

Customizing Post-Formed Counters

by Don Kowalewski

Laminate counters have dominated the kitchen counter market for many years, and with good reason — they're inexpensive, and the range of laminate color and styles is almost endless. One of the more appealing aspects of laminate counters is that they are available as post-formed tops. Post-formed countertops are sections of finished countertop that arrive at the job

Post-Formed Configurations



Standard top
25¹/₄" wide for kitchen base
22¹/₄" wide for vanity



Bar top
Available 12", 15", 18", 26",
30", and 36" wide



Deck
Available 12", 15", 18", 26",
30", and 36" wide

Figure 1. Post-formed countertops are available in three configurations: standard tops with backsplashes, bar tops, and deck tops.

site precut to length. They can typically be installed in just a few hours.

Post-Formed Options

The post-formed tops I sell arrive at my wholesaler's facility as 12-foot-long blanks (straight sections of countertop with unfinished ends). These blanks are manufactured in three configurations that will accommodate most kitchen cabinet layouts (see Figure 1). A range of edge and backsplash options are available, including factory-applied wood edge treatments (Figure 2).

Extra Features

Because post-formed tops are manufactured off site, contractors often assume that an unusual site condition (or customer request) will rule out the use of these premanufactured lengths of countertop. But most manufacturers offer a variety of counter profiles as well as a number of special options that can be used to tailor a post-formed top to unusual site conditions (Figure 3). These modifications are made to the standard counter blanks at the wholesaler's shop, and can cost less than having a custom top fabricated.

By specifying the correct feature options, you can order a countertop

that's literally "plug and play," requiring only a screw gun to install it. But as the number of specified options rise, so does the chance of error. An incorrectly located sink cutout can quickly turn a kitchen counter into a workbench. Each feature option typically adds between \$20 and \$50 to the cost of the counter.

Comparative Costs

Pricing for post-formed countertops is by the linear foot and is based on the length of the counter measured at the backsplash. Measurements are typically rounded up to the nearest foot.

At the lower end of the pricing scale, standard post-formed tops can be ordered for \$13 per linear foot. This cost includes precut inside miters, sink cutouts, and applied end caps. These lower-cost counters have the standard round-edge profile, and are covered with a common laminate style. This compares favorably to the \$28 per linear foot that local shops in my area charge to fabricate a custom top.

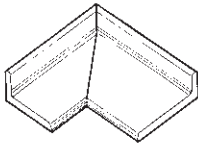
The cost for the more "exotic" post-formed tops (a wood-edged counter or an unusual laminate style, for example) ranges between \$20 to \$30 per linear foot. In this price range, it makes sense to compare costs with a local



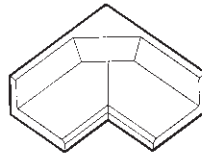
Figure 2. Post-form options range from the standard rounded-edge counter to styles that imitate custom tops.

Special Options for Post-Formed Tops

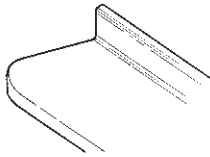
Out-of-square
miter



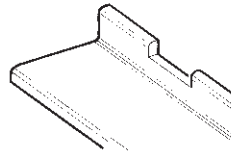
Diagonal corner
with shelf



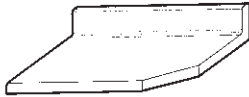
Radius
corner



Window
cutout



45° angle
clipped corner



U-shaped
cutout

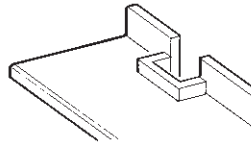


Figure 3. Most post-formed sellers have a list of special-order items that can accommodate unusual site conditions.

fabricator — particularly if there will be a number of extra feature items required. One note: Very few custom fabricators can produce the rounded laminate edge found on many post-formed tops.

Depending on shop schedules, lead time is a week or less for counters that my wholesaler has in stock. Lead times for nonstock laminate styles or counter profiles is two to three weeks, and the minimum order is an 8-foot length. Since most of my cabinet orders take three weeks or more to process, countertop lead times are seldom a problem.

When the job schedule permits, I advise my customers to wait until the cabinets are installed before ordering the countertop. This way, the countertop can be sized to absorb any unplanned adjustments to the cabinet layout. ■

Don Kowalewski owns and operates *Creative Window and Door in Hallstead, Pa.*