

TILE ON COUNTERTOPS! - YOU MUST BE CRAZY!!

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Tile on countertops! You must be crazy!

All that grout will be impossible to keep clean! The tile will show water spots and scratches and the grout will turn all kinds of different colors! I'll break everything that falls on the counter - particularly my valuables! It will be terribly expensive! I won't be able to find anyone to install it and if I do the installation will take forever! The installation will make a mess and endanger my cabinets and the rest of my kitchen! I'll have to remove my old cabinets and pay for an expensive remodeling job in my kitchen to get a new countertop!

Wrong, Wrong and Wrong!

We now use 20x20 and larger porcelain and ceramic tiles on countertops directly over the old Formica or over cementitious underlayment directly over old Formica counters. With the proper glue and setting techniques the tile can also be installed directly over old tile, wood or even Corian!

The larger tiles result in very little grout and virtually none in the work areas. (See Photo) With 1/8" grout lines and large body tiles the amount of grout on the countertop has been reduced 85%! If the grout is properly sealed and is a color that blends with the multi-colored stone look tiles often used for countertops and floors, it virtually disappears and is not a problem to the on going maintenance of the countertop.

The tiles that currently work best are mottled in color and texture so that they do not show marks, water spots or dirt. With the ranginess of color the work surface is just that and not a decorative statement that calls attention to itself. We believe that work surfaces and floors

should be functional, easy to take care of and not be decorative statements. Let the “earrings of the house”, the backsplash, carry the decorating flag and call attention to itself. No one really works on the backsplash and it doesn't get very dirty very often. One of our clients joked that she doesn't have to clean her new tile until it gets sticky!



All of the large body tiles are really floor tiles and consequently they are designed for the toughest challenge to any floor – high heeled shoes! If the floor can withstand the 500lb+ per square inch attack of a woman in high heels they can pretty much take anything that you want to put or throw at them on the countertop. In most cases you can cut on the tile all that you want – except that it will make your knives dull! Remember some of the best knife sharpening tools are made of ceramic!

As to heat -- no worry about hot pots, pans or cigarette burns! Tile is manufactured at well over 1000 degrees and you are very unlikely to generate that much heat in your kitchen unless you have a fire!!

Tile is hard! Things will break on the tile! Murphy's law suggests however, that if it's valuable, it'll break on Formica, wood, tile, Corian,

granite or whatever you put on the countertop! All of these surfaces will generally break whatever falls upon them! -- particularly if it's valuable!

Installation is not difficult and should not be very expensive. We encourage the removal of the old Formica backsplash to give you another inch of counterspace to give a greater area for the new backsplash tile that you select and install after the new countertop has been installed! The sink should be removed and reset down on top of the new tile countertop. It's not a difficult job but we recommend that when putting in the new countertop it's also the time to consider a new sink and fixtures and these installations are most often accomplished by your plumber.

Unless the Formica or other countertop covering is loose and or severely damaged, modern glues allow us to install the tile directly to the old countertop material with no difficulties. The old cabinets and countertops can be recycled if you like with no muss or fuss in your kitchen! There is no tear out mess or construction activity in your kitchen. In most cases you'll only have the excuse to have to go out to dinner because you have no kitchen to cook in for only one night!

As to edging there are a lot of options. Some clients have their cabinet maker manufacture wood edging to match their cabinets. We encourage the use of Schluter metal edging (solid brass or stainless steel). We also use Schluter painted aluminum metal edging with rounded corners with good success over the years. Ceramic or porcelain sink rail are available, some of which even match the large body field tile. They are, however, much more expensive and to our mind clearly indicate a tile countertop. With the metal edging, even though it is less expensive, it does not signal what the material is and allows the illusion of stone counters to come through. One of those rare occasions within the least expensive alternative looks the most expensive!

A decorating trick to make a small kitchen look larger is to use the same tile on the floor and the countertops! The trick works

particularly well if you use very large body tiles as the reduced number of grout lines increases the appearance of both the floor and the countertop! Since they are the same material and texture the countertop blends into the floor and makes the area look much larger!

Since there is no free lunch -- you ask how much? Even with the use of solid brass edging and 20x20+ sized porcelain tiles we have installed the countertops with total labor and material charges of approximately \$12-18/sq. ft. A typical kitchen countertop has about 30 to 50 sq. ft. so a tile countertop for that sized area would range from \$360 - \$900 – not considerably more than replacement cost in Formica!

About the Author:

Carlo Americo Odella has owned and operated **Europamerican Tile and Marble** in Centerville, OH for over 15 years. He has published articles on grout and the use of large body tile (See europamericantile.com for copies and other articles of interest in the process of selecting tiles). Europamerican has a full time showroom (M 10-7, T-Th 10-6, Fr-Sa 10-4) with well over 1500 samples of tile to be checked out for your selection process. That process is further assisted with numerous picture books filled with completed installations in virtually every conceivable application. Europamerican has sold tile from Maine to Hawaii and from Seattle to the Bahamas via it's website at europamericantile.com. One of Europamerican's most notable achievement was to supply and install an exact replica of an Esther Price Candy Box top on the bottom of a 13' by 26' swimming pool with over 110,000 mosaic tiles.