

A photograph of a modern kitchen sink area. A large, light-colored wooden cutting board is placed over a stainless steel sink. On the board, there are several fresh vegetables, including carrots and leafy greens, along with a large knife. A sleek, modern faucet with a curved spout is positioned over the sink, and water is flowing from it. The background shows a white countertop and a stainless steel dishwasher.

# Kitchen Sinks that Shine

With so many shapes, sizes, colors, and materials, one may not be enough

BY SCOTT GIBSON

**I**n its most basic form, the kitchen sink is still what it always has been: a watertight basin where dishware, food, and even small children are washed. Manufacturers, however, are turning this mundane kitchen fixture into something that's both more stylish and more functional. By experimenting with new shapes, materials, and features, designers are elevating the sink's status from overlooked to center stage.

Consumers are increasingly encouraged to see their kitchen sinks as workstations, not just as places to scrub pots and pans. Accessories such as cutting boards, colanders, and knife racks are helping to make sinks more useful even as a broader palette of materials is jazzing them up.

Stainless steel is still the choice of as many as 75% of all buyers. Yet offerings go far beyond traditional one- or two-bowl sinks to encompass large workstations that resemble cleaning and food-prep areas found in commercial kitchens. As sinks keep pace with the commercial-style appliances that many homeowners are installing, prices have risen accordingly.

The rest of the market offers an expanding array of choices, including enamel, solid surface, fire clay, soapstone, copper, bronze, stone composites, and concrete. □

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Scott Gibson is a contributing editor to *Fine Homebuilding*. Photos courtesy of the manufacturers, except where noted.

# STAINLESS STEEL: MYRIAD SHAPES, SIZES, AND COSTS

It's easy to understand why professional cooks favor sinks made of stainless steel: It neither absorbs food and bacteria nor rusts, and it is extremely durable, impervious to heat, and relatively easy to clean. Available in both polished and brushed finishes (polished versions are more difficult to maintain), stainless-steel sinks come in a variety of shapes and sizes with as many as three separate bowls.

A two-bowl stainless sink is one of the least-expensive options on the market, starting at about \$30. This economy model is made from thin steel—typically 20 to 22 gauge (ga.)—that is more likely to flex under pressure or dent when something heavy is dropped in the sink. When looking at steel thickness, remember: the higher the gauge, the thinner the steel. In less-expensive sinks, the bowls can be as shallow as 6 in., and deeply rounded inside corners can reduce the amount of usable room in the bottom of the bowl for washing.



**The basic, no-frills, one-basin stainless-steel sink (left) still gets the job done—if it's made of an 18-ga. or thicker steel and has a sufficient depth. The two-bowl model from Kohler (below) maximizes its area with tight corners.**

Stainless steel is still the choice of as many as 75% of all buyers.



**The sleek lines of Kohler's Swerve (above and facing page, back) give it a modern look, but the curved edge softens it and keeps it from looking stark. At 60 in. long and just over 8 in. wide, the Undertone trough sink (facing page), also from Kohler, is perfect for small tasks and looks great, too.**



**Stainless-steel sinks come with virtually any bell or whistle you can imagine. A bamboo cutting board is included with Kohler's two-basin Poise model (above). American Standard's Culinaire sink (left) can come with a soap dispenser and colander, as well as various cutting boards and drain racks.**



## STAINLESS STEEL: CONTINUED

*It looks like it belongs in a professional's kitchen. Commercial-style appliances are a trend in the kitchen, from ranges and refrigerators to sinks. Franke's 48-in. Magnum sink costs around \$4,200.*



Moderately priced stainless sinks are made from thicker-gauge steel—up to 18 ga.—and have deeper bowls with more tightly radiused corners (photo center right, p. 47). Bowl depths of 10 in. are common, and because the steel is thicker, it is less susceptible to denting and is quieter when a waste disposer is added. A two-bowl model costs between \$400 and \$700, but the price can reach \$1,000 or more for a 45-in.-wide three-bowl model.

At the very top of the heap are commercial-style sinks made from even heavier 16-ga. steel. These sinks are very stiff and dent-resistant, and extra attention to sound-deadening material on the bottom makes them quieter and better insulated than low-end models.

