

# Homeowners' Guide to GRANITE KITCHEN WORKTOPS



# Homeowners' Guide to GRANITE KITCHEN WORKTOPS

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Bianco Antico



Imperial White



Ivory Brown

**key to  
GRANITE NAMES  
on front cover**



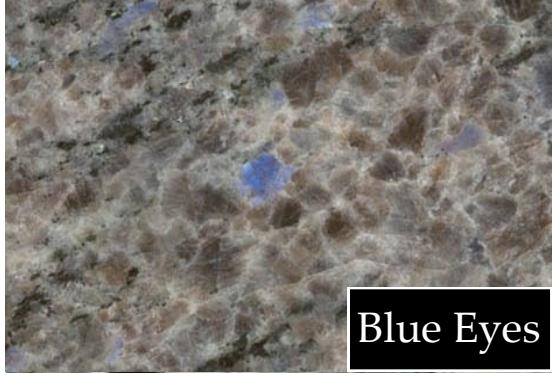
Verde Marinace



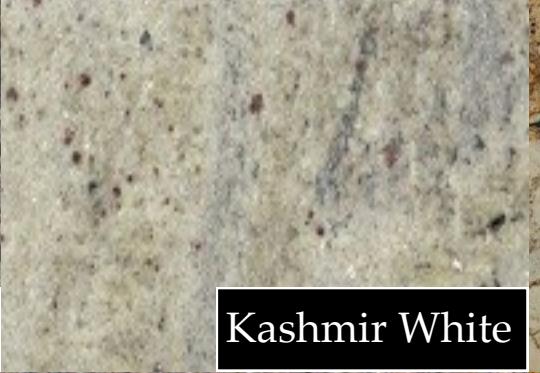
Ivory Raw



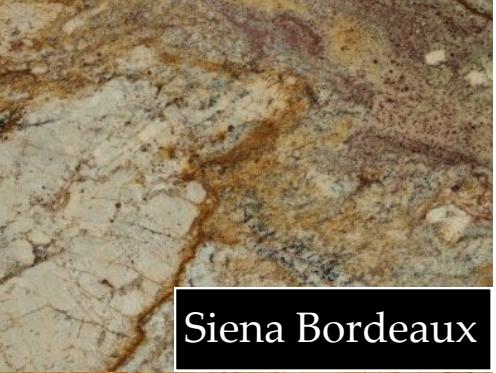
Kashmir Gold



Blue Eyes



Kashmir White



Siena Bordeaux



Verde Foresta



Tropical Brown



Nacarado



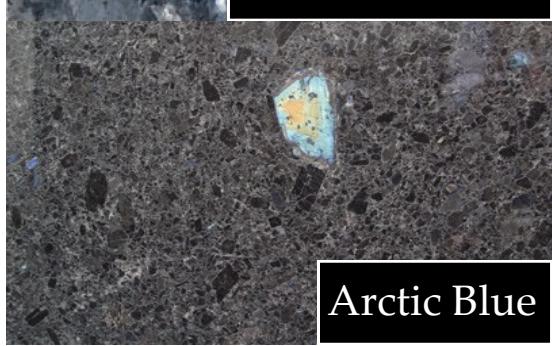
Blue Pearl Extra



Bianco Cristal



Giallo Veneziano



Arctic Blue



Star Galaxy



Imperial Red

## **GAS FITTING AND ALTERATIONS**

Never allow any person (including yourself) other than an engineer on the Gas Safe Register to do anything involving gas appliances or gas pipes .

The Gas Safe Register is the official gas registration body for the United Kingdom, Isle of Man and Guernsey, appointed by the relevant Health and Safety Authority for each area. By law all gas engineers must be on the Gas Safe Register.

The Gas Safe Register replaced CORGI as the gas registration body in Great Britain and Isle of Man on 1 April 2009 and Northern Ireland and Guernsey on 1 April 2010.

You can use the gas safe register to check if your engineer is registered and to find gas engineers in your locality: [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)

## **ELECTRICITY**

When worktops are being fitted or replaced, electrical work is often required. All electrical work should be carried out by qualified and competent electricians. A good way to find such an electrician is via NICEIC: [www.niceic.com](http://www.niceic.com)

## **IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER**

The information and knowledge contained within this publication has been acquired by the author over a period of many years working in domestic refurbishment and kitchen design and fitting. It is offered in good faith but neither the publisher nor author accept any liability in any form whatsoever for decisions, actions, designs, choices of materials, construction or anything else done by any reader or other person based on or influenced by anything in this book. The content of this book is the sincerely held opinion of the author based upon his experience and is not represented as verifiable or factual.

## **INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR**

### **MOST PEOPLE LOVE GRANITE WORKTOPS**

Most people love granite worktops in the kitchen. Homeowners love granite because it is hard, clean and long-lasting. It looks good and feels good. It gives the impression of permanence, longevity and being well established.

Granite is one of the few materials that is fashionable, of the moment, classical and traditional all at the same time.

Granite has undergone a revolution in terms of price and availability in the past couple of decades. Whereas it was once a luxury and "high end" product, the preserve of so-called "designer kitchens", it has now been democratised. It is now the people's product. It is widely available. Granite is everywhere and the price has tumbled. It is now within reach of a vast number of homeowners.

Granite is no longer an exclusive product for the wealthy. It is fast becoming a standard product in many households.

The most popular granite for kitchen worktops is polished black. However black is not the only colour available for granite. This book contains images of more than 100 different granites in a wide range of colours, some plain and some with veining or patterns.

Granite countertops also come in different finishes apart from the traditional polished finish with which most people are familiar.

This book has been written by a professional working in kitchen design and refurbishment as well as house and flat renovation in Central and North London for the past 17 years.

The author's day-to-day work involves the problems and questions that homeowners face perhaps once every ten or twenty years when they are getting a new kitchen, bathroom or other home improvement.

The trade knowledge, trade secrets and experience of the author, hard won during those 17 years, are now being made available to readers who want a new granite kitchen worktop.

There are many mistakes awaiting the unwary when getting a granite worktop either in an entirely new kitchen or when just changing the old worktop for a new, granite one. The information, advice and know-how in this book, carefully arranged in easily accessible sections, makes choosing, buying and fitting a granite worktop easier and safer.

It might even save you money, with advice on different ways in which granite can be sourced and purchased. Some people will pay more and some will pay less for the identical granite kitchen worktop.

This book can help you be among those who pay less, rather than more, for your granite kitchen worktop. Almost everybody wants to get something cheaper, at a lower price, without any reduction in quality, if at all possible. This book explains how that can be done by homeowners with regard to granite worktops and countertops using some basic trade knowledge.

The book also explains both the advantages and disadvantages of a granite kitchen worktop.

The book explains how easy it is to arrange for a granite worktop to be fitted but also alerts the unwary to what can go wrong. Because things can go wrong when granite is being fitted. Possessing this foreknowledge can be greatly to your benefit and avoid disruption and stress at home.

The author believes that once readers understand the mistakes that homeowners - and inexperienced granite fitters - can make, there is much less chance of those mistakes being repeated.

Armed with this trade knowledge on fitting granite worktops, readers will be able to get themselves a wonderful granite kitchen worktop with less risk of an easily avoidable mistake being made in their home.

Readers of this book have the advantage of being able to benefit from the experience of others.

The author has learned many lessons from 17 years successfully designing new kitchens, managing the fitting of new kitchens and undertaking many other aspects of home improvement from loft conversions and extensions to full refurbishments.

The first and most important lesson contributing to a successful project in your home is that the success depends NOT UPON HOW MUCH MONEY IS SPENT by the householder but by HOW MUCH TIME IS DEVOTED TO THE PROJECT.

Planning the project, working on the design, choosing the materials, getting the right fitters, using the right techniques and tools, supervising the site work, ensuring there is a good guarantee: it is a blend of time from the client and time from whoever is the project manager or designer that shapes the outcome, not how much money is spent on the fittings.

A good finish comes from time spent in the planning stages and time spent ensuring a careful execution. And for that time to be well-spent it is essential to have information and trade know-how readily available.

The Homeowners' Guide to GRANITE KITCHEN WORKTOPS provides trade knowledge, know-how and information to householders without any need for readers to have any prior or specialist knowledge.

The Homeowners' Guide to GRANITE KITCHEN WORKTOPS will help you choose, buy and get a granite kitchen worktop fitted that will be good value, good looking and be a credit to you and your home.

The author will welcome comments, questions  
and suggestions from readers

They will be considered for inclusion in the next edition,  
without of course publishing the contributor's  
name and home address

Please send your comments, questions and suggestions  
to the author, care of Fidelity Books

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## **GRANITE WORKTOPS**

### **POSITIVE POINTS**

#### **Rock hard and durable**

Granite is rock hard: it is probably the toughest and strongest material in the kitchen. Even among various natural stones it is exceptionally tough. It is at the opposite end of the spectrum to marble and limestone for example: they are soft, porous and scratch easily (some versions can even be scratched with a finger nail). While granite is not impossible to damage, you have to do something pretty bad to it in order to damage it.

#### **Natural material**

Many people like granite because it is a natural material. It is a piece of rock, hewn from the ground, sliced, polished and placed in the home. There is a real pleasure in owning, seeing, touching and using natural stone in the home.

#### **Variation**

There is a wide range of granites giving a large number of different colours, patterns and veins. Even within one type of granite, a slab can be chosen whose veining is totally different from another slab of the same type. For those seeking an interesting, attractive and possibly unique worktop, granite provides a rich source of material. At the same time, there are granites which are almost uniform in colour and pattern and give a visually calm and uncluttered appearance.

#### **Quality**

Granite has a feeling of substance and quality. It raises the level of the kitchen by virtue of its appearance. There is a substantial difference between the appearance of a granite worktop and, for example, a laminate worktop

## **Cutting and finishing options**

Granite can be cut, ground and finished in a wide variety of ways to give interesting and attractive finishes.

### **Low maintenance**

Granite is at the opposite end of the spectrum for maintenance to a wooden worktop. While householders have to take care of wood, ensure it is kept dry, regularly oil it, take care not to stain it, granite can be largely ignored.

As a general rule of thumb, you can get on with your life and forget all about a granite worktop.

