



Metals are hot. Purists of classic and country styles may well shudder at the cold look and touch of stainless steel, evocative of antiseptic operating rooms and production factories. For those who love to be at the forefront of cutting-edge trends, however, stainless steel, literally the coolest material in town at the moment, propels them halfway into the space age. Apart from its clean and contemporary look, stainless steel holds considerable advantages as a countertop material. It is non-porous and hence anti-bacterial, and resistant to dents and corrosion. Its neutral colour allows it to blend into any colour scheme, and being a reflective material, it brings more light into a dark bathroom. Brushed matte metal (often veneers) is appearing everywhere in interiors nowadays, and in the bathroom,

has moved away from being limited to accessories and fittings to covering large expanses of walls, floors and counters.

The orange-red glow of copper, which lit up the hair of Titian's models, enlivened the walls of traditional French country kitchens. In the new millennium, with the constant cry for 'metallics, metallics, metallics' in interiors, copper has once again become *tres chic*. Copper countertops are made of copper sheeting wrapped round a substrate and then laminated in place with adhesive and vacuum press technology. The bright tint of copper can be maintained with a copper cleaner or left to oxidise naturally into a natural, mono-chromatic patina. Copper has intrinsic properties which inhibit the growth of mould and

bacteria, and while a soft material, is, thanks to the substrate composition, resistant to chips and dents. Its pliable nature permits intricate shaping.

Concrete in the bathroom? But yes indeed, in true postmodern 'anything goes' fashion, this functional building material has come into the home and on the countertop as a bold design statement. The material, composed of a mixture of cement, sand and binders and reinforced by wire mesh, is shaped by pouring or packing into moulds. The finish may be either smooth and flat, mottled and textured, or even reveal beneath its surface layers of rock and sand. Aesthetically, concrete exudes an earthy, hand-made charm akin to that of hand-thrown pottery. Practically, its greatest advantage lies perhaps in its versatility, which allows it to form virtually limitless custom designs. Concrete countertops can come in any shape and size, can span a wide distance without requiring joints, and thanks to colour aggregates, present a whole palette of colours, shades and combinations for the choosing. For embellishment, inlays such as glass, metallics and even semi-precious stones can be added for a wonderfully eclectic and personalised look. ■

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Curved concrete vanity top from Cheng Design and created by Mark Cohen. This exquisite Nick Glacier glass countertop with matching vessel sink from Alchemy, is fashioned by the process of fusing and slumping. Sculpted stainless steel countertop lavatory by Diamond Spas Inc. Silestone unit from Cosentino.

Opposite page, top, left to right
Glass countertop and washbasin by Vitra. The tinted glass and wood of Villeroy & Boch's Central Line bathroom furniture range complements its Loop & Friends vessel washbowls.

Opposite page, bottom, left to right
Dark wood washstand from Vitra. This blue-tiled, wall-mounted countertop doesn't just act as a platform for Villeroy & Boch's Colorline vessel basins, it is itself a focal piece.