A trend toward commercial-style appliances is pushing manufacturers to offer stainless-steel workstations that include sinks, cutting boards, integral drain boards, and the like. You'll pay for what you're getting, though. Costs for these high-end sinks can get up to \$5,000 to \$8,000.

*More of a workstation than a sink, Julien's Kitchen Island 2100 features drawers, cabinets, and a pedestal with an outlet. Designed to be used from either side, it can take the place of a 48-in. sink cabinet and sells for around \$6,000.*



### PROS

Durable, nonstaining, and heat-resistant surface; wide variety of shapes and sizes; compatible with a wide range of countertop materials.

### CONS

Economy sinks have shallow bowls with thin walls, which are noisy and flexible. Mirror-polished finishes may be troublesome to maintain. Commercial-grade sinks are relatively expensive.

### COST

Prices for basic stainless steel start at \$30. Better steel and accessories are \$500 to \$1,000. High-end workstations seldom sell for less than \$5,000.

### SOURCES

#### American Standard

800-442-1902

[www.americanstandard.com](http://www.americanstandard.com)

#### Elkay

800-661-1795; [www.elkayusa.com](http://www.elkayusa.com)

#### Franke

800-626-5771; [www.frankeksd.com](http://www.frankeksd.com)

#### Julien

418-687-9205; [www.julien.ca](http://www.julien.ca)

#### Kohler

920-457-4441; [www.kohler.com](http://www.kohler.com)

Although sinks come in as many sizes as they do colors and materials, the de facto American benchmark is a 33-in. by 22-in. two-bowl design. It fits right into a standard 36-in. sink cabinet.

That's not the biggest sink you can buy, says kitchen designer Jim Kregel, but it should be adequate for most kitchens. Some sinks come with equally sized bowls, but he suggests two different sizes: one 10-in.-deep bowl big enough to handle a broiler pan or cookie sheet, and one smaller, shallower bowl used for washing vegetables and equipped with a waste disposer. "Although manufacturers have created three-bowl sinks," Kregel says, "most people find no reason to have that third bowl. It's more sink than you're really going to need."

How big should the sink be?



The key is getting a big pan all the way into the bottom of the larger bowl to avoid washing one end of it and turning it around to wash the other. Measure the largest pan you're likely to wash in the sink, then choose a bowl that will handle it. Remember that thick outside walls afford less interior room than thinner ones. A stainless-steel sink has more usable room than a cast-iron sink, for example.

Smaller one-basin sinks (25 in. by 22 in.) may work better in a small kitchen, but the design is less flexible. One activity at a time is the rule, and a 10-in. bowl suitable for scrubbing pots and pans may be difficult to peel and wash vegetables in.

Kitchens where two people work at the same time may benefit from a large two-bowl sink and a smaller prep sink. This option makes sense, says Kregel, when there's enough room to handle two work areas, and only when both sinks have waste disposers. Otherwise, whoever ends up trimming and washing vegetables at the prep sink has to walk across the room to get rid of the waste, negating the convenience of a second sink.



## COPPER AND BRONZE: EXOTIC CHOICES THAT DRAW THE EYE

**B**ronze and copper sinks have a more rustic, less polished look than stainless steel, with a lot of tactile and visual appeal. Sun Valley Bronze has two sand-cast bronze sinks for the kitchen: a 31½-in.-wide single-bowl apron front (\$6,900) and a 37¼-in. double-basin undermount (\$8,200). At about 200 lb. each, these two models need support from below.

Sand-casting gives the metal a rough-textured appearance, and the bronze is resistant to wear or damage. Bronze won't rust, although it can develop a darker surface patina with exposure to light and air. While beautiful, the sinks aren't top sellers: Sun Valley sold five apron fronts and only one or two double-basin models in the year after they were introduced. Rocky Mountain Hardware also sells cast-bronze sinks.

Copper sinks have a lot of eye appeal, too. Copper oxidizes quickly to a brownish patina, and while it won't rust, it will take some elbow grease to keep it looking its best.

