

Antonella Romano, The Tile Oracle

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NORTH JERSEY HOMES

Antonella Romano is owner of the Stone and Tile Emporium in Wycoff (www.stoneandtilenj.com). Send your stone and tile questions to her at emolo@northjersey.com.

QUESTION: My husband and I have a huge kitchen that needs updating. We have a yellow linoleum floor, yellow Formica countertops and backsplash, a center island about 8 feet long with two sets of electric cooking tops and dark wood cabinets with white knobs. The kitchen opens up to a sitting room. We have two leather camel-colored sofas in there, a TV and a coffee table. The walls of the kitchen and sitting room are a light beige with a lemon cast. We need to change the countertops and floor and perhaps the hardware on the cabinets. Should the floor be picked out first or the countertop? Should the backsplash be the same material as the counters? What materials should we consider for the countertops and hardware? What design and what size tile should we use for the floor?

— *Marie Maier of Mahwah*



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A good rule is to use the lightest color of the countertop as the main color of the backsplash. Work in accents based on the counter's darker tones as well as the hues of the cabinets, the walls, the floor and any nearby furniture.

ANSWER: When it comes to a large, updating renovation such as yours, you don't just want the various elements to look new. You want them to harmonize with one another and to last.

The first order should be your countertop. I highly recommend going with granite. Although many shops will sell other materials based on style trends, many — such as marble — will scratch and absorb stains. Granite releases stains and will not scratch, so to have a perfect countertop for a long time, granite is the way to go.

However, the larger the slab of granite, the fewer the color options there are. Because you have a large center island, you will only have about a dozen options that will work in your color scheme. That's why you should start with your countertop — because you'll have fewer selections, and those selections will determine everything else.

So begin your renovation by shopping for slabs.

Slabs are sheets of stone cut from raw material that will be cut again to fit a space, such as a countertop. You'll need to know what your longest run is on your countertop so you can buy the appropriate-sized slab.

For a large countertop, you probably will need more than one slab, which results in seams. When you assemble different slabs, the veins can easily not match up, so I suggest a light color such as St. Cecilia or a Giallo Ornamentale. These are neutrals without a lot of vein movement; also, they are light, which will create a contrast with the dark cabinets. One with dark brown veining will pull in the cabinet colors without clashing or competing.

After you've made your countertop selection and know your color palette, move down to your floor.

I recommend a glazed porcelain. First, it's fire- and water-proof. Second, with its holes and chips, it can appear to be a natural stone material; if it has a shiny finish, it can resemble a finished marble. Either way, a glazed porcelain will make it appear as if you spent more than you actually did.

Take a piece of your countertop material with you to make selecting the colors easier. Go for a random, multi-sized pattern, which creates a natural-stone look and feel, like an Old World floor. You could choose a chiseled edge, which authenticates the look of natural stone, or small grout lines with straight edges. Give thought in advance to the thickness of grout you want to see on the floor.

The tiles should have a soft tone, no darker than the countertop but not significantly lighter either.

Next should be your backsplash. Check the space between your countertop and cabinet where your backsplash will go — the standard size is 18 inches. If that's the case, take the lightest color in your granite and make that the color of your backsplash. You already have dark cabinets, so if you make your backsplash dark the room will be top-heavy. However, if the space is larger, you can get more creative with a frame or a decorative accent. The accent colors in a border or accent should feature the colors you want to bring into the kitchen, such as the camel in the sofas or the brown of your cabinets, or you can take inspiration from the dark specks in your granite.

Keep in mind that there are a few stone and tile shops, like mine, that can help you with the project. Professional advice can ensure that your new kitchen elements look like they belong together and will still be around 40 years from now.