Apart from not cutting or chopping directly on the granite, there are very few rules. If you do cut bread or vegetables directly on the granite worktop, then of course a sharp knife will probably scratch the granite.

However, even if the granite is scratched, does it really matter? Some people will want to keep the granite looking perfect. Others might not care so much and be prepared to have one area for cutting on. It is a personal decision and your kitchen, so you can do what you want.

### **Working directly on the granite**

For those who like to make pastry and bread or who like to work dough, you can work directly on the granite worktop. Flour can be sprinkled directly on the granite and then pastry, dough etc worked directly on the countertop. Keeping it clean is of course your responsibility, but the granite surface is excellent for many culinary operations.

## **GRANITE WORKTOPS**

### **NEGATIVE POINTS**

#### **Price**

For some, the price of a granite worktop is prohibitive or they do not wish to spend so much on a kitchen worktop. A budget laminate worktop, fitted on a DIY basis by a householder, can cost about 5% of the price of a granite worktop fitted by granite specialists. A high quality laminate worktop fitted by a carpenter or competent kitchen fitter can cost about 25% of a granite worktop.

#### **Colour**

Some people do not like the colour or pattern of granite. They do not want a large slab of black stone, or any other coloured stone. They will dislike all the wild, disorganised and chaotic veins and patterns. Some people react against granite and natural stone and they see it as simply something they absolutely dislike and would never want.

#### **Traditional**

Some people see granite as old-fashioned. They do not want a traditional kitchen, traditional fittings or traditional materials. They want something instead that is modern, innovative and forward-looking. They want to look to the future, not the past. They feel that granite pulls them backwards. They want to surround themselves with materials that are of the moment or of the future.

There are many alternatives to granite that fulfil the desire for a modern or futuristic material. There is of course no “right” or “wrong” in this sense: making a home is very personal and each householder has the luxury of choosing their own materials, designs and styles. Many people love granite—but there is also a smaller number of people who really dislike it.

## COLOURS, PATTERNS and VEINS

Many granites have a constantly-repeating pattern with a single dominant colour, such as Blue Pearl, Emerald Pearl, Baltic Brown etc.

The most popular granite of all, polished black, has a uniform colour without any pattern or veining. Polished black is the only granite with this uniform colour. The same granite, when given a matt finish instead of polished, emerges as a deep, dark grey. It is the polishing which changes it from this deep, dark grey to black. In both polished and matt finishes, the worktop has a uniform finish and colour, but it is only really black in the polished version.

There is one variation of polished black that is also popular, often called Galaxy Black, which is black granite with silver or golden mineral particles mixed in it. This gives a sparkly appearance.

Some granites have veining, but a pattern that is not uniform. This means streaks and swirls that weave and wind across the surface of the stone. If you choose one of these granites, such as Kashmir White, you could get a worktop looking totally different to any sample you previously saw because of the wild variation in its veining.

If you choose a granite with veins, either you take a risk on what you will end up with, or you go to the granite cutter and discuss how your particular worktop is going to be cut from the larger slab. In addition, you can also select the slab of granite from which your worktop will be cut.

More information on choosing a particular slab and how your worktop is cut from that slab is found later in this book (**put in cross reference**).

It is important for householders to be aware of what happens if you choose a granite worktop based on a small sample in a kitchen or retail showroom. If you choose polished or matt black, Galaxy Black or one of the granites with a regular, repeating pattern (eg Blue Pearl), then you can be reasonably sure what your worktop will end up looking like.

However if you choose a granite with veining or a variegated or wild pattern, then the small sample can be very different to what ends up in your kitchen. This does not mean better or worse that the sample, but different to the sample.

## **FISSURES and CRACKS**

Fissures are small holes in the surface of granite. These are naturally occurring and not a result of somebody chipping the surface. They are generally quite small, a few millimetres, although in theory they can be longer. They do not appear often, but they can be present in any and all granite worktops.

Fissures are not the same as cracks. Fissures do not represent any damage to the granite and are not weak points or an indication of future problems. All granite worktops can and often do have small fissures and, unless you are searching for them, you will probably never notice them.

Part of the finishing process by the granite technicians is the filling of fissures with a hard material that is colour-matched to the granite.

A crack is very different to a fissure. A crack means that the granite has physically separated on each side and is damaged. A granite worktop should never be supplied or fitted with cracks. If a worktop is being fitted with a crack, it should be rejected by the householder.

Reputable granite fitters will not supply granite that is cracked. The cracking might have occurred at some point in transit, with the larger slab being poorly handled and cracking. Or it might have occurred during the cutting, polishing or delivery to site, with the granite dropped or hit.

However it happened, a good granite supplier will not deliver and fit a cracked worktop. The same cannot be said for less reputable dealers, or if you are getting an unbelievable bargain. If cut-price fitters supply a cracked worktop, it could be that the extra-low price is entirely because they are trying to dispose of otherwise-worthless cracked granite.

If you see a crack, always reject the worktop. The real problem with cracks, apart from how they reduce the quality of the appearance, is that the crack can spread. It can get longer and longer and the worktop can break and separate.

A good fitter will never leave a cracked worktop on site. A bad fitter might claim the crack is a fissure in order to evade responsibility. A close look and common sense will let you know if it is a crack or fissure.

## GRANITE NAMES

Unfortunately, there is no standard or agreed list of names for granite. Within the European Union there is now such widespread standardisation of names and products, ranging from sausages to cucumbers, that it comes as a surprise to many customers that there is no standard name for the many types of granite.

There are approximately 3,000 granite names (or possibly more: nobody has ever compiled a comprehensive list). However, while there are probably not 3,000 different types of granite, it could be legitimately argued that there are 3,000 variations. Each granite will have many variations, from quarry to quarry and country to country.

Some retail shops and showrooms invent their own granite names to make it difficult for customers to compare their prices with those of other shops. If you cannot find the product with the same name elsewhere, then it is difficult to compare prices on a like-for-like basis.

Granite is also not a uniform product. It is a natural, made of stone, and varies from quarry to quarry and even, over time, within each quarry. Therefore, even within one type of granite, there will be so many variations that each supplier can be justified in giving their particular version their own name.

This means that the purchaser must exercise caution and not rely on the name of a granite to ensure that a particular one will be supplied. Each retailer or supplier will use a name, but purchasers must make sure for themselves what the actual stone is that will be supplied under that name.

The granite trade has a general list of names which most companies will generally follow. It is based upon goodwill and a rough approximation of translations from the languages of the many countries in which granite quarries are based.

There are many grandiose names. There are many exotic names. There are very few humble names!

From a legal point of view, once you enter a contract to purchase granite of a particular name, the householder must bear in mind that the granite being supplied is the granite slab or sample agreed between the householder and the supplier. There is no legally agreed specification of which granite is applicable to which name.

## **WHITE GRANITE**

Some people want a white worktop. If you want a pure, uniform white worktop, then you cannot have it in granite. Granite in pure white does not exist. The only pure, even, uniform colour for granite is the polished black worktop. There is no white equivalent in granite.

For those who really want a white worktop, there are two main options: stone composite and solid surface. More information on these is set out below.

For those interested in why you cannot have a pure white granite worktop, it is because of how granite is formed in nature.

Granite consists of a mixture of minerals and the balance of that mixture determines the final colour and pattern.

White granite exists as a background colour, which means the presence of feldspar (which makes opaque white) and quartz (the milky white colour). However these minerals do not occur alone in granite. There are small or large pieces of amphibole, which appear darker or black.

As granite is always a mixture of minerals, it is impossible to have a uniform, even, pure white finish. There are some granite names which might suggest they have a white finish (eg Alaska White, Bianco Romano, Kashmir White etc) but a quick google will show you that they are very far from a uniform, even white.

If you want a pure white worktop, the two most common options are as follows:

### **Stone Composite (“Quartz”)**

Stone composite is often called “Quartz” in the retail trade. It is easily available from almost every kitchen retailer and showroom. It is stone that has been crushed into powder and then re-cast in a resin with colouring agents. It produces a very hard worktop with many qualities similar to granite but one major difference: colour control.

Quartz worktops are available in pure white and many other uniform, even colours. If you want a particular colour without any natural patterns and veins or many of the other characteristics of granite, then quartz is the answer. It is however not as hard or durable as granite. It is also man-made and does not have the same natural feel as real stone.

## **Solid Surface**

Solid surface is the generic name for a worktop made of a composite material that was first invented and made by the giant chemical company DuPont in 1967. After its patent expired, many other companies began to make and sell similar products. It is made mainly from acrylic, epoxy or polyester resin with powdered marble, bauxite and coloured pigments.

Many shop counters are made from solid surface material. It is also extensively used in dental surgeries and hospitals. It is hygienic and has a seamless finish, meaning less opportunity for germs and bacteria to hide.

The most well-known brand names for solid surface kitchen worktops are Corian (the original DuPont material), LG Hi-Macs, Marlan, Meganite and Krion among many others. Some of the large building and retail warehouse stores, such as B&Q, are now also selling their own version of solid surface kitchen worktops.

A pure, even white is available as a solid surface kitchen countertop. However, this is a completely man-made material and has a plastic-like feel to it. It is about as far as it is possible to get from granite, which is a natural stone hewn from the ground. Solid surface appeals to some people, but not to others. However if you really want a shiny, sparkly and spectacular pure white worktop, solid surface is the way to go!

## **FINISHES**

### **Polished**

Polished is the most popular finish to granite. It gives a smooth, cool, glass or mirror-like surface that is resistant to finger prints and staining. It is rightly popular and is the classic finish for granite.

A polished finish on granite should not be confused with the application of household polish. Polishing of natural stone means rubbing it down over an extended period to produce a smooth, glossy finish.

### **Matt**

Matt finish is increasingly popular and gives a finish that is clearly different to polished. Some people want the matt appearance. Generally, only black granite is finished in matt: it gives a dark blue/grey finish when it is matt. However users should be careful: it is more prone to marking when finished in matt.

A matt finish is produced in the same way as a polished finish, in that it is rubbed down, but for matt the rubbing down stops sooner, before the matt finish turns to gloss/polished.

### **Leather effect**

Leather effect is a finish that leaves a smooth, leather-like texture on the surface of the granite. It is a type of finish chosen by those who want something different and unusual.