Stone Forest sells a 30-in.-wide farmhouse-style sink in 16-ga. copper for about \$2,000. Foam fills the cavity between the sink's double walls, cutting noise. Whitehaus Collection sells a variety of sinks in 32-oz. red copper (what the company says is the equivalent of 16 ga.). Its 30-in. by 19-in. apron-front model is about \$3,100. There are many online sources for copper sinks, too, with kitchen-size models starting at about \$1,500.

### PROS

Highly durable non-ferrous metals are aesthetically pleasing with great tactile appeal; surface won't chip or rust.

### CONS

Limited styles and bowl designs; very high cost; copper will need occasional polishing.

### COST

Copper sink prices can be as low as \$1,500. Bronze is much more expensive: \$7,000 to \$13,000, and higher.

### SOURCES

#### Sun Valley Bronze

866-788-3631

[www.svbronze.com](http://www.svbronze.com)

#### Rocky Mountain Hardware

888-788-2013

[www.rockymountainhardware.com](http://www.rockymountainhardware.com)

#### Whitehaus Collection

800-527-6690

[www.whitehauscollection.com](http://www.whitehauscollection.com)

#### Stone Forest

888-682-2987

[www.stoneforest.com](http://www.stoneforest.com)

*Copper and bronze sinks certainly are pretty to look at, but before you reach into your wallet to pay for one, be sure you're ready for the scrubbing it will take to keep it looking its best.*

## SOLID SURFACE: HIGH PERFORMANCE AND FLEXIBLE DESIGN



**S**inks made from the same solid-surface materials used for countertops have an advantage over everything else on the market: a seamless installation. Although self-rimming designs are available, the usual approach is to glue the sink to the bottom of the countertop (photo bottom right), eliminating the recesses and seams where food and grime can collect. In the hands of a good fabricator, seams are invisible (photo left).

Although solid-surface sinks aren't cheap—a 33-in. double-bowl sink starts at about \$400—they are dependable performers. Made from acrylic or polyester resin with a mineral filler, they're highly stain resistant and nonporous. The pattern or color (and there are plenty to choose from) goes all the way through, so any surface nicks or dings won't expose a different substrate below. Solid-surface sinks are more forgiving than cast iron or stone, and they can be scrubbed hard

**Solid-surface sinks mean seamless installations.** Instead of sitting atop the counter like the majority of sinks, a solid-surface sink is glued to the underside of the counter (photo right). The fabricator then uses a router to smooth the invisible seam between sink and counter (photo left).



## SOLID SURFACE:

CONTINUED

with a Scotch-Brite pad without damaging the surface. Minor blemishes can be sanded out, and major dings can be repaired by a pro.

Solid-surface sinks are available in a variety of shapes and sizes, enough to satisfy most demands. Bowls of different sizes and depths can be bought separately and combined in the same countertop, allowing great design flexibility. A skilled fabricator can cut apart solid-surface sinks and reform them into different shapes. Reliable adhesives make these hybrids leak-free with seams all but invisible.



If there is a downside to solid surface, other than cost, it's that the material may be hard to combine aesthetically with a full range of countertop materials. A solid-surface sink might look out of place with a natural-stone counter, for example, whereas an enameled cast-iron or stainless-steel sink would not.

### PROS

Durable, nonporous, and repairable, with colors or patterns that go all the way through; good sound-deadening qualities; sinks can be glued into solid-surface counters for seamless connection.

### CONS

Can be relatively expensive and may not be aesthetically suitable with all countertop materials.

### COST

A solid-surface bowl costs anywhere from \$150 to \$600, but the price of installation varies widely across the country.

### SOURCES

**Avonite**  
800-428-6648  
[www.avonite.com](http://www.avonite.com)

**Corian**  
800-426-7426  
[www.corian.com](http://www.corian.com)

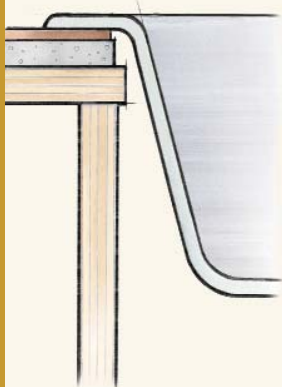
**Wilsonart International**  
800-433-3222  
[www.wilsonart.com](http://www.wilsonart.com)

