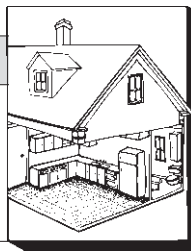


Choosing the Right Kitchen Sink

by Paul Turpin



Perhaps because we spend so much time standing in front of them, we all have strong opinions about kitchen sinks. Some people cannot live without a cast-iron, double-bowl sink, while others only want stainless steel. But no matter what type of fixture fits your customer's fancy, a sink should be selected according to how it will be used, what types of accessories will accompany it, what type of countertop will surround it, and how it will be mounted.

Materials and Styles

There are a few customers around who still prefer a roomy, single-basin sink, but the majority of homeowners want a kitchen sink with two or more basins. There is an enormous variety of basin sizes and configurations available. The most common variation on the standard double-basin sink has a third and smaller basin for the garbage disposal. If your customer chooses this option, confer with your plumber before he shows up, because this type of sink requires specific fittings.

Sinks are usually made of enameled cast iron (often erroneously referred to as porcelain), stainless steel, or solid surfacing. Cast iron is the workhorse of sink materials. The lustrous surface is a baked-on ceramic glaze similar to that used on ceramic tiles. Vitreous china is sometimes confused with cast iron, but this more delicate china is usually reserved for bathroom sinks. Stain resistant and durable, cast iron will not chip unless it's hit hard. Cast iron is more likely to fall victim to abrasive cleansers like Ajax that, over time, will scratch and dull the shiny surface. Advise your customers to use non-abrasive, soft-scrub cleansers.

Most people think of stainless steel as a less expensive alternative to cast iron. This is true of the lighter gauge

materials that sound tinny when water runs into them, but heavy gauge stainless-steel sinks can be more expensive than cast iron. For instance, Franke (212 Church Rd., North Wales, PA 19454; 800/626-5771) and Kindred Industries (1000 Kindred Rd., Midland, ONT L4R 4K9 Canada; 800/465-5586) both produce high quality round-basin, undermounted stainless-steel sinks (see photo below). Remember when you're purchasing stainless-steel sinks that the lower the gauge number, the heavier the material.

If you're working with a solid-surface countertop, you have the option of selecting an integral solid-surface sink. The beauty of these is the seamless transition from the countertop to the sink. Also, the color is unbroken, giving a streamlined look to an otherwise busy area. You can also achieve this monochromatic look with tile. Kohler (Kohler, WI 53044; 800/456-4537) and Dal-Tile (7834 Hawn Fwy., Dallas, TX 75217; 800/535-8453) share colors so that the sink and countertop match.

Some of the solid-surface manufacturers, including Corian (The DuPont Co., P.O. Box 10010, Wilmington, DE 19885; 800/426-7426), produce sinks for use with other counter materials. One of the advantages of using Corian or a similar product is that the sink can be refinished if it gets chipped. Solid surfacing is also stain resistant and durable.

Mounting the Sink

A sink is mounted in one of three ways: self-rimming (with a lip that sits on top of the counter), flush-set (level with the counter), or under-mounted (set beneath the countertop). Even if the plumber sets the sink, you need to prepare the countertop and order the materials

and fixtures for the various sink styles.

Cast-iron sinks are available in self-rimming, flush-set, and under-mounted varieties. As I mentioned last month, self-rimming models are a real nuisance for customers, since the high outer rim makes it difficult to wipe messes from the countertop into the sink. However, self-rimming sinks are easy to mount because the hole in the countertop doesn't need to be clean or very accurate.

You cannot undermount a cast-iron sink when you have a plastic laminate countertop since there is no trim to cover the joint between the sink and the counter. You can, however, install a flush-set, cast-iron sink and cover the joint with a special-order, stainless-steel sink trim. This trim will cover any rough cuts, but it is not so high as to create an obstacle for cleaning the counter.

If you're working with a ceramic tile countertop, a cast-iron sink will normally be flush-set or under-mounted by the tile sub. Be forewarned that any time you mix metal sinks with ceramic tile, you're likely to get cracking grout joints around the sink. Metal gains and loses heat faster than tile, causing stress along the joints. The condition is made worse by vibrations from the garbage disposal.

Using a color-matched caulk provides some elasticity at this joint. Color Caulk (1696 W. Mill St., Colton, CA 92324; 800/552-6225) makes a siliconized acrylic caulk in shades to match the tile or sink. The company also makes an acrylic latex caulk with or without sand that is virtually indistinguishable from grout; but without silicone, the manufacturer does not recommend it in wet areas.

Stainless-steel sinks. The majority of stainless-steel sinks are self-rimming, but the lip is so low that the sinks almost look as if they are flush-set. The sinks come complete with mounting hardware, although it's always a good idea to check the box to make sure the parts are there.

Be careful not to overtighten the clamping screws at the perimeter of a stainless-steel sink. This is easy to do. By pushing down on the counter and up on the sink, the clamp can end up dimpling the sink. Because of stainless steel's mirror finish, this will show prominently.

Solid-surface sinks. In most cases, solid-surface sinks will arrive already integrated into the countertop. Since these are set by the countertop fabricator, the contractor has only to make sure the plumbing matches the sink specifications. However, Corian does recommend using their brand of silicone caulk for mounting the faucet and drain baskets. ■

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Undermount stainless-steel sinks, like this one from Kindred Industries, are usually made of a heavier-gauge stainless steel than the typical self-rimming variety.