

of the moment

ROCK OF THE AGES

Marble may be trending right now, but these alternative stone surfaces offer beauty and luxury too

FEATURE Luke Arthur Wells

ETHEREAL LOOK

Quartzite is a designer's go-to for capturing the drama of marble, while its crystalline nature means it often has a softer, more ethereal pattern than most marble types. It is also more robust. 'Quartzite combines the aesthetic qualities of marble with the durability of granite,' explains Antwerp-based architect Dieter Vander Velpen. 'The stone is created by volcanic action so it's really strong, doesn't stain from citric acid and is heat resistant - it's perfect for those who love to cook.' The material's range is displayed in this kitchen by Australian interior designer Smac Studio, with its soft green tones. 'Some comes from South America, some from Asia,' adds Dieter. 'This brings new veins and colours to the design world.'





CLEAN AND CRISP

As an engineered stone surface, quartz is designed to enhance the best qualities of natural stone to create a kitchen countertop material that's unparalleled in terms of durability. It doesn't stain and is resistant to scratches and chips, as well as water damage. It also has great antibacterial properties, so it resists bacteria and mould. Because it's engineered, you won't have to struggle to source the right pattern, colour or style, as you may with marble. The only drawback? The designs are limited to what any particular manufacturer has decided to make, rather than what nature has to offer. Caesarstone is a great place to start your search: this kitchen features its crisp white 5121 Loyalite worktop.



UNEXPECTED DEPTH

Granite's popularity since the 1970s - and the dated kitchen worktops many people inherited with their homes - means it doesn't have the best reputation. However, it comes in many forms and interesting, creative colours, like the stone in this kitchen by YSG. 'We clad this island in mismatched oversized lapis blue granite tiles,' says director Yasmine Ghoniem. It was used in tile format as the granite had to be cut from large slabs in order to be transported in the lift.



LIGHTNESS OF BEING

Onyx can capture the dramatic swirl of a good piece of marble, but it's light and floaty too, says Yasmine Ghoniem, director of YSG. Although it is less durable than marble, it can still work in spaces such as kitchens and bathrooms. 'We applied onyx in light, crisp layers in this master en suite,' Yasmine explains. 'So streamlined is the vanity ledge with its integrated shallow sinks that its swirling veins grant the illusion of levitation - it's my favourite feature.' ▶



COLOUR CHAMELEON

Soapstone is the material of choice for those looking to recreate the drama of black marble. It is heat sensitive, which makes it ideal for a kitchen worktop, but it's equally comfortable in other areas of a house. Designer Athena Calderone used soapstone to create this floating desk in her own home. Part of the draw of this material is its dynamism: 'Its colours can range from deep greens to charcoals to blacks with some great movement across its face,' says interior designer Leslie Murchie Cascino of Bonnie Wu Design. Soapstone develops a natural patina with use, but that can mean it wears unevenly without regular oiling, which may not be to everyone's taste.

PHOTOGRAPH MATTHEW WILLIAMS