**Formica Solid Surfacing**  
800-367-6422  
[www.formica.com](http://www.formica.com)

**Swanstone**  
800-325-7008  
[www.theswancorp.com](http://www.theswancorp.com)

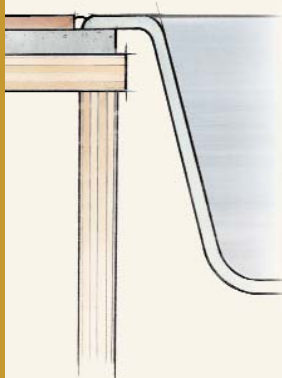
# Drop-in or undermount

## Good: SELF-RIMMING



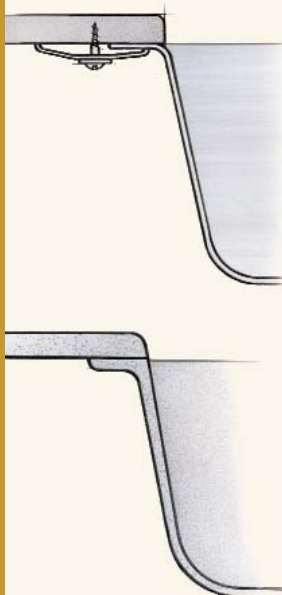
Self-rimming sinks drop into a hole cut in the countertop. A metal flange, or rim, around the top of the sink provides support. Stainless-steel sinks typically are held in place with metal clips tightened from below (cast-iron sinks don't need them). Self-rimming sinks are relatively easy to install. However, the lip around the edge of a self-rimming sink is a great collector of kitchen debris, so these sinks are harder to keep clean than flush-mounts or undermounts. All self-rimming sinks should be sealed with a bead of silicone caulk to prevent leaks.

## Better: FLUSH MOUNT



Flush-mount sinks often are called tile-edge sinks because the top edge of the sink is designed to be flush with a tile countertop. Flush-mounts are installed in much the same way as self-rimming sinks. Depending on the thickness of the tile and tile adhesive, though, the installer may have to shim or rout the edge of the counter substrate so that the sink and counter are flush. Caulk should be used to seal the sink in place as well as to fill the gap between the edge of the sink and the tile.

## Best: UNDERMOUNT



Undermount sinks are tucked completely beneath the counter, so crumbs, food, and other kitchen debris can be swept easily into the sink. Installation, however, is much more exacting. The clearance hole must be cut perfectly because the surrounding edge of the countertop is completely visible once the sink is installed. Heavy undermounts, like those made from stone or cast iron, should be supported from below.

Solid-surface undermount sinks are unique because they are glued to the countertop; seams are virtually invisible. There is no chance of a leak and no place for kitchen debris to collect. A really skilled installer can make custom undermount sinks. The downside is higher cost and greater installation difficulty. This job is for a pro.

Installation options

## ACRYLIC: NONSTAINING AND ECONOMICAL, BUT CAN BE SOFT

Acrylic sinks are made just like acrylic bathtubs and showers: A sheet of acrylic plastic is heated, then vacuum-formed in a mold and reinforced with fiberglass and resin. The surface of an acrylic sink is nonporous, resists staining and cracking, and has good noise-dampening and heat-retention properties.

Acrylic is not as hard as some other sink materials, so nonabrasive cleaners are recommended. Surface scratches can be removed with sandpaper, and the gloss restored with car-polishing compound. However, acrylic is susceptible to damage from petroleum-based products and high heat.

Karran USA, which imports a line of sinks made in South Africa, says that its manufacturing process produces a harder acrylic surface unaffected by abrasive cleaners and scouring pads. These sinks are guaranteed for life against stains and for 50 years against manufacturing defects.

Prices for acrylic sinks are typically low. A 33-in. by 22-in. double-bowl sink from Mansfield starts at \$129. But Karran's prices are higher: A 33-in. by 22-in. double-bowl model is \$250.



**You don't want to scrub too hard on an acrylic sink.** The great news is that you may not need to. Some cleaners can scratch, but acrylic offers excellent stain resistance.

