



Photo: Courtesy of Bay Area Kitchens

According to Matt Hegemier of Bay Area Kitchens, material options such as recycled glass, seen here, allow designers to utilize greater originality and creativity while maintaining an eco-friendly sensibility.

creating countertop designs.

Hegemier explains: "One concern that has to be met is in finding creative locations for electrical outlets to meet code requirements."

To address this, he says his firm will use power strips under the 1-1/2" overhang/edge of the counter

by vendors such as Task Lighting and pop-up fixtures from Doug Mockett & Co.

He adds: "Outlets in the sides or backs of island furniture can really distract from the overall design, so doing something creative to minimize the impact on storage and design is something we have to

always be thinking about."

Adams agrees: "The aesthetic value is changing a little bit, so the equipment that is housed in an island is not so prominently displayed. For instance, countertops are concealing sinks and cooktops, and either through motorization or through a manual application can slide the countertop open. This enables designers to house sinks with pop-up faucets, while cooktops have been lowered and set down to the countertop themselves."

Hegemier continues: "The questions about maintenance are always the greatest concern. High-end clients tend to choose materials based on visual appeal rather than on practicality."

Stockett notes, "There are so many great-looking colors and patterns to pick from that it can be overwhelming. Often consumers will see large ornate islands in magazines or on TV and not realize how much space they take up and how costly they can become."

Kuryluk adds: "The main challenges facing

designers with countertops and islands appears to be sizing fixtures. It is now mandatory that we have everything that touches the counter on hand at the template."

Hegemier says: "Ultimately, the challenges are and always will be listening to the client so that the designer can create something that feels truly unique to the client."

ROYAL TREATMENT

In most cases, it's not a good idea to go "over the edge," but that all changes when talking about countertop edge treatments.

Thompson explains: "The edge details are becoming more



Photo: Courtesy of Bay Area Kitchens

Pop-up fixtures for electrical outlets help to create a clean design and add convenience, as seen in this design by Hegemier.

Exclusive Fabrication Group Offers Custom Stone Solutions

Austin, TX — Kitchen designers looking to feel secure in the knowledge that they are specifying the highest quality material for their clients' countertops need only follow some simple advice: Start at the top.

These are the sentiments of Chad Seiders, executive director for the Artisan Group – a stone fabrication group that consists of 32 top-tier custom countertop fabricators. He notes that the group provides a high-end fabrication resource for designers and their clients across several geographic areas in North America.

According to Seiders, the group is not only looking to improve methods for specifying products, but is also constantly searching for the best granite, quartz and wood available – even going as far as Brazil or India, if required.

He explains: "Artisan Group was formed so that high-quality countertop fabricators from all parts of North America could collaborate to bring their own granite and other countertop products to market with organized branding."

At its heart is the group's business model, which provides a forum for its members to share knowledge and combine their buying power while providing products that kitchen and bath dealers – and consumers – want to see.

"Since our members are all owners in the partnership, it benefits them to share best practices

with other members. In addition, Artisan Group has created tremendous buying power through our combined purchases, and through this we are able to source the best natural stone available," he notes.

He says that the hand-picked roll of members – most of whom have over 20 years' experience in the industry – are all required to achieve accreditation status from the Marble Institute of America (MIA), showing their commitment to quality fabrication and safety standards.

The overall market share for granite countertops has grown steadily during the recession, leading to combined revenue for Artisan Group of nearly \$350 million, Seiders notes. He attribute this to granite's functional properties as well as its seamless positioning for eco-conscious clients.

"Granite requires a very low consumption of energy in the manufacturing process; it's inert and non-toxic, and promises an over-100-year useful life, which makes it very sustainable," he describes.

He says the group is currently considering adding new products with high recycled content – a plan that will fit well with its Lifetime Warranty.

"The warranty on granite countertops not only covers staining, but craftsmanship and material integrity as well," he notes. The warranty was put together by fabricators on the "front line" of the industry who "thoroughly understand the concerns of consumers."

elaborate. Large ogee edges requiring multiple passes of the router during fabrication are becoming the norm. The thickness of the edges is also getting more robust. Clients are asking for 2", 3" and 4" built-up edges to give the stone a more substantial feel."

Hegemier adds: "Eclectic or transitional kitchens are fast becoming commonplace, and with that, square and simpler edges with shorter overhangs of 3/4" and custom edges are entering the market as well."

Stockett sees rounded, beveled and ogee edges as his big sellers.

"In a modern-looking project, you're seeing a squared edge with eased edges and no fancy ornate detailing. It is usually thin, like 1/2", or thick, like 4"-6"," describes Adams.

He concludes: "Even though the countertops are still 3/4", the edge treatment is routed to give the look of a very thin edge." **KBDN**