## SINKS AND DRAINERS

**Sink images are in Gallery 3**

### **UNDERMOUNTED**

Undermounted sinks are particularly suitable for granite worktops. An undermounted sink consists of a bowl which is fitted to the underside of the worktop. A hole is cut for the bowl, with the inside, visible edge of the hole polished.

Undermounted sinks are probably the most popular choice for granite worktops, for two reasons.

The first is visual. You actually see the visually attractive and aesthetically-pleasing granite surface instead of an inset sink and drainer (see below). The inset sink and drainer covers a large surface area: by removing this and having an undermounted sink, you see more of the granite worktop. This is visually pleasing.

The second reason is spatial. With an undermounted sink, the area adjacent to the sink is granite and is available for multiple uses. If there is an inset sink, this area is covered by the stainless steel drainer and that part of the granite worktop is lost. However without the stainless steel inset drainer, more of the granite worktop remains exposed and is available to be used for any purpose, as per the rest of the granite worktop.

Undermounted sinks can be a single bowl, one-and-a-half bowls or double bowls. Some householders prefer twin bowls if they have enough space in their kitchen: that is, two separate bowls with a small gap between them.

Most undermounted sinks are made from stainless steel. However there is a version in highly polished white ceramic that looks very good and some manufacturers do produce coloured undermounted sinks.

It is conventional to have a set of drainer grooves cut into the granite adjacent to one side of the sink. This is done by the same people that cut the granite. It means that wet dishes etc can be placed on the worktop near the drainer grooves and water can easily drain or be wiped into the sink.

Some householders prefer two sets of drainer grooves: one either side of the sink. Others want no drainer grooves at all. This is a personal decision for each householder, based on their personal preferences.

## BELFAST

The Belfast is a white ceramic sink which is extra deep and is the most popular alternative to undermounted sinks in granite worktops.

Belfast sinks are generally chosen by those who want a more traditional finish in their kitchen. Some people also prefer the Belfast sink because it is deeper and in some ways more practical than a more modern stainless steel sink.

The Belfast sink is normally rectangular and very heavy. It cannot be mounted to the underside of the worktop due to its weight. Instead, it sits on a base unit manufactured so that the top of the sink either meets the underside of the worktop or goes above the worktop, depending upon how the householder wants it fitted.

In most cases, the Belfast sink will finish underneath the worktop and be visible from the front. The worktop is then cut with a small overhang on each side and the rear (see images in Gallery 3).

The alternative is to have the Belfast sink fitted so that its edges are higher than the worktop, with the worktop cut to meet the edges of the sink. Some people prefer this, but the disadvantage is that it is difficult to wipe water down directly from the worktop into the sink.

Belfast sinks are generally used in traditional or country-style kitchens but can also be fitted in modern-style kitchens. Some manufacturers produce a modern-style of Belfast sink that fits well in a granite worktop in a modern kitchen.

The overflow and waste can be at the rear of the Belfast sink or there are some available with the overflow and waste on the side. There are also twin Belfast sinks available (ie two matching bowls) and a stainless steel Belfast sink.

There is either no drainer with the Belfast sink or drainer grooves can be cut into the worktop in the same way that they are made for undermounted sinks described on the previous page.

## BELFAST v BUTLER SINKS

The names BELFAST and BUTLER appear to be freely used and interchanged to describe the same type of sink. Technically, or rather historically, there is a difference between the Belfast and Butler sinks, but there is little agreement on the origin of those differences.

The theory is that the Butler sink originated in London as a sink for the butler to wash glasses in the pantry. Glasses were allowed to sit next to the sink to dry, with water draining into the sink. It was relatively shallow and had no overflow.

However, in Belfast, another design emerged in the 18th century that was deeper and had an overflow built in.

The theory, or urban legend, is that free-flowing water was more readily available in Belfast, where it rained a lot and there was a relatively smaller population than London and therefore less demand for water. By way of contrast, due to population pressure, there was less water available in London. Therefore the London Butler sink was more shallow and there was no overflow.

There is disagreement over whether the difference between the two designs (the London Butler sink being more shallow and without overflow) was actually due to the availability of free-flowing water. It has been pointed out that there was no real shortage of free-flowing water in London in the 18th and first half of the 19th century. The problem was pollution in and disease spread by the water, rather than its availability.

Thus the modern Belfast sink: deeper than standard sinks and with an overflow. However, today, the names Belfast and Butler are freely used to mean the same item by many retailers, designers and fitters.

## **INSET SINK**

An inset or top-mounted sink consists of a bowl and drainer, in most cases made from stainless steel. A hole is cut in the worktop and the sink/drainer is fitted from above.

Some people really like the inset sink with its integral drainer and will fit one even on a granite worktop. There is no technical reason why you cannot have an inset sink on a granite worktop. The decision is for each householder. It is a matter of personal preference.

Inset sinks come in a very wide variety of sizes and options. There can be one bowl, one-and-a-half or two. There can be a drainer on one side or on both sides. They can also be made from white ceramic instead of stainless steel or in a wide variety of other coloured materials.

## **HOW TO BUY A GRANITE WORKTOP**

### **How to buy**

There are four main ways in which to buy a granite worktop. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. The four are:

- Buying from a kitchen showroom
- Buying from a granite cutter/fitter
- Buying online
- Buying a complete slab of granite and arranging for a cutter/fitter to cut and fit it

### **Kitchen showroom**

There are many kitchen showrooms. They range in size from a small design studio or high street shop to the large super-stores in edge-of-town retail parks. All kitchen showrooms will be experienced in designing and supplying a wide range of kitchen worktops, including granite.

The advantage of using a kitchen showroom is that they will handle the entire process for you, provide a guarantee and have a wide range of popular granite samples on display.

The value of the shop handling the process and providing the guarantee should not be underestimated. Many householders do not feel confident about a contract direct with the technical cutting and fitting company: this is something they will not have done before and risking a few thousand pounds on something new is not always a wise course of action.

The guarantee is also important. If you buy from a high street shop, then they are responsible. You can go in and complain and make them do the job properly if there are any problems. Whereas chasing after a technical company if there are problems, or even worse a website, can be an exercise in futility for many.

The high street shops gives the householder confidence and security. It will probably cost a little more than the other methods below (except for the final method), but in exchange the householder does get the benefits of the kitchen showroom handling the entire job and giving the guarantee.

### **Granite cutter/fitter**

The kitchen showroom does not of course do the actual handling and cutting of the granite. That requires heavy machinery and a workshop. The kitchen showroom will pay a company of granite cutters to do the cutting.

In theory and sometimes in practice, a householder will go direct to the granite cutters. The householder pays them direct and makes a saving compared to paying for the worktop via the kitchen showroom.

The advantage of going direct to the granite cutter is that you will - probably - pay less than going to a kitchen showroom. The disadvantage is that not all granite cutters provide the full range of services that you will require. This is where the problems start, unless you happen, by chance, to find very good granite cutters who will do everything for you that the kitchen showroom would otherwise organise.

There are five steps to buying a granite worktop. When you approach a company of granite cutters direct, all these points must be met.

#### Supply of granite slab

Who is going to supply the actual slab of granite from which your worktop will be cut?

Good granite cutters are experts in handling and cutting granite, but they are generally not holders of granite stock. Nor do most of them have a showroom or a retail display of different granites which they can readily obtain. It is a matter of negotiation between you and them to work out which granites they can easily obtain and for you to choose from them.

#### Making templates

Who is going to make the templates on site (ie in your actual kitchen)?

Granite worktops are generally not made according to simple dimensions or taken from an architect's or designer's plans. Actual, physical templates should be made on site, in the kitchen. This is done after the kitchen base units have been fitted and the splashback prepared.

The splashback should not be tiled (or glass fitted) but the wall should be prepared before the worktop templates are made. The splashback tiles or glazing is then fitted after the worktop has been fitted.

So the question remains, who is going to make the templates? If the granite cutter provides a templating service, then all is well. However if they do not make templates, then you will have to find a builder or other technician to make them.

However, there now arises a potential problem. If the templates are made other than by the granite cutters, who is responsible if the worktop does not fit properly? The granite cutters will say the fault lies with whoever made the templates. But the template maker will say the fault is not theirs, but the granite cutters. This is exactly why many people go to a kitchen showroom to organise a granite worktop: if things do not work out well, the showroom is clearly 100% responsible.

1 Granite importer yard—choose slab

Find a cutter and fitter to collect and cut it

2 Or go to cutter and see what slabs they have (they will buy from importers)

3 Or website: bargains can be obtained, but so too can problems occur. If you go for the cheapest, then might get a standardized or low level of service and not end up with the finish you actually wanted. If you pay the lowest price possible, then you must expect the lowest level of service and lowest quality of product.

4 or go to kitchen showroom—big chain or one-off

More expensive, but trade knowledge and manage the job

Dealing with cutters and fitters can be problematic if, for example, not used to dealing with tradespeople

But if confident, can deal direct

Impossible—DIY. Do not even think about it. Of course, as soon as say impossible, somebody will say they have done it. But reality is, granite is incredibly heavy. You just cannot pick up the slabs and handle them safely. Nor cut them. If you are keen DIY person, then you can buy the correct tools and learn how to cut and fit laminate and wood worktops. But physically impossible to handle, cut and fit granite as DIY project. A lifetime of back problems add/or a painful period while broken foot and hand bones recover awaits anybody foolish enough to attempt DIY granite worktop cutting and fitting.<sup>5</sup>

5 get the worktop as part of total kitchen package. But beware...no technical or contact reason to buy worktop at same time as kitchen. It is template and fitted after base units. No need to choose until base units are in. Even if you think you know what you want, I always advise clients to wait until base units in, then get samples on site and decide. At that stage you can get the kitchen shop to do it, or somebody else. No technical reason why has to be same supplier or same contractor.

### Choose slab

Big kitchen means more than one slab

Choose where cut from slab

Consider the cutting pattern

Check for fissures and cracks

Fissures natural, cracks bad (cheating, cheap, caveat emptor, too good to be true)

Ask for off-cut as chopping board (or other use if you want matching granite?)

### What are components to final price?

Another factor affecting the total price to be paid by a householder is whether the supplier has to buy a complete slab and then cut and sell only a part of it, leaving much left over. If you want a worktop that involves less than half a complete slab, you will get a better price by finding a supplier who has that particular granite in stock or is willing to charge you only for the amount you use and not charge for the area left over.

