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Custom COUNTER

Installing a granite tiled countertop
made easy BY MICHEL ROY

LOOKING FOR THE ultimate do-it-yourself kitchen countertop project? How about one that combines hard-wearing natural granite that's laid in easy-to-manage tile-size sections and finished off with a contemporary metallic edging system? This project took less than a day to complete, and all the materials, including the tiles, the metallic edging and the underlay were readily available at the local building centre. The tools required were also kept basic, with the exception of the diamond wet-saw, which can be rented at most rent-all centres.



Step-by-Step Installation



1. The first step in using the Schluter edging is to plan the layout. The aluminum profiles need to be fitted together properly. This is not difficult, as there are special inside and outside corner pieces, for example, to join sections together. But it does mean setting up your tile layout and your edging layout before you start the installation



2. The profile pieces can be easily cut with a non-ferrous metal blade in a chopsaw, or by hand with a simple hacksaw. (For more information on the Schluter edging, call 800-472-4588 or go to www.schluter.com)

3. Depending on the type of tile you use and your layout, you might be able to use a simple scoring-type tile cutter. An inexpensive diamond-bladed wetsaw can make things much easier, and it was necessary for the granite tiles in this project



PHOTOGRAPHY: ROGER YIP

Step-by-Step Installation



4. For a solid base for the new countertop, install a double layer of 1/2" exterior-grade plywood. After making the cutout for a new sink, begin the actual installation by laying out and cutting Schluter's Ditra underlay membrane to size



5. The Ditra mat is adhered to the plywood with a modified thinset tile mortar formulated to bond to plywood, using a 1/4" x 3/16" or 5/16" x 5/16" V-notched trowel. Lay out the mortar with the flat side of the trowel, then comb it out with the notched side



6. The waffle-like underlay mat is pressed in place over the mortar, so that its fleece backing is completely bonded into the thinset



7. The plan for the new counter was to have a very short backsplash applied directly over the existing drywall, so a strip of waterproofing membrane was installed using the same technique as for the countertop



8. Before starting the actual tiling, it's a good idea to double-check your trim piece layout. It is not necessary to wait for the mortar to set before starting to work on laying the tile. However, the mortar does have to be unmodified thinset, suited to the type of tile you are installing. Check with the manufacturer of your mortar and Schluter if you have any doubts



9. Begin tiling by laying down thinset with the flat side of a trowel and then comb it out with the notched side. In this project, the full-size 12" x 12" floor tiles required a 3/8" notched trowel

Step-by-Step Installation



10. Lay the edging pieces in position over the mortar, pressing them in so their perforated flanges are grabbed by the mortar



11. Comb a little extra mortar over the flanges to ensure the tiles are well bonded over the edging sections

12. Set the tiles in place. The process goes quite quickly, assuming you have done a thorough job of planning your layout and cutting everything to fit in advance

13. The countertop edging profile in this project is designed so that a strip of tile (which you cut to fit) adheres along the front edge of the countertop



14. To install the edge tiles, “back butter” the tile mortar directly onto the tile backs with your trowel, and press the tile pieces into place. The mortar locks into dovetail-shaped channels in the profile, holding it firmly

15. The backsplash is installed following the same techniques and order of operations; the trim goes on first, and extra mortar is applied over the flanges

16. Once the edge profile is fixed in place, each section of the granite backsplash tile is applied

17. After the mortar has cured for a full day, grout to fill the gaps between the tiles and the tile edging. For a countertop, it’s a good idea to use a darker-toned grout to hide staining. The grout (and tiles too, if necessary) should then be protected with a sealer, according to the manufacturer’s directions

