

A Backsplash with Panache

EXAMINING THE HOTTEST MATERIALS, COLORS, PATTERNS AND STYLES IN KITCHEN BACKSPLASHES

BY ERIK J. MARTIN
CTW FEATURES

It may not cover as much surface area as your floor, countertops or cabinet fronts, but make no mistake: the wall above your sink is often the first place the eyes fix upon when looking into a kitchen. So if you want a room that makes a splash, back up and give careful thought to your backsplash, the experts advise.

"The backsplash is the one place in the kitchen where the owner can let his or her personal style shine," says Mark Scott, owner of MARK IV Builders in Cabin John, Maryland. "Flooring, cabinetry and countertops are not usually distinctive as statement features, but because the backsplash is a small space, it can really be a spot to highlight design preferences. If you spend any time in the kitchen at all, you're going to want a backsplash that makes you smile."

Richard Subaran, project manager with Silver Spring, Maryland-based Aidan Design, says the backsplash fills an important role as the "pop" piece of the kitchen and can act as a border or frame for the countertops.

"Typically, you want your accent piece to be supported by the other finishes, so if you have a backsplash that draws your eye, the other elements become supporting pieces in the art of your kitchen," Subaran says. "And from a functional standpoint, the backsplash protects the walls near the sink or oven from water, oil and other damaging elements and is a surface that can be easily cleaned."

Lately, the top five backsplash materials are ceramic tile (selected by 85 percent of National Kitchen & Bath Association members polled in 2015), followed by natural stone (69 percent), glass (66 percent), quartz (41 percent) and granite (35 percent).

Mercedes Desio of New York City-based design firm Villalobos Desio says several interesting backsplash trends have emerged recently.

"Backsplashes are being extended to the ceiling to give some height and texture to the room, and tile is being laid out in interesting designs - such as a her-



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ringbone pattern," Desio says. "New materials that traditionally aren't chosen for backsplashes, such as wood veneers, are popping up. As for colors, neutrals such as gray and bone have staying power and remain on trend."

Monochromatic backsplash designs that incorporate old-style handmade fire-clay tiles with crackle can make a flowing, classic statement, and new products "like porcelain printed full slabs, which mimic natural materials such as marble, travertine, limestone, slate and basalt, are getting a closer look," Subaran says.

Janice Harper, a homeowner in Tacoma, Washington, chose simple Talavera tiles with Mexican designs that

add color, warmth and brightness as well as a low-maintenance, easy-to-clean surface to her newly renovated kitchen. The result is a striking but pleasant contrast between the bright backsplash tiles and the terra cotta and dark amber colors prevalent elsewhere in the room.

"Backsplashes are one of the last things people think to clean the kitchen, so even if it's lovely, think about what it will look like when it hasn't been cleaned in a few weeks," says Harper, who suggests using a grout with a concealing color like grey and that includes a densifier premixed within the grout mix.

Whatever backsplash materials, patterns or approach you choose, be sure to

take a big picture approach.

"Make the backsplash part of the overall design concept for your kitchen, and consider the level of usage of your kitchen so that you select the right material that will be durable enough," Desio says.

Also, ask important questions before embarking on a new backsplash project.

"How will the backsplash harmonize with your other kitchen surfaces and materials? Will it serve a function as well as give you the esthetic results you're going for? And can it be used in a manner that will maximize its intended use?" Subaran asks.

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9 Tips to Shop Flea Markets Like a Pro

ARM YOURSELF WITH A STURDY BAG, BUBBLE WRAP AND THESE SAVVY TIPS THE NEXT TIME YOU HEAD TO A LOCAL FLEA MARKET

BY NANCY MATTIA
CTW FEATURES

Shopping at a flea market counts as a unique experience. Timing your visit right is essential, haggling is part of the process, and finding one-of-a-kind items is the underlying expectation. We've got tips to make your next trip fun and successful!

1. MAKE A LIST

Since flea markets and their multitude of goods can be overwhelming to some shoppers, having buying goals (patio chairs, throw pillows) will help you focus. While you're at it, set a budget to avoid making impulsive purchases you later regret.

2. GET THERE EARLY

"The best things will go first," says Nicolas Martin, founder of Flea Market Insiders (fleamarketinsiders.com), an online reference to vintage and antiques shopping. "Merchants and professional dealers often show up before dawn when the flea-mar-



ket vendors are still unpacking their trucks. This is one of the best times to find hidden gems." If you do go super-early, bring a flashlight so you can see in the dark. "A headlamp flashlight is even better, as it will leave both hands empty for rummaging," he says. If arriving before dawn is too drastic, show up at least 40 minutes before the official opening time.

3. STROLL THE VENUE TWICE

FROM OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS

"This may sound like a weird tip, but I guarantee that you won't see the same things from two different perspectives," Martin says. "You'll be surprised how different a market looks like when browsed from a new angle."

4. BRING CASH

Cold hard cash rules at flea markets. Though most major flea markets have ATMs on the

premises, try to avoid them - the lines will be long, you'll pay a service fee and it's a way to stay on budget.

5. WHEN YOU FIND SOMETHING YOU LOVE, GRAB IT

Just looking at something doesn't give you first dibs. If you're not firmly holding onto an item, another shopper could claim it.

6. INSPECT THE ITEM FOR FLAWS

The worst thing besides paying too much for something is paying for something that's broken, Martin says. "Should it be a chair, a vintage camera, a painting or a porcelain figure, always take the time to review the item in detail," says Martin. If the vendor gets pushy, "be polite and tell him that before making him an offer, you need to know exactly what you're buying."

7. NEGOTIATE

A flea market is one place where a "\$25" tag may really mean "\$18" - but you have to ask.

One of the biggest mistakes people make is not haggling enough on the price, Martin says. Here's how to do it: Name a price that's half of what you are actually willing to pay. The vendor will then give you a price that's lower than the original. You two will go back and forth a few times until you can agree on a price.

8. HESITATE

"If the seller's final offer is too high, hesitate and look worried," Martin says. "Then tell them that you're going to look around while you think about it." At that point, the vendor will probably start bargaining again. But be reasonable: He still needs to make a profit.

9. STAY UNTIL CLOSING.

Great deals often happen if you show up just as the vendors are packing up for the day. If they don't want to lug their wares back to their truck, they may knock considerable dollars off the original asking price.

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