

HINTS FOR HOMEOWNERS

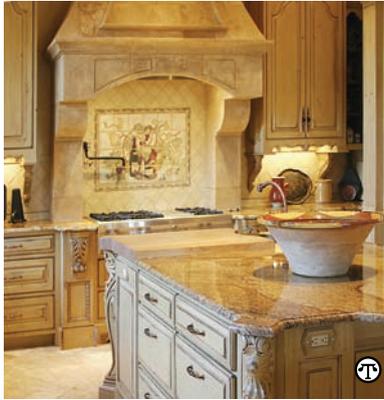
Natural Stone: Affordable Luxury

(NAPSA)—After a year of belt tightening and just “making do,” Americans are again investing in their homes—redecorating, remodeling and generally sprucing up.

The reason is simple: With mortgage money still restricted, consumers are “improving up” rather than moving up. In the past, many families would trade up to homes that offered appealing amenities like nicer kitchens or baths. This year, consumers are looking for ways to get the appealing kitchen or bath upgrade without the expense of moving.

And homeowners are finding that luxury enhancements like natural stone countertops can be very affordable. The timeless stone is unsurpassed in bringing warmth and richness to any room, immediately becoming a focal point. And, while the makers of synthetic countertops have tried to convince consumers that their manufactured products are as good as granite, natural stone remains unbeatable for enhancing the value of a home.

Consider what the experts advise. Each month, HGTV’s FrontDoor.com, in partnership with DIYnetwork.com, identifies “maximum value projects” for improving different areas of the home. The partnership recently offered tips “for getting the most value out of kitchen and bath renovations.” The recommendation? “To add beauty, value and buyer appeal to a kitchen, consider upgrading countertops to natural stone. Granite, marble, limestone and soapstone are popular options.” The recommenda-



This lovely, natural stone countertop is 3cm Copper Canyon granite from Brazil, finished with a Dupont edge.

tion for bathroom improvement was simpler: “Upgrade to granite countertops.”

Stone countertops have become more affordable as demand has increased and as new technology has made it easier to cut and polish the stone. And the selection is unparalleled—greater than any other countertop surface.

“Granite countertops are becoming all the rage,” writes KitchenKool.com, an online consumer information guide that does not sell products directly and is not affiliated with any individual manufacturer. “They’re almost as hard as diamond, easy to maintain, heat resistant and come in a range of over 3,000 colors to enhance the beauty and usefulness of your kitchen or bath forever.”

Studies show that consumers overwhelmingly prefer natural stone over synthetic materials. And it remains the gold standard

for real estate resale. Why? Because natural stone looks good forever, while some countertop materials look old and tired within a few years. And the artificial dyes in many synthetic stone counters can look dated quickly.

Plus, natural granite countertops are absolutely unique, made by Mother Nature—not in a factory that manufactures the same material over and over all day long.

There are some options that can help you get the most bang for your buck for granite countertops:

- **Color**—Select a more popular variety of granite and it can be more affordable. Select a more exotic and rare variety and it can cost a bit more.

- **Edge Profile**—More intricate profiles require more work and can increase the cost of the stone. A simpler style still looks elegant but will cost less.

- **Thickness of Slab**—The most popular is the 1¼-inch slab, but check on the availability of ¾-inch slabs that provide the same beauty and durability but will likely cost less.

The Marble Institute of America (MIA) is the industry’s nonprofit trade group. If you’re looking for a supplier or fabricator of fine granite or have any other questions about natural stone countertops, the MIA’s Web site is a great place to research stone and stone providers. You can find the Marble Institute Web site at www.marble-institute.com and you can access a directory of MIA fabricator and supplier members at www.marble-institute.com/directory.