## FITTING

Never think that you can buy, cut and fit granite yourself: you cannot. It is too heavy to handle and needs special machines (as well as a lot of experience) to cut it.

There are conventionally two ways to get a granite worktop.

The first is to find a company specialising in granite worktops. They can most easily be found on the internet. Find one local to you and contact them, send them the plan of your kitchen and get a price for the granite worktop you want.

It would also be advisable to ask for a sample of the granite you have chosen, to make sure that what they are supplying is actually what you want. You cannot rely on the name of a granite to ensure it has a particular appearance because granite names are not regulated or defined – each supplier can call their granites whatever they like.

The alternative is to visit a kitchen showroom local to you where they have many samples of granite on display. You can choose the granite you want from the shop's samples. The kitchen showroom will then organise the worktop for you, using a local contractor as above, but the showroom would normally be responsible and sort out all the problems.

When it comes to the fitting of granite worktops, there are three stages after you have accepted a quotation from a shop or worktop supplier:

**First**, the granite fitters make a site visit and take measurements or make their own template.

If it is an existing kitchen, some fitters want the existing worktop removed before making templates. Other fitters can take measurements with the old worktop in place. You should check this with the fitters before you enter into a contract.

If it is a new kitchen, the base units have to be fitted and the splashback wall plastered (but not tiled) before the worktop template plates are made.

**Second**, the granite fitters go back to their premises and cut the granite to size and cut out holes for sinks and hobs. This involves heavy machinery: granite slabs cannot be cut on site, in your home.

**Third**, from five days to two weeks after the templating, the granite fitters return to deliver and fit the worktop. The fitting can take anything from one hour to half a day. If there is an undermounted sink, the fitters will normally fix the sink to the underside of the worktop.

## Inspect after fitting

Look for cracks. Reputable will never leave countertop fitted with cracks—but how do you know? Check for cracks...

This is clearly a crack, but according to householder who posted it online, fitter said it was a fissure and therefore natural...



## **MAINTENANCE**

Granite is low-maintenance. It needs very little care and attention and in this it is the opposite of wooden worktops.

### **Do...**

Wipe it down daily with warm soapy water and dry with a clean cloth

### **Do not...**

Put hot pans directly onto the granite surface. Use a trivet to keep the heat from having direct contact with the granite, otherwise the surface will discolour.

Put anything on the worktop which could have sand or grit on it. If pans, cups or plates etc have been in contact with sand or grit, wash them before putting them on the worktop or the granite can be scratched.

Allow foods that are likely to stain or corrode the granite be left in direct contact with the worktop (eg wet tea bags, curry, saffron, red wine, vinegar, fruit juice etc).

Use abrasive cleaners such as Ajax: they will scratch the surface and make it dull.

Use chemical cleaning agents containing ammonia: they will make the surface dull.

Use any other cleaning chemicals or products unless they are specifically labelled as suitable for natural stone or granite worktops and for food use.

## **REPAIRS**

Granite is very strong and robust, but it can be damaged and sometimes – not always – the damage can be repaired.

### **DIY or home-repair kits**

There are various kits and compounds on sale to the public which claim to repair chips in granite worktops. These might or might not be successful and might endure or might fall off in a few weeks, months or years. If you want to try one of these it is best to be sceptical and then you will not be disappointed if it fails.

### **Professional repairs**

Granite fitters use compounds and colouring agents to join and fill granite worktops. If you have a chip, you can contact local granite worktop fitters and ask them to repair chips with their fillers and colouring agents.

A larger repair would be to cut out a damage section and replace it with a new one. This can only be done by professional granite worktop fitters. There will probably not be an exact match with the new stone so you will have to consider carefully where to make the cut for the replacement piece.

### **Re-polishing the worktop**

A polished granite worktop should have a high-gloss, shining finish. That polished finish can fade over time: for example as a result of harsh chemicals or abrasive cleaners. You can ask a professional granite fitter if they can bring a hand-held polishing machine to your home to re-finish the surface to restore the polished effect. This is not always possible but sometimes the polished finish can be restored.

## **DIMENSIONS**

Granite worktops are normally 30mm high and made from solid stone.

There is a thinner version, 20mm, also available at a lower price. However not all granites are available in 20mm. You should think carefully before fitting a 20mm granite worktop: it could look good, but it could also look like it should be 30mm and you did not realise it was going to be as it is.

Edges higher than 30mm can be constructed by fitting a tall piece of stone on the front edge. This then gives the appearance of the worktop being, for example, 50mm high.

## **FITTING A GRANITE WORKTOP IN A NEW KITCHEN**

Many people think they have to choose a kitchen worktop when a new kitchen is being designed. This is wrong. There is no need to choose – or at least make a final decision – on the worktop until the kitchen's base units have been fitted.

The notion that the worktop has to be chosen when the kitchen is being designed is encouraged by some kitchen designers and kitchen shops because they want to make the sale for the worktop at the same time as the sale for the rest of the kitchen. They are worried that if they do not include the worktop in the kitchen plan and sale, they might later lose the sale for the worktop if the client buys it elsewhere.

It is not just kitchen sales staff who encourage clients to choose the worktop prematurely. When people are doing the kitchen design themselves, before buying a kitchen from one of the many suppliers, they often feel it is necessary to include the worktop in the design.

However, there is no need to decide on a worktop until after the kitchen units have been fitted. It is at this stage that you will see your kitchen taking shape in reality. You can better understand the impact that the worktop will have.

Until the kitchen base and tower units are in place, no actual fitting work takes place with the worktop. There is no need to decide upon, order or buy the worktop before this stage.

If you want a granite worktop, the fitters will come on site to measure for the template after the base units have been fitted (see “FITTING” on page 30). It is at this stage that you have to make the final decision and confirm the choice of granite.

The benefit of choosing the worktop after the base units have been fitted is that you can see the kitchen in reality and more clearly understand how the worktop will look, fit and appear. You make an informed choice for the worktop after you have seen your new kitchen on site and in reality.

It normally takes about five days from templating to delivery and fitting of a granite worktop, but some fitters can take up to two weeks. During this time, the fitting work for the kitchen is normally being completed. However a temporary worktop made from plywood can also be fitted if there is going to be a delay.

## **FITTING A GRANITE WORKTOP IN AN EXISTING KITCHEN**

The issues faced by householders who want to change the worktop in an existing kitchen are totally different to those choosing a worktop for a new kitchen.

Many people want to upgrade or renovate an existing kitchen by changing the worktop. Granite is a popular choice because this is one way of improving a kitchen without going to the trouble and expense of changing the entire kitchen. A new worktop can have a big impact on an existing kitchen.

The following issues should be considered before you buy a new granite worktop in an existing kitchen. If you do not consider these points in advance, you might find the same issues arise later, when you will be faced with additional and unwanted expenditure.

### **Increase in weight**

If you are changing from a laminate to granite worktop, there will be a substantial increase in weight. You must not assume that the base units can support the weight of granite: they might, or they might not. You will have to check the base units themselves to see how strong they are and consult the granite worktop supplier.

### **Support the granite**

Granite needs to be well supported or it will crack and break.. This particularly applies to overhangs (for example at breakfast bars) and unsupported areas (for example over appliances such as dishwashers and washing machines). You can discuss with the granite fitters how to make sure the granite is adequately supported throughout.

### **Change in height — impact on splashback**

Check to see if your existing kitchen has tiles (or other material) on the splashback wall (ie tiles or other items on the wall, fitted directly top of the worktop). It is conventional to tile the wall so that tiles sit on the top of the worktop.

If you choose a granite worktop that is higher than the existing one, there will be problems fitting it if the splashback wall is tiled. In reality, it means you will have to remove the splashback tiles, plaster the wall and then fit new tiles.

If you choose a granite worktop that is lower than the existing, there will be a gap between the top of the worktop and the splashback tiles. Depending upon the size of the gap, this can be filled with silicone or a border, or the wall can be re-tiled as above.

## **Change in height — impact on gas hob**

If you have a gas hob, this is often fitted with a copper gas pipe that has no flexibility. If the new worktop is higher or lower, then you will need a registered Gas Safe engineer to adjust the pipework for the new height of the hob (see page 4).

### **Removal and re-fitting of gas hob**

Regardless of whether there is a change in height, if you have a gas hob, you will need a registered Gas Safe engineer to make two visits: first to remove the gas hob, then later to return and re-fit it. Nobody other than a registered Gas Safe engineer can do any work on gas pipes and gas fitting (see page 4).

### **Sink and tap**

Changing the worktop gives you the opportunity to change the sink and tap. The new worktop will have to be cut for a sink and tap so from a fitting point of view, it does not matter if the old sink and tap or new ones are fitted.

If there is a change in height of the worktop, or a new sink is fitted, then some changes might be required to the water and waste pipes below the sink. You should check this, or consult your plumber or fitter, before making a final decision and buying the new sink and tap to make sure they will all fit.

### **Potential damage**

One of the risks when changing a kitchen worktop without making an entirely new kitchen is that the process of removal and re-fitting can cause damage.

The most common damage and high risk area is where the splashback tiles, or other splashback material, sit on the top edge of the kitchen worktop. What can happen is that as the worktop is pulled away from the wall at the rear, it pulls the bottom row of tiles off the wall.

Alternatively, as the worktop is pulled away from the rear wall, tiles in the splashback can crack or chip. Whoever is removing the worktop has to take care to ensure that the worktop is free from the tiles before starting to slide out the worktop.

Care has to be taken to avoid other damage when taking out the existing worktop and bring in the new one. Most fitters are accustomed to removing worktops as part of a job involving disposing of an entire kitchen. Therefore additional care has to be taken in all parts of the removal and replacement process to avoid damage.

Whatever happens, there is always the risk of damage when a kitchen worktop is being replaced in an existing kitchen.

**GALLERY 1**

**GRANITE IMAGES**

There are many thousands of different granites available. For every type of granite, there are sometimes many variations. Granite is a natural material, cut from the ground: except for the polished and matt black, almost every piece will appear unique in appearance.

To make sense of the thousands of variations, this is a gallery of the 77 most popular types of granite, using the most common names.

The granites are arranged in six groups, according to their approximate price.

