

KITCHENS & BATHS

SPECIAL ISSUE

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Bath Sinks

With Style and Sense

Don't let choices overwhelm your quest for a great lav

BY MARIA LAPIANA

Running the gamut from spallike minimalism to sybaritic decadence, today's bathrooms bear little resemblance to the no-nonsense washrooms of old. If this is apparent anywhere, it's in the stunning array of bathroom sinks—or lavatories, as they are known in the trade—available today.

These artful fixtures include vessels of natural stone, copper, bronze, and blown glass as well as ceramic basins that distinguish themselves through designs that are alternately sleek, curvaceous, carved, outsize, or edgy. It may seem that function has given way to form, with designs so stunning we're likely to forget that bathroom sinks even have a purpose. Consider this a reminder that there are practical considerations to weigh when choosing a new sink.

If you're designing a bath, your first task is deciding the type of sink suitable for the space. After you've settled on one of those seven essential types—pedestal, wall mount,

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GV-100
Kraus

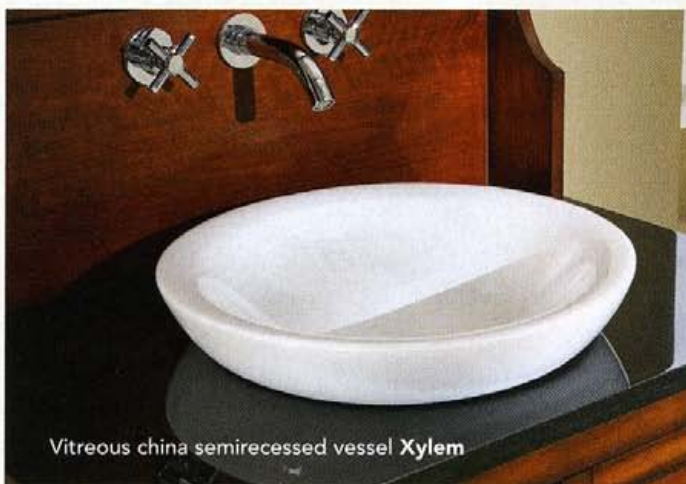
MATERIAL CHOICES

"The design process really gets going once materials come into play," says Bill McKeone, design manager for Kohler's Kallista brand. Familiar, tried-and-true sink materials such as vitreous china and enameled cast iron will always have an important place in the market. Newer composites, such as high-end solid-surface materials, are often specified today because they allow

for relatively fuss-free care. Material options are a major way by which the lavatory has crossed over from utility into art. Vessels made of glass, carved from stone, cast in bronze, or hammered in copper all reflect materials that have contributed to a veritable design revolution in bathroom sinks. Here are some common materials used in lavatories today.

VITREOUS CHINA

Made from a clay-and-mineral mixture that is glazed and then fired at high temperatures, vitreous china is the oldest, most common sink material. These high-gloss sinks are scratch- and stain-resistant, and require only minimal maintenance. "It's hard to beat the cleanability and decades of durability that come with vitreous china," says architect Paul DeGroot. If that's not enough, brands such as Porcher (from American Standard) boast an antimicrobial surface glaze on some china sinks that makes it even harder for stains and other nasties to gain a foothold. Although featured more often on toilets and tubs, the glaze, called EverClean, is also available on some sinks.



Vitreous china semirecessed vessel Xylem

PROS: When glazed and fired properly, vitreous china absorbs no water at all, making it long-lasting and sanitary. The material is also popular in basic, entry-level sinks, making it an economical choice.

CONS: Although less likely to chip or crack than other sinks, vitreous-china lavs are susceptible to damage from heavy impact.

"With glazed vitreous china, there is virtually no place for microbes to grab onto and live."

—Gray Uhl, American Standard

GLASS



Dorian glass vessel
American Standard

PROS: Most glass is stain-resistant and can be cleaned with any household cleanser.

CONS: Glass sinks can be pricey, and they show soap and water spots easily.

Colored, textured, flecked, studded, or otherwise adorned, glass sinks are an artful addition to any bathroom. Tempered handmade glass is most often used to create vessel sinks, but some undercounter styles (with clear, colored, or frosted finishes) are becoming popular options. Glass sinks are elegant, versatile, and surprisingly durable.

"The best glass sink is one that has texture. It's much more forgiving; you don't see the drips and every splash. You're not wiping it down 24/7." —Ann Morris, kitchen and bath designer

FIRECLAY

In use since the 19th century, fireclay, like vitreous china, is made from a clay-and-mineral mixture, but is fired at a higher temperature, making it even more resistant to extreme heat. The difference between the two lies primarily in the manufacturing process rather than the material itself. Fireclay is smooth and nonporous, and it won't fade or discolor. Its strength makes it the material of choice for many pedestals and console-style vanities.

"Thicker and more dense than those made from vitreous china, fireclay sinks are found more often in the kitchen than in the bath."

