

# Get look of real stone without maintenance

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At Home

A new Stone Age is dawning in today's kitchens and bathrooms. Countertops and backsplashes made with engineered, man-made or manufactured stone have a natural look without the maintenance of real stone.

Also called e-stone or quartz countertops, engineered stone is a manufactured surface comprising more than 90 percent quartz. The remaining ingredients include high-performance polymers, resins and pigments that are colorized to mimic natural stone or concrete surfaces.

Caesarstone introduced engineered stone to the American market in 1999. Although Caesarstone developed and launched the countertop product in 1987, today, other manufacturers — including Silestone, Zodiaq and Cambria — also market their own brands of engineered stone.

Engineered stone is counter-revolutionary for those who want the look of stone without the sealing maintenance that comes with a natural surface. Jeff Lewis, a Los Angeles-based designer and star of Bravo TV's "Flipping Out," doesn't skip engineered stones when selecting countertops for clients.

"(Engineered stone) is a material that blends into both modern and transitional designs," he says. "With the consistency of Caesarstone, I don't have to have to fly to a location just to visit a local stone yard. If the design calls for a dark Belgian Moon color, then I simply specify (that) to my clients in Florida, New York or Missouri, and have the peace of mind knowing that the design will come together exact-



Caesarstone Quartz Surfaces photos

White engineered stone is a top-seller in Caesarstone's quartz surfaces. Featured here is the Linen pattern that helps create a clean, minimalist kitchen environment.

ly as I envision it."

The uniform appearance of engineered stone allows homeowners to easily match color lots, since a manufactured quartz countertop does not have the movement or variance of natural stone, says Ed Rogers, director of business development of Caesarstone, based in Van Nuys, Calif.

"A quartz countertop has the translucence of stone without the flaws of natural stone," Rogers says. "Engineered stone removes any concern consumers may have about pitting and fissures that occur naturally in real stone."

Engineered stone is non-porous, waterproof, and stain-, heat- and scratch-resistant. The surface of e-stone is smooth and can have a shiny or honed appearance. Because it lacks surface holes, engineered stone does not support the growth of bacteria and doesn't require sealing as natural stone does.

While it can be as expensive as a builder's-grade natural granite countertop, Rogers says engineered stone is the fastest growing product in the countertop market.

"More people have become aware of quartz countertops, especially when they're remodeling and doing a kitchen or bath upgrade," he says. "Engineered stone also complements other materials — such as stainless steel, wood and ceramic tile."

Rogers says an upgrade in countertop surfaces is an easy way to uplift a kitchen or bathroom. Without fabrication and installation, expect to pay \$10 to \$20 and up per square foot for engineered stone, compared to entry-level ooba-tooba granite, which can run nearly \$30 per

square foot. Engineered stone slab sizes vary, but a standard American size tends to be 56½ inches wide by 120 inches long by 1¼ inches thick.

Engineered stone is most often fabricated in the same way granite is, using a wet saw with a diamond-tipped blade. Because it is a manufactured product, engineered stone colors match better than natural stone, making grout joints less conspicuous. Rogers says grout joints

can be glued together with an epoxy that leaves a 1/16-inch gap between slabs. Custom edges like bullnoses, ogees and premium bevels can give engineered stone countertops added flair. "Depending on the fabrication of a countertop's edge, it can look traditional or ultramodern," Rogers says.

While a basic granite countertop has a palette of about a dozen colors from which to choose, Rogers says Caesarstone offers 45 different consistent colorings, ranging from apple green to black. "Our top-selling engineered stone color for countertops is white, polished to a satin finish," he says. "Many homeowners also choose black countertops, polished to a satin finish, as well. A matte or honed finish on a black countertop will show everything, including fingerprints."

Rogers has a white engineered stone countertop in his own kitchen and appreciates how easy it is to clean. "A spilled glass of red wine on engineered stone will wipe up easily with a nonabrasive soap and water," he says. "Unlike some stone countertops, engineered stone won't absorb the stain, because it is nonporous and doesn't require sealing like a natural stone."

In the event of damage, a professional can polish or fill in chips to repair an engineered stone countertop. Caesarstone offers a lifetime warranty for countertops installed in residential homes, and many companies who manufacture engineered stone offer at least a 10-year transferable warranty.



Engineered stone is counter-revolutionary for those who want the look of stone, without the sealing maintenance and possible fissures that come with a natural surface. Caesarstone's Belgian Moon patterned countertops are made primarily of quartz, creating an ultramodern feel.

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