

counter culture

A GUIDE TO CHOOSING THE RIGHT
COUNTERTOP FOR YOUR KITCHEN

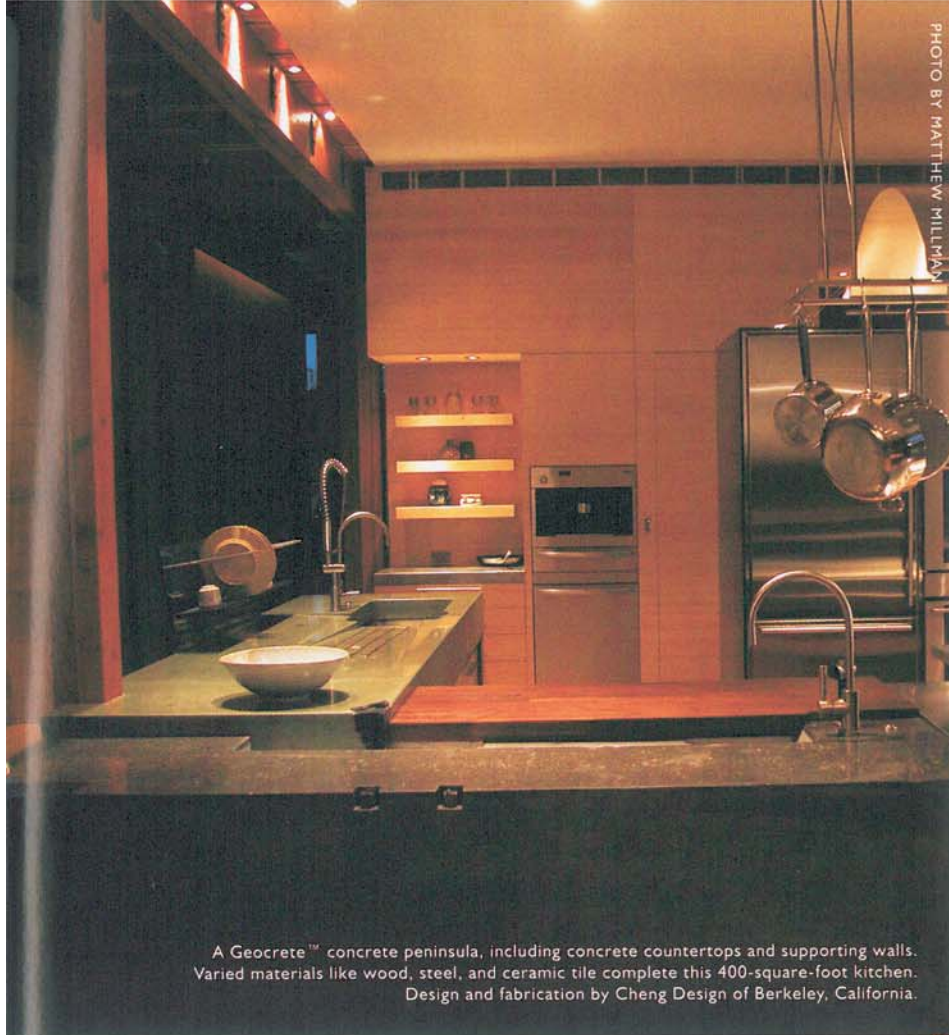
BY RICHARD LANDON AND CLANCY DONLIN

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The world of kitchen design will never be simple again. Why? Because savvy consumers now demand more choices. They want styles and materials that reflect their personal lifestyle rather than simply mimicking every other house in the neighborhood. This demand has led to one of the most exciting trends in kitchen design—the combining of different materials and styles.

Today there are a number of different countertop choices available, and the list keeps growing as new materials are developed. This wide array of products means that homeowners can mix and match materials, colors, and textures to create unique looks that fit their own needs.

Countertop materials tend to fall into groups, and each group has characteristics that you might or might not find desirable. To help you determine which countertop materials are best for your kitchen remodel, we've broken down the pros and cons of the most popular groups.



A Geocrete™ concrete peninsula, including concrete countertops and supporting walls. Varied materials like wood, steel, and ceramic tile complete this 400-square-foot kitchen. Design and fabrication by Cheng Design of Berkeley, California.

◀ CONCRETE

Handmade and able to be mixed in just about any color, concrete is becoming a popular material for countertops. The hairline cracks and fissures it can acquire over the years often add rather than detract to its beauty.

PROS

- Available in almost any color
- Creates a unique look when combined with wood and stone
- Can be molded in almost any form
- Can add or embed items such as trivets, inlays, and soap dishes
- Can create unique surface textures with techniques such as sandblasting, etching, staining, and polishing.

CONS

- Porous; requires periodic sealing
- Visible seam
- Can look industrial when no color or texture is added
- Can crack and change color (although some think this adds interest)
- May require additional reinforcement
- Acidic foods/liquids can etch the surface if left over long periods of time

TIP: Cutting directly on the surface can damage its sealant.

WOOD/BUTCHER BLOCK ▶

Recent studies have found that wood cutting boards and countertops are not as unsanitary as previously believed, especially when the wood is periodically treated with the strong new sealants that are available. This, coupled with the fact that wood adds warmth and charm to the decor, has helped bring butcher-block countertops back from extinction.

PROS

- Scratches can be sanded
- Won't dull knife blades
- Easy to clean

CONS

- Scratches easily/shows knife blades
- Requires periodic oiling and sealing
- Can darken if subjected to standing water for long periods

TIP: Buy from established fabricators who use resin-impregnated sealants. Consider using thin strands of wood in a crisscrossing pattern (butcher block) to help prevent warping.

Richard Landon's (CKD, CBD) portfolio includes over thirty published projects, three cooking schools, and numerous awards. You can find out more about his design projects at www.spaceplanner.com. He also owns Knob, Pull & Handle in Bellevue, a great resource for distinctive bathware, locksets, and cabinet pulls.

Clancy Donlin is a kitchen designer at International Kitchens in Bellevue. He designed his first kitchen in 1986 and has been fascinated with the process ever since. For the past two years, Clancy has served as a board member for the Puget Sound Chapter of the NKBA, where he was involved in a number of industry committees. To reach Clancy at International Kitchens, call 425.641.5363.