—Travis Rotelli, Kohler



Fireclay
Town Square
pedestal
American
Standard

PROS: Fireclay sinks are lead-free and highly resistant to chips, stains, and scratches.

CONS: Sometimes heavy, they often require additional structural support.

STAINLESS STEEL

Stainless-steel sinks come in several gauges, or thicknesses. Thicker metals are naturally more durable—and expensive. Stainless-steel lavs are available in high-end mirrorlike finishes, but it's just extra buffing that gives them that brilliant shine. Brushed finishes don't compromise durability.



Stainless-steel Bachata undermount Kohler

PROS: Stainless-steel sinks are tough and can withstand extreme temperatures.

CONS: Stainless steel scratches and dulls over time, and it comes in only one color.

"Stainless-steel sinks are very trendy, but they can be noisy and appear commercial and cold-feeling."
—Gray Uhl, American Standard

STONE



Jeton vessel in Nero Marquina marble Kallista

Bath sinks can be carved from an extraordinary array of natural stones—from granite and marble to onyx, limestone, and even petrified wood. Stone sinks are typically available in vessel (countertop) styles and in a variety of colors. Because stone is so porous, these sinks are often sealed before shipping. It's recommended that they be resealed every year; nevertheless, some designers advise against heavy daily use.

PROS: Few fixtures steal the show like hand-carved stone sinks.

CONS: It's not uncommon for stone sinks to chip, break, or stain.

"I did a half-granite rock with the middle scooped out. It was sculptural, but it weighed 150 lb. Reinforcing it required a structural engineer and thousands of dollars."
—Sophie Piesse, architect

ENAMELED CAST IRON

One of the oldest fixture materials, cast iron is also one of the most durable. When porcelain enamel (in a wide range of colors) is applied over cast iron, the result is a workhorse of a sink with incomparable gloss and shine. Because these sinks are made from such a trusted, long-lasting material, Kohler's come with a lifetime guarantee against cracks, chips, or burns.

Enameled cast-iron Tones basin Kohler

PROS: Enameled cast-iron sinks are solid, affordable, and easy to clean.

CONS: Installation may require extra support—and helping hands.

"Recycled iron (as much as 80%) is used in the manufacturing process, so these sinks are considered by many to be green products."

—Travis Rotelli, Kohler

SYNTHETIC

Synthetic lavatories represent a broad range of price, quality, and appearance, from budget-friendly "cultured stone" to proprietary (and pricey) solid-surface materials.

At the lower end, ground stone is mixed with synthetic resins, molded, and finished with a gel coating. Pricier solid-surface sinks are made from a blend of natural minerals and high-performance acrylics.

Consistent colors and patterns run all the way through, allowing solid-surface materials to be cut, carved, routed, and inlaid to create a variety of designs. Because of the wide disparity in the quality of synthetic materials, it's important to do research.

"Although they've been around for some time, there are newer solid-surface materials that are worth a second look." —Bill McKeone, Kallista



Englishcast Cabrits basin Victoria + Albert

PROS: Synthetic-sink options are endless and available at all price points. Expensive ones are durable and can be repaired and renewed by sanding.

CONS: Heat may discolor some of these sinks, and coatings may crack over time. Appearance varies greatly with price.

OTHER METALS

A sink made of brass, bronze, copper, hammered copper, or nickel is a true statement piece. Most are found at the higher end of the price scale, with hand-crafted bronze among the most expensive. Brushed nickel has a warm, brown-tone appearance and a vintage feel. Copper has natural antibacterial properties.

PROS: Most metal sinks age gracefully, developing a soft patina.

CONS: Constant cleaning and care are required.

"The choices are endless—from rustic metal to detailed patterns."

—Travis Rotelli, Kohler

Lilies Lore cast-bronze undermount Kohler



Style at any price

With such a wide variety in materials, manufacturers, and designs, prices for bath sinks vary widely—even within the confines of a single type. Here's just a small sample of what's available at various price points in the vessel category.

\$115



Clear glass vessel Kraus



Sandstone vessel Lenova

\$350



\$595

Reflex Aztec glass vessel Xylem

\$1007



Rectangular oil-rubbed bronze vessel Belle Floret



Wavelet decorative vessel in copper

by Robert Kuo for Kallista

\$4995

bath designer from Fort Lauderdale, Fla. "The sink you choose depends on the theme of your bathroom," says Morris. "With so many materials out there, you can make your sink the focal point of your powder room."

To be clear, we're talking about a little-used powder room, not the one the family runs in and out of on a daily basis. "You can be really playful in the powder room, as long as it's used for just a little bit of hand-washing," says North Carolina architect Sophie Piesse. "In my house, the first-floor powder room is used by my kids all the time." Clearly, that's not the best place for a pricey vessel sink.

