



TIMBER COUNTERTOPS

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT TIMBER COUNTERTOPS.

Wood countertops remain a very popular choice for homeowners as they offer a natural beauty that will enhance the appearance of any kitchen. While they went out of fashion for a period there has been a definite increase in demand for them over the last few years as the trend has shifted toward matt and satin finishes versus gloss.

Current trends encourage consumers to embrace the natural. With timber being a fairly expensive option, we are seeing it combined with other surfacing materials like quartz surfacing. The juxtaposition of the two materials, with very different properties, enhances the sense of texture and pattern in a kitchen

There are many varieties of timber that can be used but a harder timber is more suited to a countertop application. Maple, Cherry, Oak, Birch and Teak are all common in this application. Low density soft timbers like Wawa or Pine, mark and dent easily and will not be as hard wearing. When choosing your timber, you need to give thought to its grain and underlying colour and how these will pair with the other tones in the kitchen.

Timber countertops are not well suited to areas with a lot of moisture so think twice before installing them in a bathroom, at the kitchen sink or in an area with very high humidity. They should also not be installed in areas exposed to long term direct sunlight. If the top is directly under a window or installed in an area with a lot of windows consider applying a UV tint to the windows or installing

blinds. Wood is sensitive to extreme climates. Rapidly shifting temperatures and dryness can cause the wood to crack and warp. If you live in a region that gets extremely cold, make sure the kitchen is always kept warm. Likewise, if you live in a humid area, consider a dehumidifier in the home to avoid excess moisture in the air.

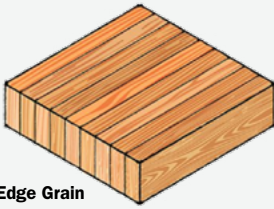
Exposure to high heat, like the underside of a pan just off the stove, will cause scorch marks. There is no spot repair for this. The top would need to be stripped and resprayed with polyurethane. Sprayed lacquered surfaces are seldom successfully spot repaired due to the distortion in the reflection of the paint.

The cost of a timber countertop will be determined by the type of wood and the thickness of the countertop. Thin countertops of 25mm or under are not recommended for timber as they would be more prone to warping and movement.

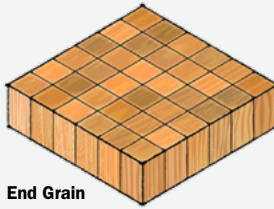


No matter what type of timber your wooden countertops will require maintenance. All timber tops should be correctly sealed. A polyurethane industrial paint with an industrial hardener is the best option for sealing a countertop and no aftercare is needed if done correctly. If needed the countertop can be re-coated easily, by removing it and reapplying the sealant in an environmentally controlled location.

There are various ways to make up a timber countertop - edge grain, end grain and face grain.



Edge Grain



End Grain



Face Grain

You can add a stain to enhance the colour and grain of a wood countertop, but you'll pay 5 to 10 percent more than you would for the same species in its natural state. You can get a pricey look for less, however, by choosing an inexpensive, light-coloured species (such as beech) and staining it a rich colour (like walnut).

Edge grain is made from boards placed on their sides and glued so that the narrower edge forms the surface. The strips may be continuous lengths with no joints, or random-length pieces that are finger-jointed. This construction is best for large areas, like a long kitchen counter or island top. The wood can only move in one direction, across its width, meaning it is more stable than other wood countertops. It can also be less pricey.

End grain is when blocks of edge-grain wood are turned on end to form a grid that's glued together. End-grain butcher block style tops require more wood and labour, so you'll pay about 40 percent more than for edge grain. Because it's also more prone to movement, end grain is often thicker, to counteract cupping and warping. It is best suited for cutting on, as it is easy on knives and least likely to show blade marks. Nowadays, the countertops checkerboard appearance is favoured over its functionality.

Face grain, also known as flat grain or plank grain, is where 4- to 12-inch-wide boards are laid flat and edge-glued, forming an almost seamless surface that highlights the natural patterns in the wood. This may expose soft areas in the grain, making these tops more likely to show scratches, dents, and dings. It is best used for dining islands, table and bar tops — wherever you want a fine-furniture appearance, not a workhorse.

Many consumers make the mistake of applying oil directly to a water stain or mark on a piece of timber. This may do more damage than good as it actually locks the moisture in. Applying a wood polishing agent onto a properly sealed top will end with the polish sitting on top of the lacquered surface. This leaves a shiny finish which gathers

dust and can result in build up over time. If your countertop has been oiled from the onset of the installation, instead of sealed, it would need to be maintained using the same method on a fairly regular basis.

When replacing a top or making a repair, it is important to remember that matching timber can become increasingly difficult if the timber is stained. Timber changes colour as it is exposed to the elements so the newer timber will not be the same colour as the older timber. So too, if you need to add a new piece of stained timber the match will be difficult as each batch of timber can react differently to how it absorbs the stain and how it reacts to the stain's application method.



Over time, a wood countertop will begin to show some wear and tear. Some homeowners consider these blemishes or life prints as giving character to the counters and imprinting memories. It adds to the authenticity and emotive connection to the home. Timber is a natural product so embracing its knots, grain and colour variations is important. Respecting it as a natural resource and taking care of it correctly to ensure its longevity is key and will ensure the addition of a timber countertop is an investment not only functionally but aesthetically too.

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Loubser LWC
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