### PROS

Low cost; nonporous surface with good sound-dampening and thermal properties; dingy surfaces can be renewed.

### CONS

Acrylic is relatively soft and can be damaged by high heat, abrasive cleaners, and petroleum-based products.

### COST

Expect to pay between \$100 and \$300 for an acrylic sink.

### SOURCES

#### Mansfield

419-938-5211

[www.mansfieldplumbing.com](http://www.mansfieldplumbing.com)

#### Karran USA

866-452-7726

[www.karranproducts.com](http://www.karranproducts.com)

## ENAMELED SURFACES: DIFFERENT METALS KEEP THE LOOK BUT LOSE THE WEIGHT



**Eljer offers an interesting alternative:** a cast-iron sink with a clear-enamel topcoat that gives the sink an unusual translucent quality. But a two-bowl model is about \$700, well above the cost of a standard 33-in. by 22-in. two-bowl sink in white, off-white, or black.

An enameled cast-iron sink is probably what Grandma had in her farmhouse kitchen. Coating a substrate of metal with porcelain enamel and then fusing the two materials together under high heat is an old technology that continues to produce long-wearing sinks. When maintained correctly, the gloss finish can last for a long time. But the surface can dull when abused by abrasive cleaners.

The mass of cast iron gives these sinks their characteristic thermal properties: slow to warm on a cold winter morning but able to keep hot water up to temperature once warmed. The surface is very hard and unforgiving for delicate dishware. These sinks also are heavy, a factor to consider in installation, but the weight helps to keep them quiet under running water or when equipped with a sink-mounted waste disposer.

The fired enamel that coats the iron is tough, but it can chip and allow the metal beneath to rust. Cast iron can't be modified in the field by the installer, so knowing what type of faucet and accessories will be used is a prerequisite for buying the right sink.

White, off-white, and black are traditional colors for enameled sinks, which often sell for about \$200 at big home-improvement centers.

An alternative to enameled cast iron is enamel over a steel substrate, the same material that appliances are made of. The enamel is applied to stampings made from 14-ga. steel, so the sinks are two or three times lighter than cast iron and also less expensive (a 33-in. by 22-in. two-

## ENAMELED SURFACES: CONTINUED

bowl sink in white sells for \$79). But sizes and colors are limited, and enamel-over-steel has the reputation of being noisier and more likely to chip.

A better choice is American Standard's Americast sink. This enameled-steel sink is coated on the back with a proprietary material that enhances heat retention, deadens sound, and makes the sink less likely to chip. It is about half the weight of cast iron and comes in 15 colors. Prices are about the same or slightly lower than those for enameled cast-iron sinks.

**Much of the mass** in American Standard's Americast sink is a dark material that deadens sound and reduces chipping without adding much weight.



### PROS

Long-wearing, glossy surface resists stains; good sound-deadening and thermal properties; variety of styles. Basic two-bowl designs are low in cost.

### CONS

Enamel can chip and surface dull by improper cleaning. Weight may complicate under-mount installation.

### COST

Prices start at around \$79. Americast sinks range from \$250 to \$450. True cast-iron sinks are \$200 to \$500, but some cost upward of \$900.

## SOURCES

### American Standard

800-442-1902  
www.americanstandard.com

### Bootz

812-423-5401  
www.bootz.com

### Eljer

800-423-5537  
www.eljer.com

## ANCIENT MATERIALS, MODERN SINKS



## FIRE CLAY

### A decorative and durable choice

Fire clay, also called vitreous china, is another high-temperature ceramic material that, like enamel, has a tough surface that resists wear. Unlike cast-iron or steel sinks coated with enamel, fire-clay sinks are made of the same material all the way through, so if the surface is chipped, there's no chance of rust developing in a metal substrate.

Fire-clay sinks are unique because they can be decorated before firing (photo left). The pattern or scene then becomes a permanent part of the surface. Fire-clay sinks also have the potential for sharper and more elaborate detailing than cast iron.

The cost for these sinks can be high, with painted, decorated, or highly detailed sinks reaching well over \$1,000.

