

Granite Countertops

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Maurizio, We are about to make a purchase for new kitchen countertops and after doing some reading you have me questioning my decision. We were looking at black Silestone (Quartz), but had decided to go with a black granite (which I see is not really a granite). Reading all the issues people are having with black countertops I wonder what you recommend. Do you recommend the quartz or would you stay with the granite? Either way, can you give me a color option that might be less problematic? We have a 6 month old "BOY" and I need something durable and low maintenance. Thanks, Krystal

Dear Krystal:

Starting from your last question, the answer is that I'm no interior decorator and I'm colorblind to boot!... :-)

As for the he rest, I don't know what kinds of problems you've been reading about black countertops. Perhaps you were not specific enough: do you mean black countertops in general, or only black "granite" countertops?

If the issues are realted to black "granite" countertops are not totally groundless, alas. They are in fact alarming to say the least. The major problem seems to be "water staining", which is only what it looks like, but it is a much more serious matter.

This the copy and paste standard answer that I give to consumers inquiring about this mysterious "water-staining" on polished black granite surfaces:

" Let's start by saying that the only black mercantile granite that has the legal right to be called "Black Absolute" is the one coming from South Africa. However, in real life, when one mentions "Black Absolute Granite" one's talking about a huge variety of stones coming a little bit from all over the planet, each and every one of them not a geological granite by a long shot, and each and every one of them with different characteristics. If that wasn't confusing enough, each and every one of them are processed with even if so slightly methods " which again can make a difference. There used to be three possibilities to explain the problems that you are experiencing, which are here listed in order of probability (the first being the most probable):

1. The fabricator applied an impregnator/sealer to it believing that it's granite. No impregnator/sealer will ever be absorbed by black granite; therefore it won't do the first thing about doing what's designed to do, which is prevent stains. (What you have are NOT stains, and no impregnator/sealer on the planet can prevent those.) Many a sealer turn out to be sensitive to acids; hence the "mysterious etching." Not on the stone, rather on the sealer that had no business being there.
2. The slab had been "doctored" by the factory by applying some sort of black shoe shine in order to make it "blackier" and, therefore more "sellable." After a while the "shoe shine" will begin etching as it gets eaten away by acidic spills. The true color of the stone is dark gray.
2. It is one of those as-rare-as-a-white-fly "mutt" stones with some traces of acid-sensitive minerals in it. In this case it is actually the stone that gets etched.

In the last couple of years there's been a change in the scenario above. Another possibility has entered the scene:

4. Certain manufacturers apply some sort of protective wax to the slabs. It is not actual "doctoring," since there's no alteration to the color of the stone, but the result is the same as if the slab had been "doctored" with the "shoe-shine."

Finally, case 3 above is not as rare as it used to be anymore. At least a couple of "Black Absolute Granites" allegedly from India and China entered the scene recently and are terrible "mutt" stones. Since they are cheap (to the importers) they push them like crazy at full black absolute granite prices.

Having said all that, the remedy to the points 1, 2 and 4 is to remove whatever it is that's sitting on the stone surface, by either stripping it chemically by soaking it with Methylene Chloride, or mechanically, by rubbing on the stone surface a polishing compound for marble (NOT for granite!) with a little bit of water.

Case 3 is terminal.

From a legal point of view, cases 2 and 3 are full-fledged consumer fraud and could be prosecuted by the law.

All things considered, black granite "which should be considered among the most enjoyable materials as a kitchen countertop" has made it out my own list of recommended stones.

Until the industry will not straighten its act up by becoming serious about the classification of all the different "granites" on the marketplace and dictate strict rules and guidelines about their characteristics and implied guarantees to the consumers, my position is going to be that from now on.

You can help! Actually, as a consumer-to-be of stone you're the best qualified to make things happen! Will you now please read and sign our Statement of Purpose by logging on at: <http://www.marblecleaning.org/purpose.htm>? By spreading the word about this valuable site among your friend & family and the stone trades' people you've been dealing you will be rendering everybody a valuable service!

Thank you.

Ciao and good luck,

Maurizio Bertoli

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Of course, if you can find a good fabricator that you can trust and will locate some good black "granite" slab with none of the issues listed above (they are available if you know what to look for), then black "granite" is indeed one of the most enjoyable and virtually bullet-proof stones that money can buy.

Bottom line, shop for the man first, not for the stone!

We have available a very comprehensive article on "How to Shop for a Granite Kitchen Countertop" that will give you all the intelligence you need to venture yourself with confidence in the stone industry jungle, and it includes the world renowned "Lemon juice (and oil) test"! It does carry a small price tag, and you can order it by logging on the Educational Literature section at: <http://www.marblecleaning.org/literature.htm>. It's available in pay-per-download format and I consider it a cheap "insurance premium" to pay when there are thousands of \$ involved! Not to mention the little and much needed support you'd be giving to the cause, **your** cause, since every single penny of the cost of the article will be used to support it.

Also, will you please read and e-sign our Statement of Purpose at: <http://www.marblecleaning.org/purpose.htm>? By spreading the word about this valuable site among your friends & family and the stone trades' people you've been dealing with you will be rendering everybody a valuable service!

Also, do take advantage of the plethora of FREE Helpful Hints available at:
<http://www.marblecleaning.org/helpful-hints.htm>. They're on the house!

Thank you.

Ciao and good luck,

Maurizio Bertoli

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