Master bathrooms offer opportunities for beauty and drama, but once again, it's important to consider purpose. Do you wash your face, shave, and brush your teeth there? Or do you also blow-dry your hair and apply makeup? If so, how much counter space do you need? Do you wash your hair at your sink? If so, depth may be a concern.

Budget comes into play here as well. While twin sinks have been in vogue for some time now, ask yourself if you really need them. Two sinks mean two faucets and twice the plumbing, which can be costly. Twin sinks also cut down on counter space.

What does all this variety mean for homeowners? Today's sink options are so exciting that it's hard not to have some fun when choosing them. "It's important to do what you like. Remember, you're the one who has to use the sink," says Travis Rotelli, an interior designer for Kohler. "I understand that people think about resale, but I believe that done properly, a bath sink can be beautiful and functional—and be something that the next guy will like." □

Maria LaPiana is a freelance writer who specializes in home design. Photos courtesy of the manufacturers.

EIGHT GREAT COUNTERTOPS

ENGINEERED STONE/QUARTZ

This is my go-to kitchen countertop, specified for more of my projects than any other material. It's durable; low maintenance; and heat-, stain-, and scratch-resistant. I tend toward solid neutral colors, and I love the new soft-matte finishes such as Silestone's Suede (pictured).

caesarstoneusa.com
cambriausa.com
silestoneusa.com

Cost: \$45 to \$75 per sq. ft.

DEKTON

This is the newest entrant in the countertop marketplace and will be available at home centers at the end of the year. Dekton is a composite of three of my top countertop materials—quartz, glass, and porcelain—and it embodies their durability, heat resistance, scratch resistance, and low maintenance.

dekton.com

Cost: Projected to be \$65 to \$75 per sq. ft.

WOOD

Warm and elegant, a wood top by a company such as Craft-Art (pictured) can add unsurpassed beauty to a kitchen. I adore the look of wood countertops—particularly walnut on painted cabinets in a traditional kitchen. I'm less enamored with wood in food-prep or cooking zones.

craft-art.com • glumber.com (Grothouse)
jaaronwoodcountertops.com

Cost: \$40 to \$200 per sq. ft.

SOLID-SURFACE ACRYLIC AND ACRYLIC BLENDS

Tops such as Avonite (pictured) have a soft, low-glare, easy-care surface ideal for aging-in-place kitchens. I also like the material's seamless appearance. This material does have a few downsides: It can be scratched or scorched easily, and it rarely succeeds at looking as good as natural materials. Also, its cost is comparable to that of granite or quartz.

avonitesurfaces.com (Avonite) • corian.com • staron.com

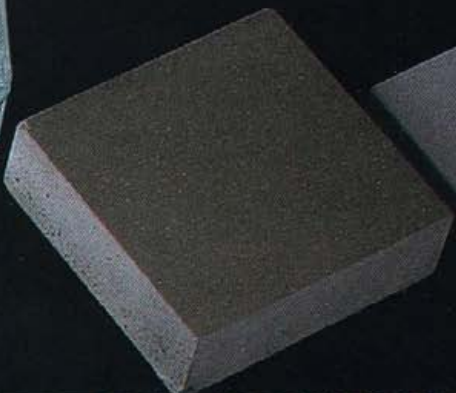
Cost: \$40 to \$75 per sq. ft.

SLAB GLASS

Glass is extremely durable; it's heat- and damage-resistant with normal use. It's also a surface that can add exceptional drama to a kitchen, especially when it's underlit. Its major downside is cost, which puts it out of reach for projects that would use it for anything other than a small accent.

thinkglass.com

Cost: \$200 to \$400 per sq. ft.



CONCRETE

Concrete is versatile and comes in virtually any color combination and pattern. Slab concrete, made by manufacturers such as the Concrete Collaborative (pictured) is nearly flawless in appearance. I like its industrial look for contemporary kitchens, but not its need for regular sealing.

concrete-collaborative.com

polycor.com (KarmaStone)

Poured-concrete cost:

\$65 to \$135 per sq. ft. (without customization)

Slab-concrete cost:

\$60 per sq. ft.



PORCELAIN AND CERAMIC SLABS

Recently, I came across an Italian line, Iris (pictured), that looks like marble, but without its softness or porosity. There is also a new Iron Series from Spain's The Size. Like any porcelain or ceramic surface, these countertops are durable and low maintenance. You now also can have an integral sink in the same pattern if you'd like, but the only edge profile offered is a bevel.

thesize.es • tpbbarcelona.com • transceramica.com (Iris)

Cost: \$65 to \$85 per sq. ft.

RECYCLED GLASS

Recycled-glass countertops by companies such as Vetrazzo (pictured) are made from bottles, windows, and other castoffs blended with cement to create smooth slabs with fun backstories. Because most of it needs to be sealed, I like this dramatic material as a focal-point countertop away from food-prep or cooking zones.

eos-surfaces.com (GEOS) • icestoneusa.com • vetrazzo.com

Cost: \$75 to \$155 per sq. ft.

