwide have shown increases over 2009.

Sudsina also reported results that sometimes point to other developments. Some clients still want to snare a special role for their kitchen or bath and go with even-more-expensive granite to do so. That can lead to kitchen counters that top \$15,000. It is possible to do one for \$8,000 in less-costly granite and \$5,000 for quartz.

The two are close in terms of price, the experts said. It is reasonable to think of spending \$100 a square foot for both, but cutting, edging and other installation points can add to a job.

Robert Vertes, vice president of sales and marketing at Vangura Surfacing Products in North Huntingdon, issued a warning on cheap, thin granite and granite veneers that could be susceptible to cracking.

The choice between granite and quartz provides "a real fork in the road," said JB Redd, a Pittsburgh district manager for Home Depot.

Color is one of the biggest aspects that makes quartz countertops popular, retailers, designers and producers all agreed.

Quartz products are made from a natural mineral, but because they are engineered using resins to create slabs, the end color and style is controllable and systematic. Granite on the other hand, is a stone, often with veining and seams that can produce a countertop that is somewhat different from what is seen in a showroom or even a slab collection.

In an effort to provide countertops that "combine the look of granite or stone with the durability of granite," Cambria in September released 21 new colors, bringing their total to 83, Smith said. Silestone has 65 colors right now and by April 2011 will have 79, Marquez said.

All of this is done to provide countertops that fit any use and show how quartz can be "reinvented anytime for any use or need," he said.

Smith said some of their colors are designed to mimic natural stone, but others are "a new look," such as a jeweled line or an onyx-like series that can be back-lighted.

Backus, Vertes and other experts all agreed color is a vital element in any countertop choice. Vertes said he tells clients to "choose the color you want first. You're going to have to live with it."

While the irregularity -- sometimes unpredictability -- of granite can be a problem, it also can be a blessing. Backus admits it is great to be able to pick a quartz design and get exactly what was expected.

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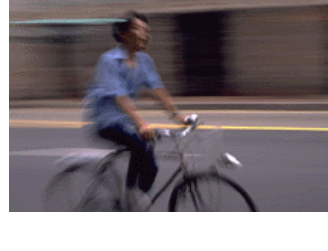
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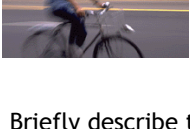
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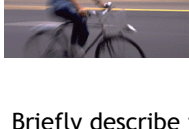
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