

# Simple Rules for Countertop Edges

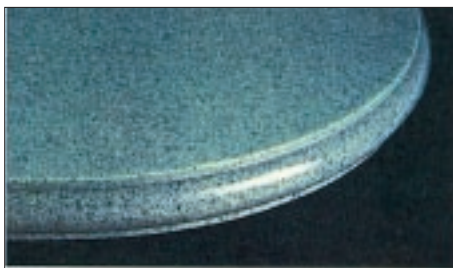
by Sandy McAdams



Last month I listed some criteria for choosing a countertop backsplash. But the job isn't done until you've chosen an edge detail. You can put any backsplash on nearly any countertop, but the countertop material plays a greater role in the selection of an edge detail than it does in the selection of a backsplash. Some edgings work well with certain materials and not so well with others.

## Edging Slabs

Slab countertops made from cultured (synthetic) marble or solid-surfacing materials can be tooled easily to form a variety of edge profiles (see Figure 1). You can get everything from standard bullnose to custom metal or wood inlays. One local company I work with will fabricate any custom detail I bring them. Edge treatments are more difficult with granite or marble. Some custom shops, however, will cut a bevel or ogee into the edge of a stone slab before it's polished, but the labor required makes this tech-



**Figure 1.** Solid-surfacing edge details, like the one on this Avonite countertop, can be easily formed and shaped into a nearly limitless array of shapes and styles.



**Figure 2.** Painted wood edgings tend to break down quickly in damp environments, as happened with this three-month-old vanity. The best finish for wood edging is a good polyurethane.

nique very costly — in fact, it can raise the cost of the countertop by a third.

Edge details on solid-surfacing materials can also be molded separately then applied to the edge of the countertop, which means the edge can be thicker than the countertop itself. The countertop is then shipped as a single piece.

Edgings can't be added to granite, marble, or cultured marble slabs. This means the edge is always the same thickness as the rest of the countertop — usually  $3/4$  inch. (Cultured marble is too soft and porous to be used in kitchens, by the way, but it's fine for desks and vanity tops.)

## Edging Laminate Countertops

Laminate countertops can be edged with wood or laminate. Wood edgings are popular because they can be finished to match the cabinets and can be formed in various shapes and styles. They're usually glued, and sometimes nailed or screwed, to the edge of the countertop. As is true with wood backsplashes, the finish on wood edgings breaks down quickly in damp environments. The best finish is a good polyurethane, the worst is paint (Figure 2).

If you want a beveled, solid-color edging, there's now an alternative to wood. Wilsonart's Perma-Edge moldings (Wilsonart, 600 S. General Bruce Dr., Temple, TX 76503; 800/433-3222) consist of a medium-density fiberboard (MDF) substrate topped with a layer

of laminate (Figure 3). They come beveled on the bottom and top, and in any combination of 236 colors. (You can have one color on the bevel and another on the face.) They can also be fabricated to accept an inlay. A tongue on the back of the edging fits into a dado that's routed into the edge of the countertop.

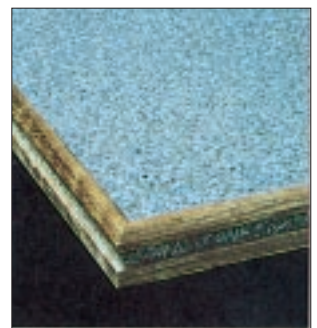
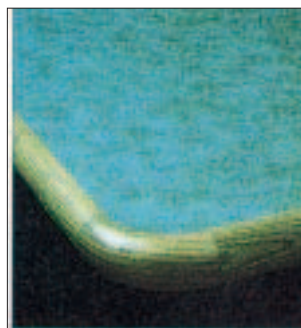
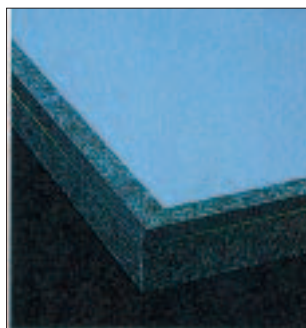
The Perma-Edge line also includes beveled and half-round wood moldings. They're standard wood moldings with a tongue on the backside.

## Edging Tile Countertops

Tile countertops can be edged with tile or wood. It's best to install wood edgings before setting the tile. If you nail into the edge of the countertop with the tile in place, you risk breaking tiles or jarring them loose. Of course, presetting the edging requires you to have a tile on the job so that you can set the edging at the correct height for the thickness of the tile. I don't recommend putting a wood edging next to a tile that varies greatly in thickness (as do many Mexican or Italian tiles). The irregular surfaces of the tiles won't fit flush with the top of the edging, and the depth of the grout line will vary, making it more likely to crack.

Many ceramic tiles made for use on countertops come with a factory-made bullnose. But the vertical leg of some manufactured bullnose extends below the bottom of the countertop and interferes with the operation of some drawers and doors. Check the size of the bullnose before you buy it. If it's too long, either get another bullnose or build up the thickness of the countertop. ■

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**Figure 3.** Wilsonart's Perma-Edge moldings come in wood or laminate, and with or without an inlay.