The lowest prices are in group 1 and the highest prices are in group 6.

## PRICE GROUP 1



Azul Noche



Azul Platino



Baltic Brown



Bianco Sardo



Bianco Crystal



Black Pearl



Bross Blue



Carioca Gold

## PRICE GROUP 1



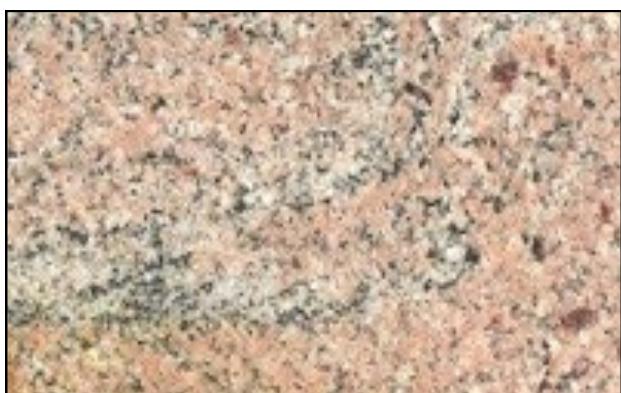
Coffee Brown



Gibli



Icon Brown



Indian Juparana



Indian Mahogany



Ivory Raw



Juparana Colombo

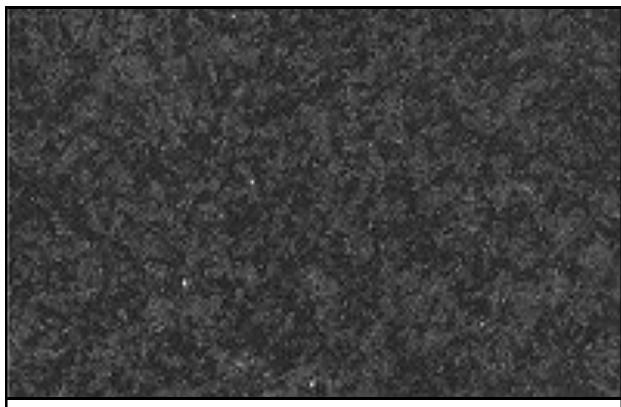


Kashmir White

## PRICE GROUP 1



Kuppam Green



Nero Impala



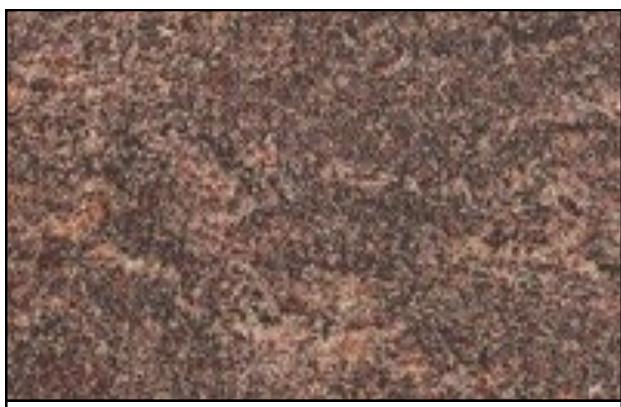
Nero San Marco



Orissa Blue



Ouro Barzil



Paradiso Bash



Paradiso Classic



Red Multi-Colour

**PRICE GROUP 1**



Regal Black



Romantic Blue



Rosa Limbara



Santa Cecilia



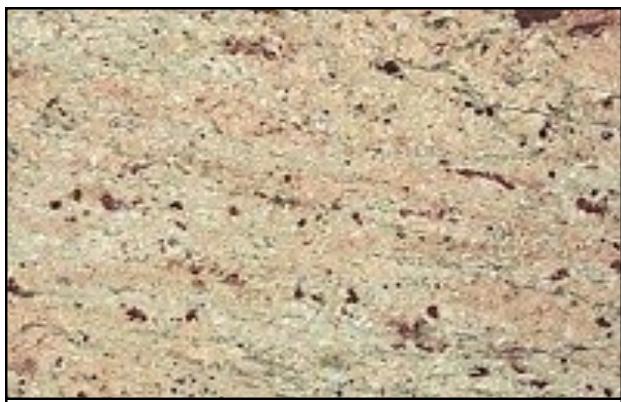
Saphire Blue



Saphire Brown



Seaweed Green

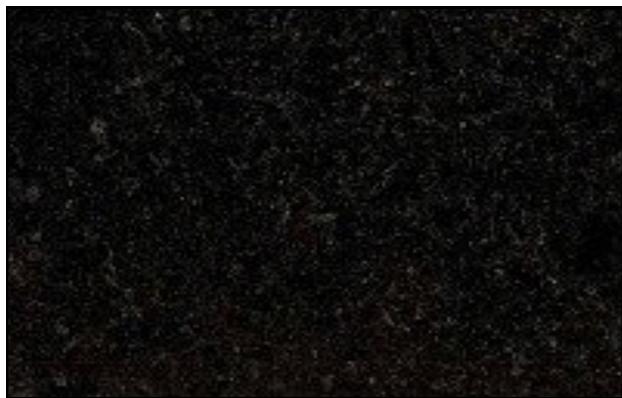


Shiva Gold

**PRICE GROUP 1**



Steel Grey



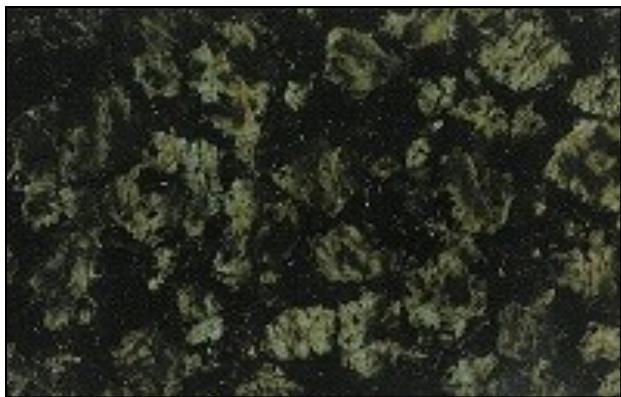
Saint Gabriel



Tan Brown



Uba Tuba



Verde Magic

## PRICE GROUP 2



Absolute Black



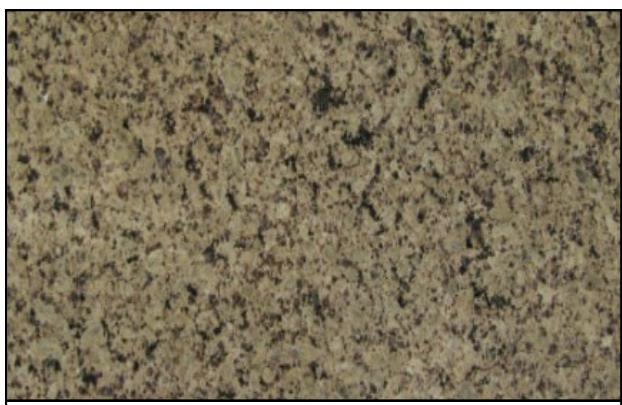
Angola Black



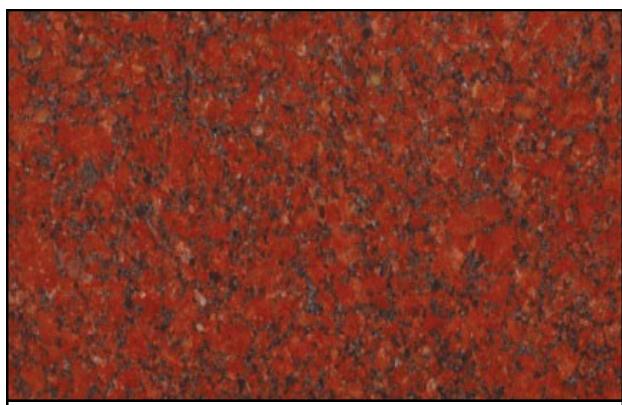
Galaxy Black



Emerald Black



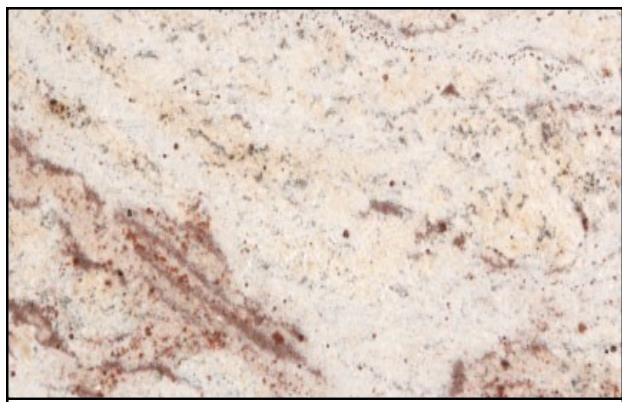
Golden Leaf



Imperial Red

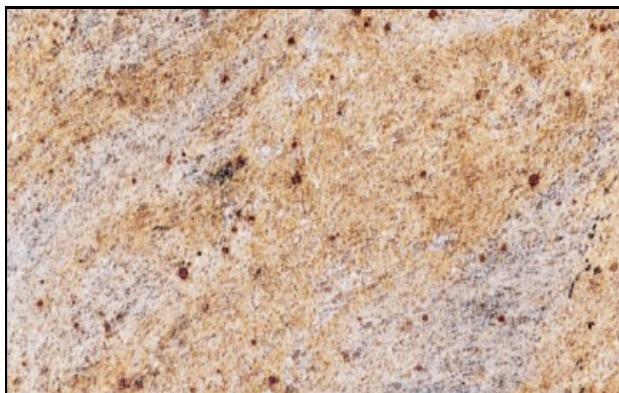


Indian Black



Ivory Brown

## PRICE GROUP 2



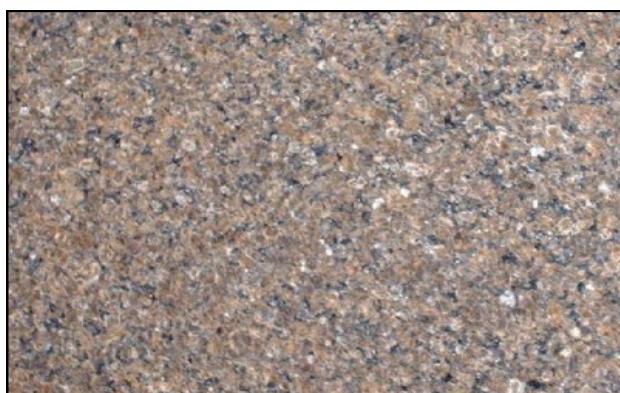
Kashmir Gold



