

MATERIAL WORLD

From timeless marble to comeback laminate, the materials we choose to live with reveal what matters now—durability, sustainability and style

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Special to Postmedia Network

In design, surfaces aren't background players — they set the stage. The stone on a kitchen island, the finish of a bathroom vanity, the façade of a fireplace or the cabinetry you open daily: these choices define not only the look of a space but also its durability and mood.

What's interesting isn't just how these materials look, but what they reveal about us. Marble speaks to aspiration, porcelain to innovation, quartz to ease. Granite reflects tradition, while laminate reminds us that design can be accessible — beautiful doesn't always have to mean expensive.

Countertops, cabinets, and floors aren't just surfaces to walk on or work at. They're design choices that speak volumes about how we live now — and where home design is headed next. We asked top designers to spill the tea on how they're using today's most popular materials.

MARBLE: THE SELECTIVE LUXURY

Few materials signal luxury like marble. With its veining and cool-to-the-touch elegance, it has long been a designer favourite. "Marble has always felt timeless to me, and I often incorporate it into projects," says designer Jessica Cinnamon of Jessica Cinnamon Design. "With the growing interest in raw, natural materials, I see many looking at using natural stone."

For Cinnamon, marble is about impact. "It instantly elevates a space, so I love using it where it can truly be appreciated — kitchens, bathrooms, and entryways. In my own home, I've framed archways and window ledges with marble." She leans toward dramatic gestures—waterfall islands, full-slab backsplashes, and statement fireplaces. "Marble works best where you want a wow factor — it's about impact, not utility."

Still, she uses it thoughtfully. "I'm cautious in high-traffic areas like floors and mudrooms, or in children's bathrooms where spills and wear can be hard on the surface.

Marble is softer and more porous than other stones, so it can scratch, etch, or stain if not sealed and maintained properly."

GRANITE: THE STURDY CLASSIC

Granite may no longer be the default choice it once was, but its appeal endures. "Granite combines undeniable durability with the authenticity and luxury of natural stone," says interior designer Katy Mitchell of Sansa Interiors. "Using natural stone is a mark of luxury and character — when you enter a room featuring granite, it instantly feels elevated and top-of-the-line."

Mitchell embraces granite's variation. "We draw inspiration from the stone's colours and carry them throughout the space, so every element feels intentional and curated."

Durability is its anchor. "In high-traffic areas like kitchens and bathrooms, function is always the top consideration. Granite works beautifully for clients who appreciate the authenticity of a natural material."

QUARTZ: THE SAFE BET

Quartz has held its place as a go-to surface for more than a decade, and principal designer Golar Ghasemi of Golar Design explains why. "Quartz is one of my go-to materials because it's durable, low-maintenance, and beautiful for so many applications — kitchen islands, countertops, vanities, even laundry rooms."

Engineered for strength, it resists scratches, stains, and bacteria, delivering the polish of stone without the upkeep. "Quartz keeps its look for decades. It doesn't easily fade, stain, or etch, so the finish stays fresh over time."

That said, Ghasemi is deliberate in how she uses it. "I avoid quartz outdoors where UV can cause discoloration, and near high-heat sources where natural stone performs better. And if a client wants the organic veining of marble, quartz can feel too uniform."

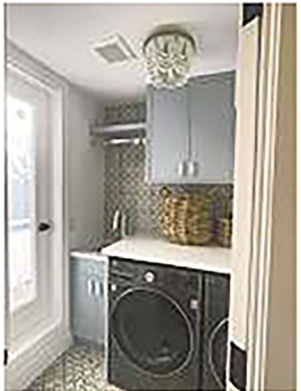
Aesthetically, quartz adapts with ease. "It can be a showstopper with



Designer Katy Mitchell of Sansa Interiors draws inspiration from granite's colours and carries them throughout a space, making each element feel intentional and thoughtfully curated.



Designer Jessica Cinnamon of Jessica Cinnamon Design notes that marble's natural veining adds movement and depth to a room, and she often pairs it with warm wood tones to soften the stone's coolness and create balance.



"Quartz gives you the look of stone with far less upkeep — making it a smart investment," says principal designer Golar Ghasemi of Golar Design.



Designer Dorothy Tsui appreciates porcelain because it removes the stress of everyday use while still performing at a high level.

bold veining and a waterfall edge, or it can quietly ground a design as a seamless backdrop," she says. Its versatility makes it an ideal partner for brushed brass, matte black, nickel, oak, walnut — even marble backsplashes. "Quartz is like a neutral — it works with everything."

For Ghasemi, quartz is often at the top of clients' wish lists. "They know it's durable and low-maintenance — and they're right. To me, quartz is both timeless and of-the-moment — adaptable enough to evolve with trends, yet practical enough to remain constant in design."

PORCELAIN: THE RISING STAR

Porcelain slabs are the sleek surface disruptor of the moment. Thin, durable, and sustainable, they mimic marble, concrete, or wood with ease — without the maintenance. "Porcelain is redefining luxury. It feels fresh, timeless, and incredibly practical," says co-founder and creative director Dorothy Tsui of

Bobeche Interiors.

She leans on porcelain's versatility: "It works beautifully in kitchens and baths, especially for countertops where durability is key. It's also great for fireplace facades, feature walls, and even entire bathroom applications because it's much lighter than natural stone."

Its performance is part of the appeal. "Porcelain is non-porous, so it doesn't need sealing, and you don't have to worry about stains from coffee, wine, or oils. It's also resistant to acids, scratches, and heat, so it holds up beautifully in busy kitchens and bathrooms."

There are limits though. "Unlike natural stone, porcelain can't really be sculpted, so it's not ideal for curved applications," explains Tsui. Design-wise, porcelain is a chameleon. "It can be dramatic as a feature wall or subtle in the background. I love pairing it with wood, modern veneers, or metal accents. Some even mimic slate for a rustic feel."

LAMINATE: THE COMEBACK KID

Laminate may have once carried a "cheap" reputation, but designers like Jessica Dybenko of Kerr + Field Interiors are rethinking its role. While her team avoids it for flooring — favouring engineered hardwood or luxury vinyl — custom laminate cabinetry has become a smart solution in entryways, living rooms, bathrooms, and kitchens.

"It's all about the mix," says Dybenko. "When clients are on a tight budget, we'll often opt for laminate cabinetry if we can find a prefab colour, texture, or finish we like. Paired with painted-MDF in a custom shade, the result feels elevated."

Quality is key. "Laminate is essentially a photo or design applied on a core board, so the substrate can vary hugely in performance," she explains. Dybenko is pragmatic about its role. "It's still a budget choice, but also a practical one. If you can save money and still have a space that looks great, why not?"