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Healthier kitchens and baths for you — and the planet

A look at the pros, cons, and costs of including sustainable materials in your next home renovation

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This New York City duplex designed by PJCArchitecture features a Dekton countertop and backsplash. Sustainable counters such as those made by Dekton include glass, quartz and porcelain crushed and heated to be super strong.

Health and wellness are top priorities for most people, but it's not just about hitting the gym. Many consumers want a healthier home for themselves and for the long-term well-being of the planet, which informs their choices when remodeling.

Sustainability was a key theme in the [2023 US Houzz Kitchen Trends Study](#), with 92 percent of homeowners incorporating sustainable features during a kitchen renovation, according to [Mitchell Parker](#), senior editor of [Houzz](#), a platform for home improvement, architecture, and interior design, in Palo Alto, Calif.

“It’s interesting to see the intersection of economics and environmental concerns playing into these decisions,” Parker said. “While homeowners are spending more on kitchen remodels, they’re increasingly choosing sustainable options that are more cost-effective in the long run.”

Sustainable materials and products are not always more expensive, and they can be just as beautiful, said [Jillian Hayward Schaible](#), principal of [Susan Hayward Interiors](#) in Milton.

“My general rule of thumb is to buy well and buy once,” said Joshua Smith, principal designer and founder of [Joshua Smith Interiors](#) in Vermont, New York, and Palm Springs, Calif. “Buying durable items contributes to sustainability.”

Options for healthier and sustainable materials for kitchens and bathrooms include:

Cabinets, paint, and wallpaper with fewer chemicals

Chemical off-gassing can be harmful to people as well as the environment, but with [careful vetting of manufacturers](#), you can find materials that have low or no volatile organic compounds (VOCs), Smith said.

Pros Healthier (Smith)

Cons Slightly more costly, requires extra research (Smith)

Price range Comparable to similar products (Smith)

Recycled glass counters

Manufactured counters such as those made by [Dekton](#) include glass, quartz, and porcelain crushed and heated to be super strong, said [Nandar Godoy-Dinneen](#), a senior associate at PJCArchitecture in New York City.

Pros Environmentally friendly, heat-resistant, waterproof, variety of patterns, easy to repair if it chips (Godoy-Dinneen)

Cons Limited edge styles, few fabricators and sellers (Godoy-Dinneen)

Price range 30 percent to 40 percent more expensive than other counters (Godoy-Dinneen)

Recycled glass tiles

Digitally printed, recycled-glass tiles, which are made of compressed materials, are a good choice for backsplashes and bathroom showers and floors, Smith said.

Pros Environmentally friendly, durable, stain-resistant, resilient, indestructible, can be made to resemble marble (Smith)

Cons Can scratch in high-traffic areas (Smith)

Price range More affordable than marble and natural stone (Smith)

Quartz counters



Quartz counters are popular because they are durable and made of recycled materials, said Susan Hayward of Susan Hayward Interiors in Milton. ADOBE STOCK/ANDREY GONCHAR - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Quartz is among the most popular materials for kitchen and bathroom counters because of its durability and because it's made of recycled materials, said Hayward. The counters can be crushed and recycled again, Jon Gorey reported in his [Globe guide to choosing a countertop](#).

Pros Easy to clean, stain-resistant (Hayward)

Cons Not natural stone, can be damaged by exposure to excessive heat, look less natural (Hayward)

Price range About 25 percent more than granite counters (Hayward)

Touchless faucets



Having a touchless faucet means that you aren't touching the handle you dirtied when you turned the water on. ADOBE STOCK/ANDREY GONCHAR - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Touchless faucets use less water because they automatically turn off, and they offer health protection because they don't spread bacteria or germs, Hayward said.

Pros Healthier and reduces water use (Hayward)

Cons Needs a nearby hot water supply and works best if water temperature needs are consistent (Hayward)

Price range Similar price to quality faucets but may require extra installation costs from a plumber and electrician (Hayward)

Reclaimed wood

From an environmental viewpoint, reclaimed wood from another renovation project or a teardown is among the best options for floors, cabinets, and bathroom vanities, Godoy-Dinneen said.

Pros Durability, beauty (Godoy-Dinneen)

Cons Labor intensive, may cost more and be harmful for the environment to transport if not locally sourced (Smith)

Price range 30 percent to 50 percent more than virgin wood because of labor costs (Smith)

Cork floors and walls



Cork is biodegradable and will break down into the environment at the end of its life cycle, according to The Spruce, a home décor and garden website. ADOBE STOCK/ANDREY GONCHAR - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Cork is a renewable resource that's harvested from bark, so you don't even have to cut down trees, Smith said. It works well for floors, walls, and ceilings because it provides natural insulation and soundproofing.

Pros Naturally anti-allergenic, anti-microbial, resistant to mold and mildew (Smith)

Cons Soft material, may scratch (Smith)

Price range \$4 to \$8 per square foot, similar to porcelain tile (Smith)