

Kitchen Backsplashes

The “Earrings” of the House!

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If you want to make a decorating splash of color or design in your home - the kitchen backsplash is often the best place to make one!

A carefully chosen set of earrings or accessories will often make a modest outfit look more expensive! Similarly, a modest investment in a tile or stone backsplash will make your kitchen and, indeed, your whole house look more expensive!

Floors and countertops get worked on or walked upon and consequently get dirty. It then makes sense to make these areas functional rather than decorative. We want your eyes to only slightly notice the floor and countertop. Instead we want to draw your attention to the area of the kitchen that doesn't get worked or walked on – the backsplash. Having an interesting or innovative design statement on your backsplash will draw your attention upward upon the wall and not the floor or countertops!

Often a bright, shiny, classy or interesting design on a backsplash will make a plain floor and countertop treatment look much more expensive than they are!



You can often assist an older home to sell quicker and for a higher price by a modest investment in a backsplash. The new backsplash will make an otherwise drab or outdated kitchen look better and be a positive rather than a negative selling point!

We almost always recommend that the backsplash selection process and installation take place after the new floor, countertops, new cabinets, new lighting or paint or other renovation or new construction activity is completed. You can then take a range of samples to the environment where they are going to “live” and determine which pattern, color or combination gives you the greatest impact for the least amount of effort and investment. You can only do this after all of the other areas are finished otherwise you'll be trying to hit a moving target.

From our experience, the impact of the color, texture and style of the backsplash tile will be dramatically effected by the color and kind of material used on the countertops and the lighting and wall coverings on the walls of the room.

If you have granite countertops, you have in essence a “plaid” on the flat surface and you will have to be very careful about having a complicated design or range of colors that may create a competing “plaid” on the backsplash. If you



have busy or very colorful wall paper on the walls, you will have a similar “plaid” problem to deal with.

If you have darker colored countertops or cabinets you may need brighter, glossier tile on the backsplash to reflect rather than absorb light. If you have plain or very neutral cabinets and countertops you might want shiny tile or tiles with a range of colors to brighten up a plain look that looks too antiseptic and lacking in style.

None of these selection complications can be effectively solved in your mind’s eye or from a showroom display! You must take a range of colors, styles and textures to where the backsplash will be created to make a good decision in the light of the environment that the tile will reside!

You will either use (1) decorative tiles which typically are square or rectangular in shape and usually coordinate in size with the field tile or (2) decorative liners (strips of tile 1/2x6 to 4x12) which frees you from having to worry about the size of the field tile. Other options include stone tiles which often are used by themselves or range in design (octagons, trapezoids or rectangles) rather than by color.

Decorative tiles or even decorative liners can have a lot of color and character but still be neutral! If you use one color you then have a blue, green ,etc. statement on your backsplash. If, on the other hand, the decorative tile or listelli range in color, your backsplash will not be color specific and the range of colors can be utilized as other accent colors are introduced to the kitchen environment. You can have your “cake and eat it too” by having a range of colors with will give a design statement and some excitement on your backsplash and still remain neutral and not compromise or limit you ability to decorate your kitchen!

In our experience the sizes that work best for backsplashes are 4x4, 6x6 and 3x6. Smaller tile are generally too busy and require too much grout and larger tiles look out of scale and in many instances like a commercial kitchen! Most deco tile are either 4x4 or 6x6 so if you use an off size your decorating choices are both limited and more expensive.



We are starting to see more and more demand for stone, glass and metal tile for use on backsplashes. The stone tile can both be quite dramatic and colorful when some of the red limestones are used. On the other hand, some of the lighter limestone are quite neutral and mix well with metal tile or with designs made with different sizes of the same light limestone material. With any stone

material periodic sealing will be required to keep them from staining. Readers who are addicted to wild cooking with Italian or Indian foods might want to stay away from stone unless they are prepared to be very careful with their cooking activities and are prepared to seal the backsplashes often!

Glass tiles are generally used on their own and as such become a dramatic but reasonably expensive backsplash material. They clearly are the choice to get a contemporary or modern European look.

A trick to reduce cost with metal tiles is to use them as accents with ceramic field tile. By mixing a few 4x4 or 6x6 metal tile into the field, the whole area will look more expensive but the cost will be moderated in that most of the area will be covered by the less expensive ceramic or porcelain tile. When used alone the metal tiles do allow for a contemporary look at usually a lesser cost than glass tile.

Both metal and glass tiles which can be quite elegant and expensive looking (because they are!) are a great match with the “plaid” created by granite or stone countertops. Since you don’t want to install Chevrolet hubcaps on a Mercedes you will clearly want to have a material of substance and elegance to match the investment that you have made on your stone backsplash.

You need to be sure that you have the proper “earrings” for your home!

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