

A photograph of a kitchen sink area. The sink is a double-basin stainless steel unit with a high-arc chrome faucet and two side handles. The countertop is a light-colored material, possibly granite or quartz. The backsplash is a mosaic of small, square tiles in various shades of brown and gold. A window is visible above the sink, showing bare tree branches outside. The kitchen cabinets are white with dark handles. The floor is made of dark wood.

Think
sink

When it comes to kitchen sinks, there are so many options to choose from, including top-mount, bottom-mount, wall-mount, undermount, pedestal and vessel. Today, there are a wide range of materials available, all of which come in a variety of shapes, sizes, colours and finishes. Here, Justin Horn and Tröe Collier of Paradigm Kitchen Design Ltd. compare seven sink materials to help designers select the most suitable option for their clients.

stainless steel

Most popular among consumers for its clean, contemporary look, stainless steel sinks are often made by drawing a sheet of stainless steel over a die.

PROS Available in a wide range of styles, sizes and finishes. Virtually care-free, easy to maintain and affordable. Resistant to staining and will not rust or corrode unless exposed to harsh chemicals, such as chlorine bleach.

CONS Scratches easily; however, the scratches become less apparent and will begin to blend in with the surface material over time. As stainless steel is a relatively thin material, it can sometimes be quite noisy.

TIP To help reduce the clattering of dishes, look for sinks with a sound deadener applied to the bottom.

FACT Premium sinks are made of a higher quality steel (18/8 or 18/10-grade) for durability. This thicker gauge steel prevents water spotting and provides heat retention.

solid surface

Solid surface sinks are made from a man-made material and typically combine two main ingredients: a natural mineral (the 'filler') and a resin (the 'binder').

PROS Durable and adaptable. Excellent insulation properties. Heat, cold and sound resistant.

CONS Can scratch or chip; however, because the colour runs all the way through, surface scratches can be easily buffed out and chips filled.

TIP Custom-made drain boards or inlay designs can be built directly into the sink and adjacent countertop.

FACT The only product that can be colour matched and integrated with countertops, creating a 'seamless' look.

porcelain or enamel

Offering a more traditional look, porcelain or enamel sinks are made by applying a glass coated finish to metal or cast iron.

PROS Very durable and resistant to hot and cold objects.

CONS Susceptible to scratching and chipping. Extended exposure to certain items, such as tea bags, will cause staining and aggressive cleaning can dull the surface. Surface damage that exposes the metal substrate can lead to metal corrosion.

TIP Look for a lifetime warranty against chipping.

FACT This sink material is quite heavy, so under counter cabinetry and braces must be sturdy and strong enough to support the sink. Often designed with a front apron.

stone

Stone sinks often come with an apron front. Some of the most popular stones used are granite, marble, travertine and onyx.

PROS Heavy and durable. Resistant to heat and cold. Quiet and retains heat well. Will not fade in colour or corrode.

CONS Susceptible to chips and scratches, which are difficult to repair.

TIP Stone is porous. To protect it, regular oiling or sealing is required.

FACT Porosity of the stone varies depending on the species and finish. Granite can contain pits or fissures. Marble is the most porous and requires careful maintenance. Soapstone is the least porous; however, it is quite soft and will develop a scratched patina with time.

copper

Highly lustrous, copper sinks are becoming increasingly popular. They are available in a multitude of colours to suit a variety of needs.

PROS Low maintenance. 100 per cent copper will not corrode or rust. Bacteria cannot survive on copper, so it is extremely sanitary.

CONS Made of soft metal, so susceptible to denting. Can be very costly because typically man-made. Patinas over time.

TIP Look for soldered joints as opposed to welded ones as the latter can corrode and turn black. Beware of recycled copper as it is not pure and can rust.

FACT Waxing will prevent oxidation of copper. A thicker gauge of copper will reduce the risk of denting.

wood

Used for hundreds of years, wood sinks can be sculpted into any form. **PROS** Can withstand the rigors of daily use. Material maintains richness.

CONS Naturally organic product, so more conducive to the growth of bacteria and spread of germs. Tends to darken with time.

TIP Certain organic oils can be applied to alter the colour and sheen of the wood.

FACT Must waterproof with wax or oil. However, some woods, such as teak, have inherent anti-bacterial and waterproofing properties.

glass

Although more commonly used in bathrooms and low-usage areas, vessel glass sinks have found a niche among the adventurous and in high design.

PROS Available in a variety of shapes, colours and finishes, including frosted, etched, textured or polished.

CONS Can chip or scratch when it comes into contact with metal or glass objects. Cannot be repaired if chipped, cracked or broken.

TIP Do not install where waste overflow is required as glass sinks do not offer this feature.

FACT Tempered glass is stronger and more shatter-resistant, however, it can still crack. Laminated glass contains an inner layer of resin or plastic that acts like a bond, making it sturdier and particularly resistant to shattering.

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Concrete goes upscale

Perfect for creating a one-of-a-kind, modern architectural piece, concrete has grown in popularity among consumers. The construction material can be poured to shape any form whether it's square, rectangular, oval, round or integral. Sinks can be created with perfect angular lines or soft curves and there are a wide range of colours to choose from to complement fixtures, faucets, walls and tile. Concrete is also less expensive than other custom sink materials, however, it is vulnerable to staining and susceptible to cracking if not properly cured and sealed regularly.