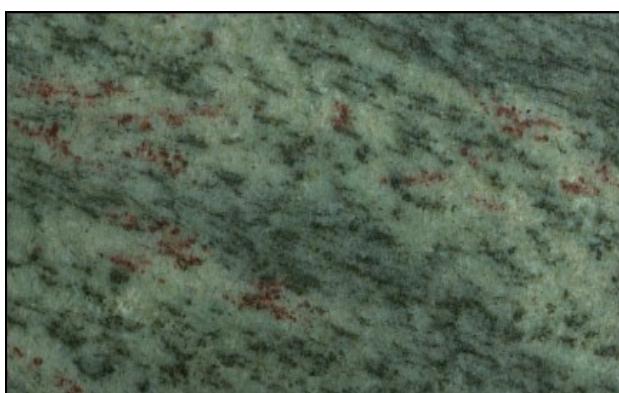
Lady Dream



Red Brazil



Tropical Brown



Tropical Green



Violetta

### PRICE GROUP 3



Angola Gold



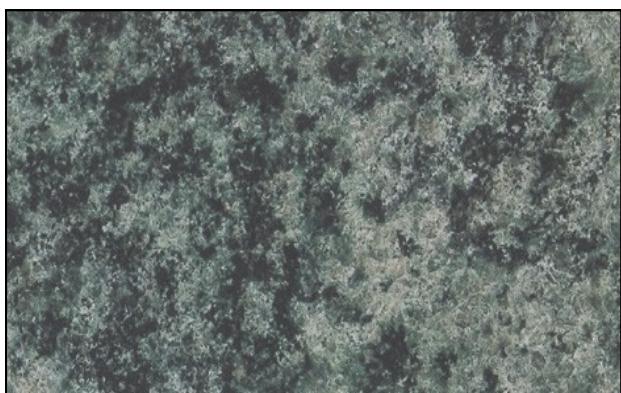
Giallo Veneziano



Imperial White



Nero Zimbabwe



Olive Green



Verde Foresta



Verde Olive



Volga Blue

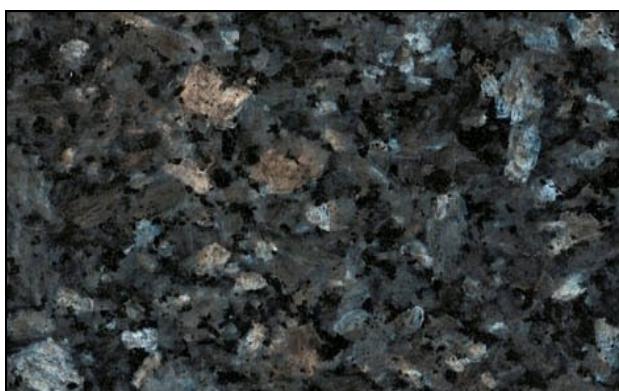
**PRICE GROUP 4**



Bianco Antiquo



Cosmic Black



Blue Pearl



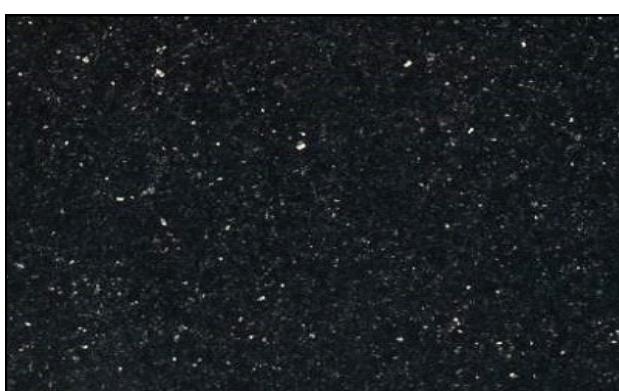
Blue Pearl Extra



Juparana Bordeaux



Red Bordeaux

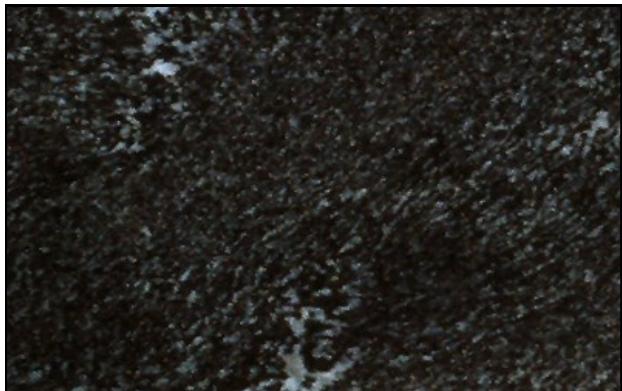


Star Galaxy

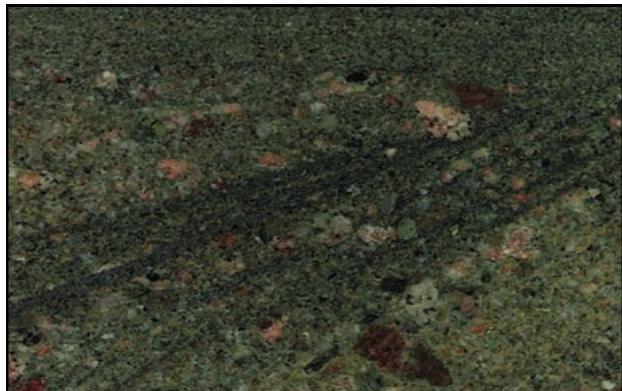


Verde Marinace

**PRICE GROUP 4**



Via Lattea

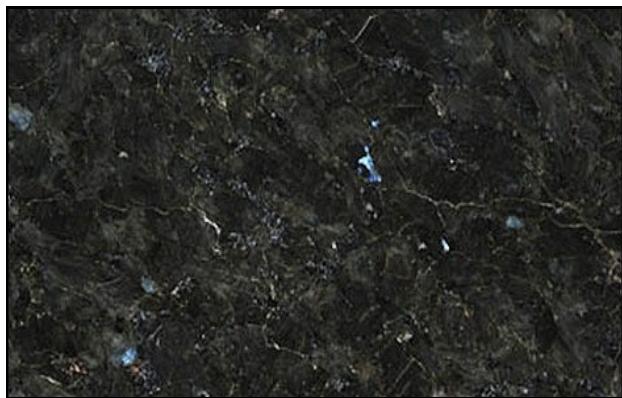


Wild West Green

**PRICE GROUP 5**



Arctic Blue



Emerald Pearl

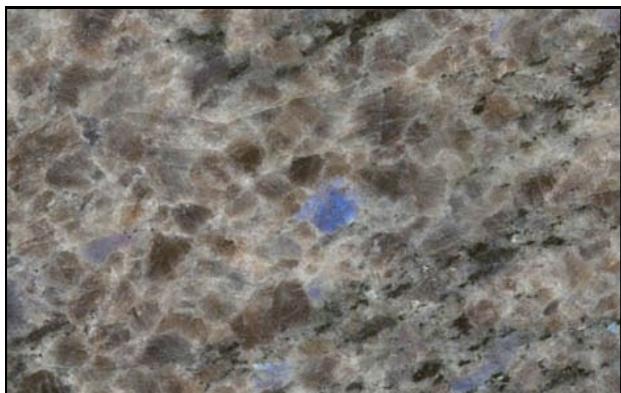


Siena Bordeaux



Solarius

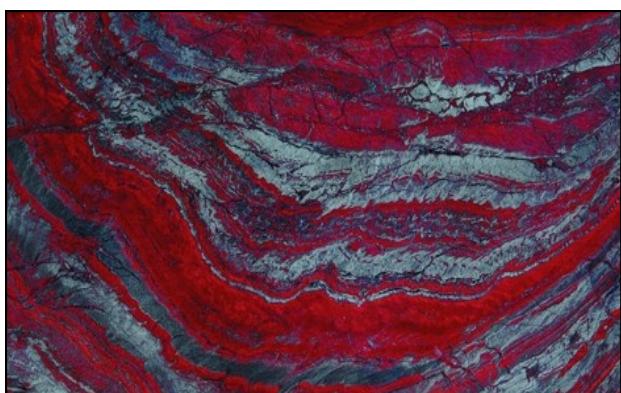
## PRICE GROUP 6



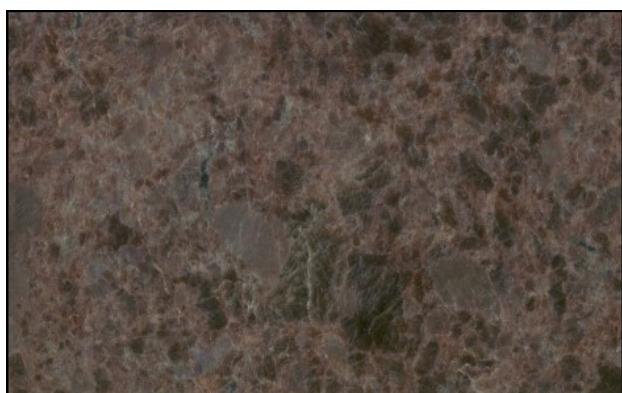
Blue Eyes



Emerald Green



Iron Red



Labrador Antique



Nacarado

## **GALLERY 2**

### **EDGES FOR GRANITE WORKTOPS**

Visible edges on granite worktops consist of the front edge which you actually see and any side edges if they are also exposed. When a worktop is cut for you, a decision must be made over how to finish the visible edges.

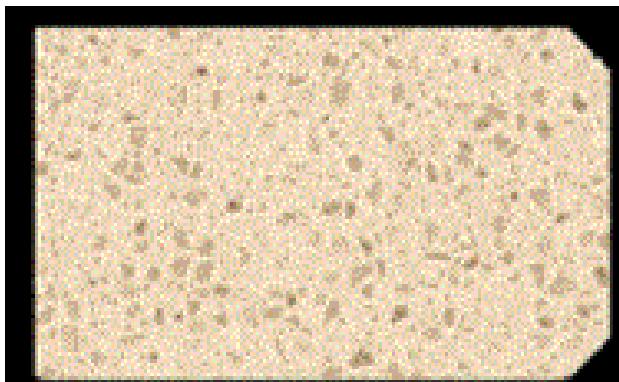
The non-visible edges are fitted against walls or tower units and you never see them.

