



Better choices put the “fab” in prefab granite

I have some customers who refuse to consider prefab granite. Their view is that if it costs half as much, it must be only half as good. Thankfully, many of my customers don't feel that way, and the kitchen my wife and I remodeled (pp. 32-35) ably demonstrates that the reverse is true—that something costing half as much can turn out twice as good.

If you plan to use prefab granite, the first step is to determine your countertop's dimensions. Today, there are so many prefab sizes available that you don't need to design your kitchen in any particular way to go the prefab route. The most common prefab slab size available is 96 in. by 26 in., but pieces measuring 48 in. by 72 in., 84 in. by 36 in., 86 in. by 39 in., and 108 in. by 26 in. are available. If the supplier doesn't have the exact size that you need, a fabricator can alter it at the job site.

The next step is to visit your local prefab-granite warehouse and pick out the stone. Twelve years ago, the “warehouse” meant a small corner of the kitchen-supply store, and the choice presented to my wife and me consisted of ten 4-in. by 4-in. samples. We were told that the only size available was 96 in. by 26 in., the only finish



was polished, and the only edge was bullnose. We were told to count the linear feet of our countertops, and we bought as many of the 96-in. by 26-in. pieces as we needed. Even with the limited choices, saving 50% made the decision worthwhile, and that counter is as good as new 12 years later.

Today, the experience is different. The warehouse is actually a warehouse, and the showroom displays 40 or more 12-in. by 24-in. samples hanging from the wall. Various finishes are available, including polished, honed, leather, and pebble. Additionally, just about every edge profile is available. The warehouse will generally stock the edge profiles that are most popular, but more exotic

profiles can be ordered. After you get an idea of what you want, you'll browse a huge warehouse where you can choose the pieces of stone.

Here is where one small issue arises: Even the biggest warehouses won't have every option in stock. One might specialize in square edges with a pebble finish, while the warehouse across town specializes in bullnose edges with a leather finish. If you have your heart set on a square edge and a leather finish, you'll need to prepare yourself to go in with an open mind, or plan enough so that the two-month wait for delivery won't slow down your project.

Once you've chosen your color, finish, and edge profile, you need to make sure that combi-

Slabs in stock. The choices for prefab granite countertops have grown tremendously in the past few years. At CornerStone Home Design in San Francisco, customers can choose from more than 40 types of granite (photo left) before choosing precut slabs in the warehouse (photo above).

nation is available in the size or sizes you need. One combo may be available in 84 in. by 36 in., but you may need 86 in. by 39 in. for a slightly deeper overhang on your island or peninsula. This all may seem a bit confusing, but in practice, it works. I just did a kitchen for clients undertaking their first home-improvement project ever. I sent them to the warehouse with their dimensions, and they were done with the entire process in a couple of hours. The result was perfect.

Once you choose the pieces, the sales rep or designer tags

them as sold, gives you a quote for fabrication based on the amount and difficulty of the cuts, and puts you together with a recommended fabricator.

You then choose a date for the installation. Before installation, I reinforce the tops of all the cabinets with ¾-in. plywood. If I'm doing an overhang, I rout some ½-in. rigid square steel tubing into the tops of the plywood. The fabricator can install the counter in about four hours. The fabricator will cut the holes for the sink and faucet and will join all of the edges of the different slabs together with epoxy that is colored exactly to match the stone.

I've done two prefab granite counters for myself and a bunch for customers, and I've not had anything but great feedback.

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SOURCE Leather-finish prefab granite; CornerStone Home Design www.cornerstonehd.com; approximately \$100 per lin. ft.