

# Fine Homebuilding

## Amazing countertops

Metal, paper, and even **recycled glass**

Build a better shed

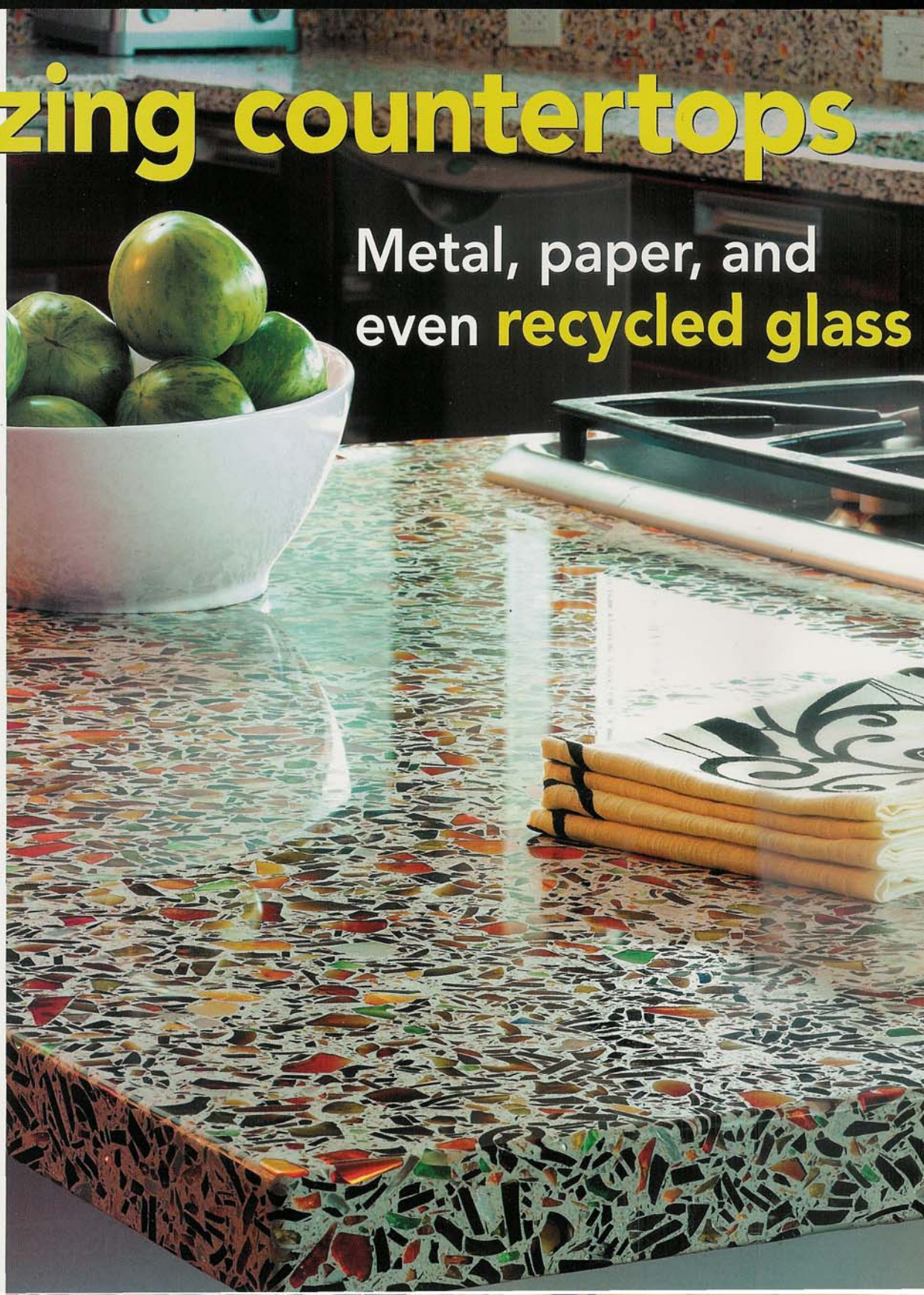
Small, smart kitchen addition

Solar water heaters

Pour a concrete slab

Big miter saws and more

MASTER CARPENTER  
Perfect crown molding



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**Concrete is controversial.** With seemingly limitless design possibilities, concrete has become a popular finish material, particularly in modern homes. Countertops, like the one from Syndecrete shown here, can be poured in just about any shape with integral features like drainboards or sponge trays. To make your concrete counters green, ask for them to be made with an alternative to portland cement (see below) and with plenty of recycled aggregate.



## CONCRETE

Led by early luminaries Buddy Rhodes and Fu-Tung Cheng, many fabricators now make concrete counters in just about any shape and color a buyer wants. Concrete countertops are considered green because they are durable and don't off-gas. Their weakness is a reliance on portland cement and its costly carbon-dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) price tag. Portland-cement production is responsible for an estimated 7% to 8% of total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions worldwide.

Some fabricators are increasing the percentage of aggregate and using portland-cement alternatives to create concrete counters with fewer environmental trade-offs.

Lithistone and VitraStone use ceramic cement. Lithistone says this portland-cement alternative is made with magnesium oxide and has only one-twentieth the embodied energy of portland cement. Squak Mountain Stone uses fly ash to make concrete slabs that are 50% lighter than conventional blends, while Syndecrete uses up to 40% recycled content and may mix in brass, abalone shells, or wood chips.

Concrete counters are heat and scratch resistant, but will stain if they're not well sealed. A few sealing options are available, each with its own pros and cons. For more on sealing, visit [www.concretecountertopinstitute.com](http://www.concretecountertopinstitute.com).

### How green is concrete?

Concrete's greenness depends on how much portland cement is used in its manufacture. Concrete is durable and doesn't off-gas, so if the counters are made locally with cement alternatives and recycled aggregates, they can be very sustainable.

### How much does it cost?

\$65 to \$125 per sq. ft.

### SOURCES

**BUDDY RHODES**  
[www.buddyrhodes.com](http://www.buddyrhodes.com), 415-431-8070

**CHENG DESIGN**  
[www.chengdesign.com](http://www.chengdesign.com), 510-899-3272

**LITHISTONE**  
[www.lithistone.net](http://www.lithistone.net), 970-799-0181

**SQUAK MOUNTAIN STONE**  
[www.tmi-online.com](http://www.tmi-online.com), 425-486-3417

**SYNDECRETE**  
[www.syndecrete.com](http://www.syndecrete.com), 310-829-9704

**VITRASTONE**  
[www.vitrastone.com](http://www.vitrastone.com), 970-385-4044