

## COUNTER CULTURE

## Soapstone sur

Unusual offerings for counters, backsplashes serve up individuality for many homeowners

**SHERRYLL SOBIE**  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Soapstone is carving a niche in the home-building market.

When Doug and Joyce Dineley were designing a kitchen in their new 2,400-square-foot home in Niagara-on-the-Lake, they were all set to go with granite countertops — until their interior designer suggested soapstone.

The Dineleys were unfamiliar with soapstone as a material for countertops, so they visited Green Mountain Fabricators of Soapstone, in St. Catharines. "When we saw it, we knew we had to have it!" says Dineley, 64.

According to Ed Pell, manager of marketing and research for the National Kitchen and Bath Association, 6 per cent of Canadians remodel their kitchen in any given year. "That's a very strong number," he says.

It's no wonder, then, that new product offerings are popping into the marketplace faster than nails from a nail gun. Alternatives to granite and Corian, such as soapstone, quartz and concrete made with recycled materials, are just some examples, as is hemp, manufactured by Manitoba-based Avanti Polymers Ltd.

Many people connect soapstone with Inuit carvings.

"It's not the same exactly," says Roy Wielhouwer, owner and designer of Green Mountain Fabricators of Soapstone. "We use soapstone from Brazil, which is much harder because it has less talc."

In the Dineleys case, they liked soapstone so much they used it not only on their 13-foot-long counter and 12-foot island, but also on the



The striking pattern and texture of soapstone

backsplash over the stove.

"It's not shiny; it blends in rather than taking over the room," says Dineley.

He also likes how forgiving it is. "One day I was cutting vegetables and got carried away. I sliced right into the soapstone. I took some fine sand paper, wet it and sanded the scratch. Then I smoothed it out with mineral oil. The whole process took about two minutes and you wouldn't be able to pick out the scratch now."

"I like how the colour changes," Dineley offers. "It's an interesting feature."

At \$115 to \$125 a square foot, the cost for soapstone falls in between granite and engineered stone. The price includes measuring, fabrication and installation.