

# The Ins and Outs of Laminate Countertops

Laminate countertops have been in use now since 1927, and through the decades high pressure laminate has improved not only in appearance, but in durability and functionality. Because of the cost and tremendous choices in color and design, laminate remains one of the most popular surface materials for countertops, but it is not without its drawbacks as well.

Laminate can be formed in virtually any color or pattern desired. This allows it to be incorporated into new design trends with ease. Patterns can range from solid colors to geometric forms, dots, swirls, or intricate designs such as quilting. Laminate can also mimic nearly any other surface including wood grains, granite, marble, quartz and even stainless steel.

Although traditionally smooth, Wilsonart, with its High Definition series, and Formica, with its Radiance Collection, are now offering designs that include subtle texturing to simulate both the appearance and the feel of other natural surfacing.

The price of laminate is among the lowest of all countertop surfaces and can provide even the most budget-minded consumers the look and feel of more expensive natural surfaces at a fraction of the cost.

Laminate has a wide variety of edging available as well. Straight edging and beveled edges are used but recently, many have chosen to go with the newer post-formed edges and covered backsplashes that are free of seams. The most popular post-formed edges are the waterfall edge that is rounded straight down at a half inch radius, the bullnose edge that is rounded like the waterfall but curves back on itself underneath, and the no drip edge that provides a small hump on the surface before rounding down. While the no drip edging seems desirable at first, it the fastest to show wear as inevitably objects will be bumped into it or brushed against it.

In choosing a laminate countertop, it is worth noting that laminate has evolved from a surface that allowed only drop-in sinks to now being able to accommodate an acrylic sink undermounted for a nearly seamless design.

Additionally, Laminate requires no sealing, but will still resist staining and moisture, much like the more expensive solid surface or quartz surfacing options. In contrast, though, natural stone must be sealed up to twice per year. As such, laminate is easily cleaned with only a mild detergent. There are some disadvantages to laminate as well. Although when properly maintained, it can last for decades, it is not as durable as more premium surfaces, such as natural stone or quartz surfacing. Laminate is relatively easily scratched. A knife or other object can cut into the laminate creating an irreparable fissure and it can be scuffed with abrasive materials and cleaners.

Laminate can also be scorched when exposed to temperatures as low as 140 degrees F for long periods and 275 degrees F for a short time. A trivet or other insulation is required for any hot objects.

Visible seams are also apparent in laminate. A busy design may help hide the seams somewhat, but not completely. These seams can harbor small amounts of moisture or food if not properly cleaned and may lead to bacterial growth.



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