Visible edges are polished and finished to the same standard as the top surface. However the actual edge - the right angle where the horizontal top surface meets the vertical edge - is never left as a 90-degree angle. This would produce a sharp, cutting, blade-like finish which could injure you at home if you leaned on it!

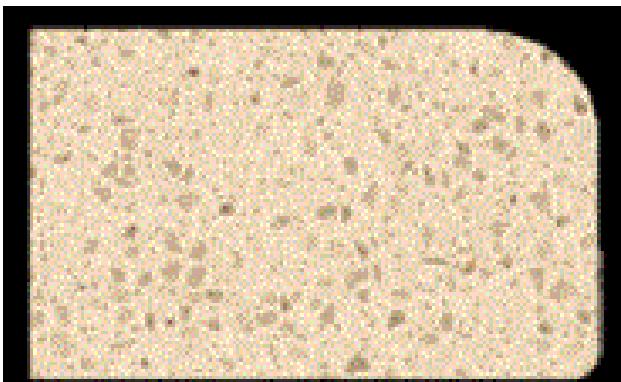
Instead of the actual corner being left as a sharp right-angle, it is finished in one of a wide variety ways to blunt the corner.

The next three pages show a number of different styles for the visible edges. The most popular are pencil square, pencil round, half and full bullnose. However as with many other aspects of design, it is your home and you can choose the style that suits you best.

