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ARCHITECT'S CLINIC

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Best low-maintenance kitchen materials?



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Q WE are planning some renovations — including a new open-plan living/dining/kitchen space. We want a timeless look and are looking for low maintenance but long-lasting materials for the floor and kitchen worktop. What would you recommend?

A THE Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen wrote: “Always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context – a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan”. Site or context should fundamentally influence a design response at any scale, providing clues, informing the decision making process, suggesting appropriate materials, eliminating others.

As such, recommending materials and finishes without a specific context is somewhat open ended, given the huge array of possibilities available. Budget, functional requirements and how the space is to be occupied will also influence the choice of materials.

You may have a pre-determined idea about what you want but this doesn't mean it will work. The materials should be compatible aesthetically but this does not dictate that they be consistent or imitative of existing features. A variety of different materials, with contrasting colours and textures could form part of that compatibility. For example a warm timber floor with a minimalist kitchen or a polished concrete floor with a rich timber kitchen.

Be selective in allocating the available budget, invest more in one thing that will last

and less on elements that can be replaced. Careful use of a small amount of special material can give a lift to a whole space.

For floors, I'd recommend a timber floor, solid (more prone to warping), engineered (ideal for underfloor heating) or laminate (more affordable but cannot be sanded). Polished concrete or terrazzo floors are durable, low maintenance and look timelessly beautiful. Don't rule out vinyl, marmoleum or rubber flooring as they are easily cleaned, available in many colours and quiet underfoot.

For countertops, I'd recommend natural stone as it will last forever with proper maintenance: marble is porous and needs regular sealing; granite is more durable and heat-resistant. Man-made solid surface materials, such as Corian, are robust and offer huge design possibilities. Other options include concrete, stainless steel, Formica or wood.

Choosing appropriate materials can sometimes seem overwhelming given the huge range of options but this is where an **RIAI** registered architect can help. Find an architect whose work interests you and they will be able to respond to your needs and ideas, building on and bringing them to fruition within a coherent design, whatever the scale of the project.

Do you have an architectural dilemma we can help you with? Email your problem to designclinic@independent.ie. Advice provided is for guidance only and readers are advised to seek professional assistance for any proposed project.