### Franke

800-626-5771; www.frankeksd.com

### Kohler

920-457-4441; www.kohler.com

### Whitehaus Collection

800-527-6690;  
www.whitehauscollection.com

## COMPOSITES

### A mix of stone and resin creates durability and a unique look

Sinks that are made from a combination of stone powder and resin result in a handsome and durable surface that resists staining and scratching.

Franke offers both a blend of quartz and acrylic resin and a composite of granite and resin. The quartz composite has a glossy look (photo left), the granite more of a matte surface. Colors and sizes are somewhat limited, with prices starting at about \$400 for a 21-in. by 19-in. single-bowl model. FHP's composites of quartz and acrylic range from \$400 to \$700, depending on size.

### FHP Kindred

800-637-6485; www.fhpsinks.com

### Franke

800-626-5771; www.frankeksd.com

### Moen

800-289-6636; www.moen.com



### PROS

Highly durable material that resists staining and chipping.

### CONS

Moderately expensive; limited colors and designs.

### COST

For a composite sink, \$250 is a bargain price, but top of the line will cost \$700 or more.



## NATURAL STONE

### Handsome, indestructible, and expensive

Stone has a long history as a sink material. In old New England farmhouses, sinks made of locally quarried soapstone were once a fixture. Soapstone is now more likely to come from Brazil, but its attributes are the same. Dense and nonstaining, soapstone has a slippery feel because of its high talc content, and it can be sealed with nothing more complicated than mineral oil. In time, the stone ages to a rich patina that needs little care. Its mass offers good sound-deadening qualities.

Soapstone is not brittle, so the sinks are not susceptible to cracking. But the material is heavy and must be supported from below. These sinks look best when paired with soapstone counters or other less-formal material.

Green Mountain Soapstone offers three sizes with prices ranging from \$435 to \$718. These apron-front, or farmhouse, sinks can be customized with a hand-carved decoration.

Stone Forest hand-carves solid blocks of granite into farmhouse sinks. If the look of a solid-granite sink with 3-in.-thick walls in your kitchen sounds appealing, plan on build-

*A hand-carved soapstone sink can be a beautiful addition to a kitchen, but you can expect to pay \$275 to \$300 more.*



ing a sturdy cabinet to hold up the sink: The double-basin model weighs 330 lb.

Kallista's 27½-in. single-bowl model with a high backsplash in green terrazzo or black nero Tanzania is \$3,995, and a 30-in. model in two kinds of marble costs from \$1,225 to \$1,795.

#### PROS

High durability; aesthetics; good sound-deadening properties.

#### CONS

High cost; not the right look for all kitchen designs; weight may complicate installation.

#### COST

Soapstone: \$435 to \$718; more with hand-carved decoration  
Granite: \$1,145 to \$1,795  
Green terrazzo and black nero Tanzania: \$3,995  
Marble: \$1,225 to \$1,795



## CONCRETE

### Tough, with plenty of design possibilities

Concrete countertops are hot. What about concrete sinks? While very durable, concrete is an unforgiving surface for glassware, and by nature is a porous material that must be sealed carefully so that it won't leak. Sonoma applies three coats of a penetrating sealer called Porous Plus and recommends buyers reseal their sinks once a year. Concrete is susceptible to staining, especially from acidic foods like fruit juice or wine. For those who like a sparkling sink bottom, Sonoma can cast a stainless-steel screen into the bottom of its sinks, which won't stain.

From a design standpoint, concrete is an exceptionally flexible medium, well suited to sculptural and color customizing. It's also an expensive option for a sink: Sonoma's line runs from \$1,600 to \$3,200 for standard sinks in the 24-in. to 32-in. range. Concreteworks makes custom sinks that start at \$800 and run to \$1,800.

#### Sonoma Cast Stone

888-807-4234  
www.sonomastone.com

#### Concreteworks Studio

510-534-7141  
www.concreteworks.com

#### PROS

Durable; easily customized; good sound-deadening properties; can be cast as part of finished countertop.

#### CONS

Expensive and heavy; may stain; must be resealed periodically.

#### COST

A concrete sink is at least \$800; customized sinks can run over \$3,200.



*Who said sinks have to be square?*

*Concrete's flexibility offers unlimited design potential, as in this sink from Sonoma Cast Stone.*