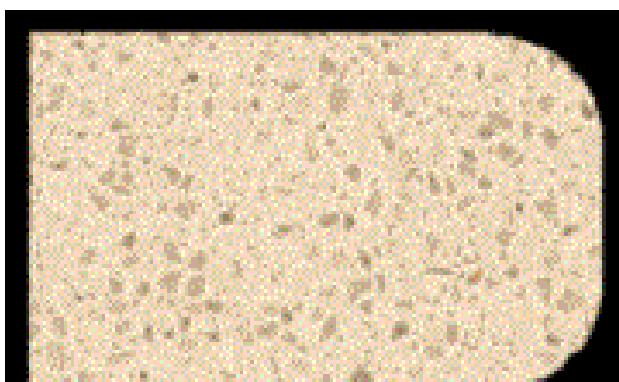
## EDGES



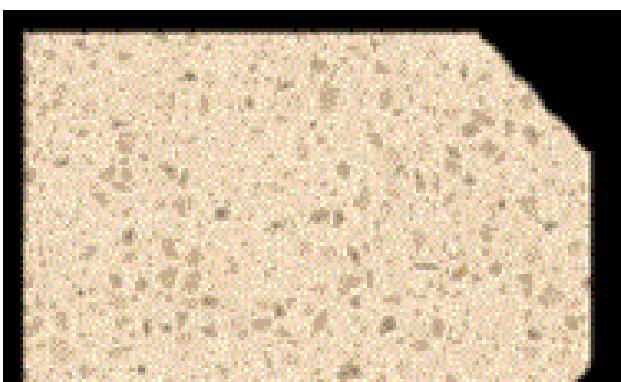
Pencil Square



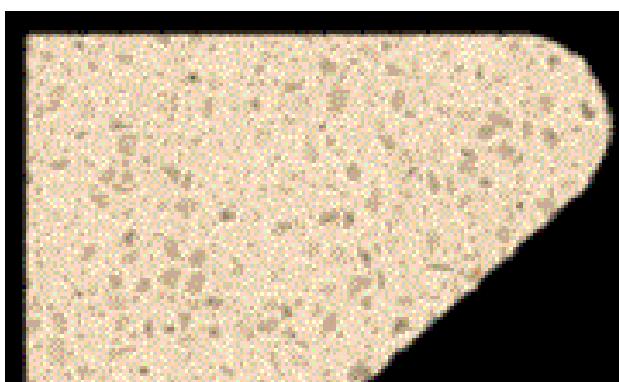
Pencil Round



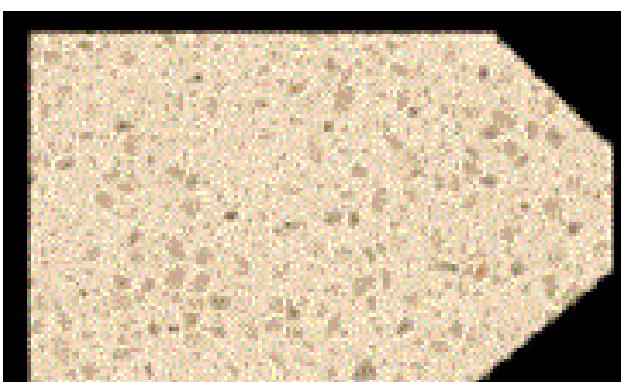
Pencil Round top and bottom



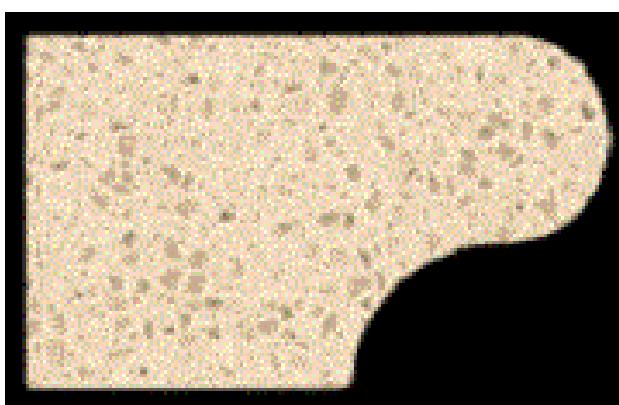
Bevel



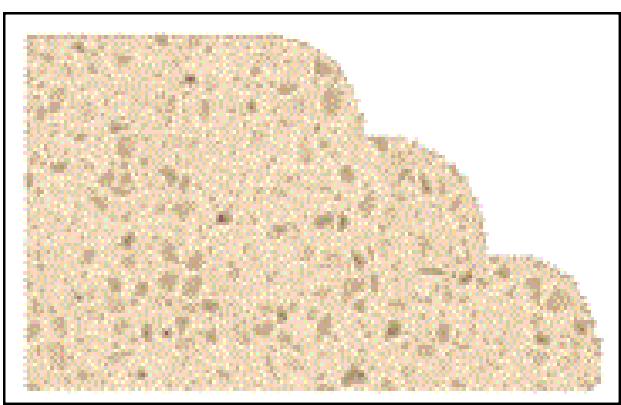
Platner



Bevel top and bottom

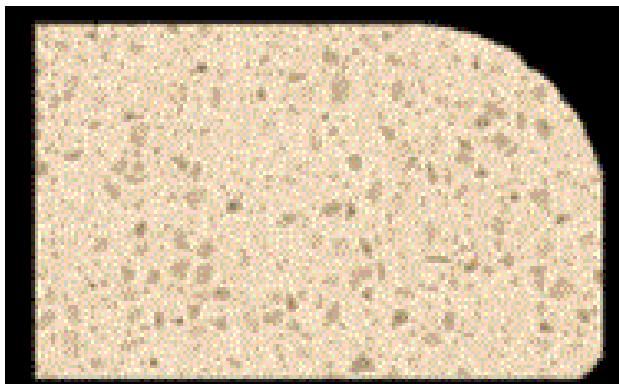


Stair Thread

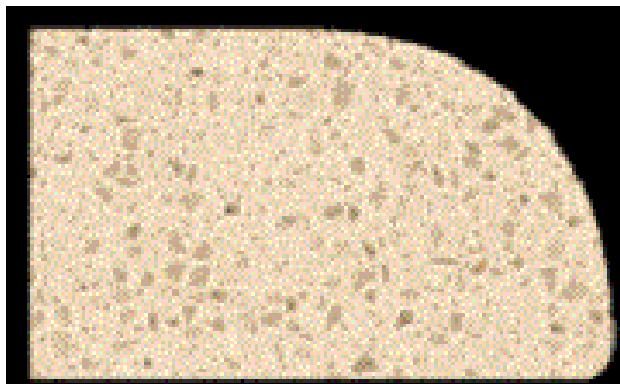


Waterfall

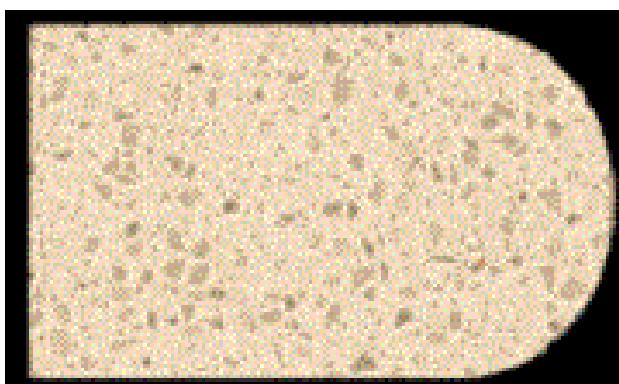
## EDGES



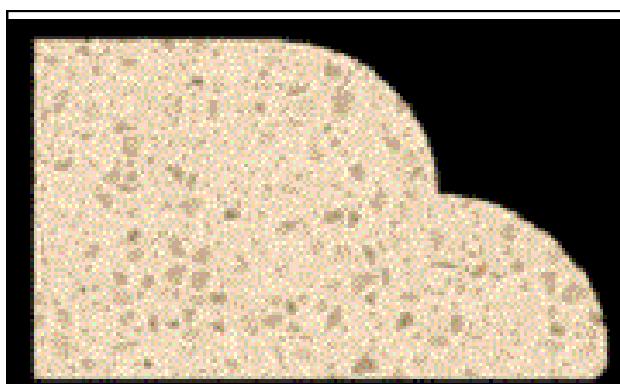
Half Bullnose



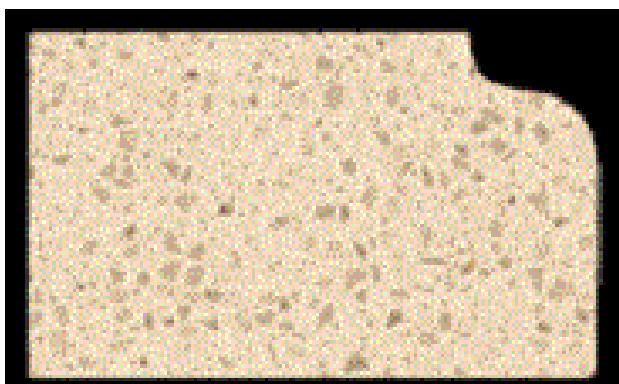
Demi Bullnose



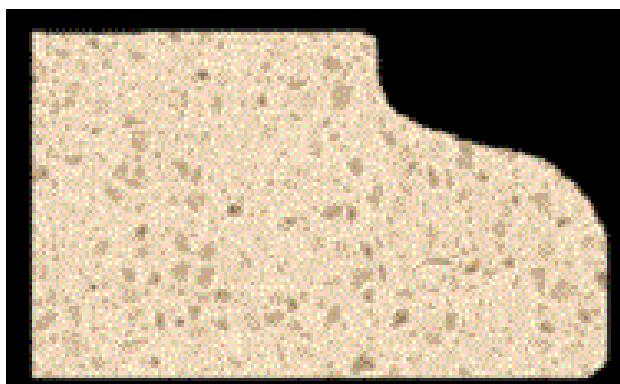
Full Bullnose



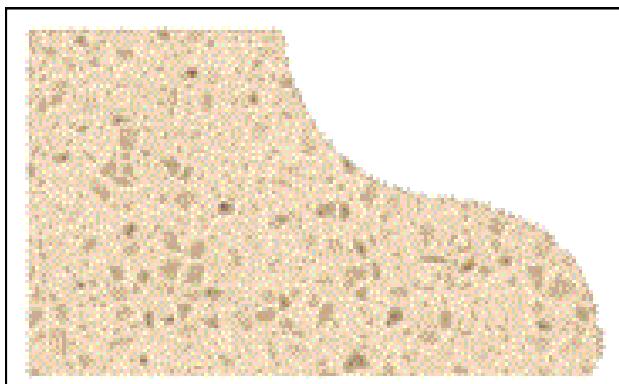
Double Bullnose



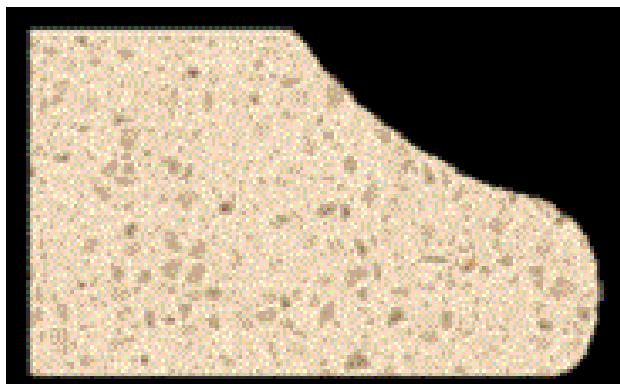
Half Ogee



Ogee

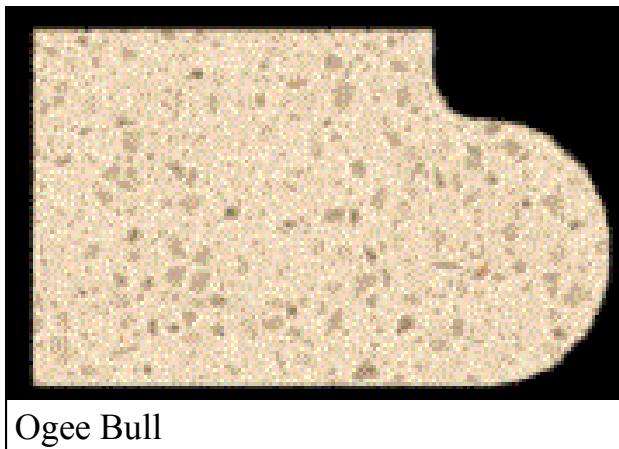


Deep Ogee

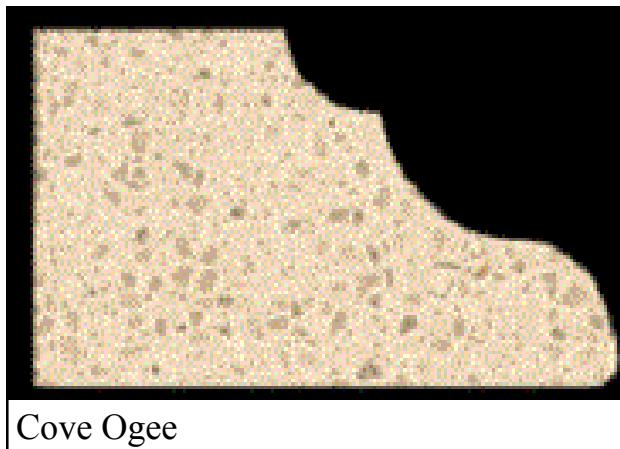


Flat Ogee

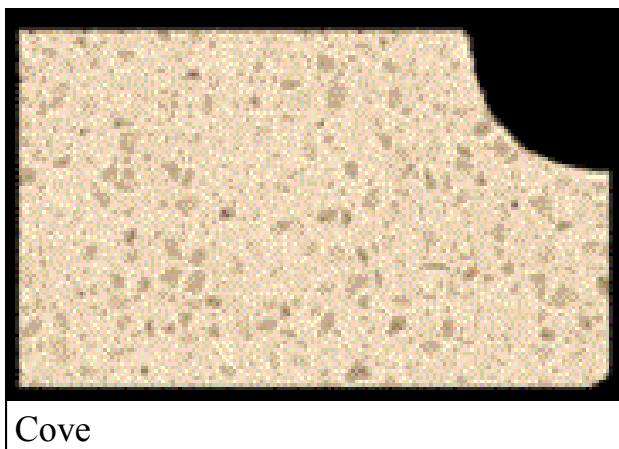
## EDGES



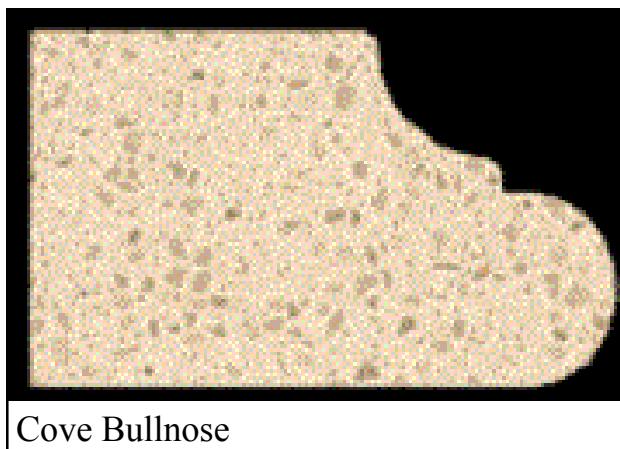
Ogee Bull



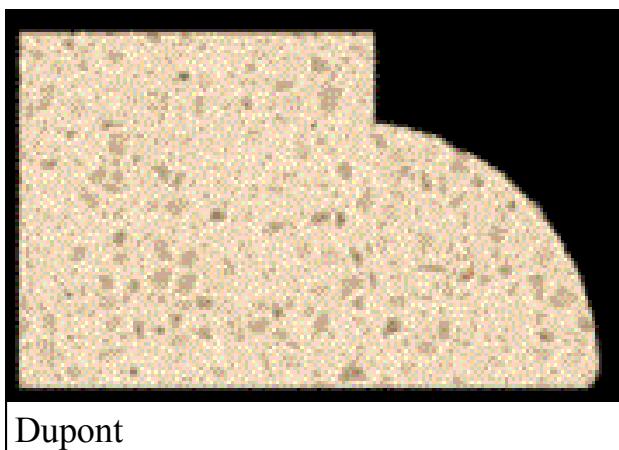
Cove Ogee



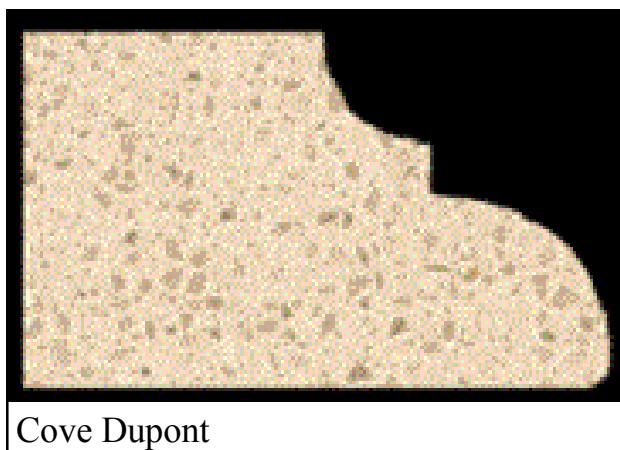
Cove



Cove Bullnose



Dupont



Cove Dupont

## GALLERY 3

### KITCHEN SINKS



**UNDERMOUNTED**  
Conventional style  
one-and-a-half bowls



**UNDERMOUNTED**  
Conventional style  
Twin bowls



**UNDERMOUNTED**  
White ceramic  
Twin bowls

**GALLERY 3**  
**KITCHEN SINKS**



**UNDERMOUNTED**  
Modern style  
Single bowl



**UNDERMOUNTED**  
Modern style  
One-and-a-half bowls



**UNDERMOUNTED**  
Round bowl

## GALLERY 3 KITCHEN SINKS



**BELFAST**  
Fitted below the worktop  
Modern style sink



**BELFAST**  
Fitted above the worktop  
Traditional style sink



**BELFAST**  
Modern, twin bowl

**GALLERY 3**  
**KITCHEN SINKS**



**INSET**  
Traditional style  
Single bowl with drainer



**INSET**  
Traditional style  
One-and-a-half bowls



**INSET**  
Modern style  
Coloured finish

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

This books shows how the author, David Beskine,...

# GRANITE KITCHEN WORKTOPS

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