

Applying Laminate to a Countertop

I know some of you are saying, "Laminate? On a countertop? Doesn't that go on the floor? She must be crazy!" No, I'm not talking about laminate *flooring*, I'm talking about laminate for a countertop (the crazy part is still up for discussion). "Isn't that Formica?" you may ask... Well, yes, but Formica is the brand name not the name of the material.



Laminate is defined by [Merriam-Webster](#) as "to unite (layers of material) by an adhesive or other means". So in other words, laminate is basically layers of paper fused together with high pressure, with a coating to make it durable. Laminate flooring is basically the same thing – it is almost a "picture" of wood grain fused onto melamine or MDF also with a durable coating. Isn't that interesting?

So now that the daily science lesson is out of the way, let's get to the point of today's article – Applying Laminate to a Countertop (or basically any other horizontal surface)...

When I remodeled my kitchen, I built my own countertops. I used sheets of laminate, plywood, and 1x3 boards. It was so easy! The sheets of laminate are very economical and come in a wide variety of patterns or colors, and sizes. A couple of the more popular manufacturers are Formica and Wilsonart.

There are a few special tools required but they are not expensive. First off, you will need a laminate cutter. It is basically a tool with a V-shaped cutter on the end that scores the laminate so it can be snapped apart at the score line. A box cutter or other knife can be used but keep in mind it will make the edges of the laminate very sharp and a cut from laminate is similar to a very thick papercut!



New laminate can be applied over existing laminate and I have done this successfully. The existing surface will have to be roughed up so the adhesive will “bite” into it. I used a belt sander with 50 grit sandpaper. Believe me, that did the trick! One thing to note about applying new laminate over old – the edges of the countertop will have to be square and not the rounded “bullnose” edge (there are other products that can be used for that). It would be very difficult to try to form the laminate over a rounded edge!

Applying new laminate over plywood is much simpler. A quick sanding with a coarse grit of sandpaper is all you will need to get started. Adhesive is the next tool and I used Weldwood Contact Cement. This is a very economical and strong cement. The adhesive is applied to the laminate as well as the surface to which the laminate is being applied. Once the adhesive is dry (approximately 20-30 minutes) it will not be sticky to the touch. Once the cemented surfaces come into contact with each other, it is stuck forever! Dowel rods are used between the surfaces while positioning the laminate. they are removed

one at a time and pressure is applied to the top surface so the cemented faces make full contact. A "J-Roller" can also be used to help with this but I used a rolling pin covered with a towel.

A router with a flush cutting bit and a chamfer bit (preferably a 15 deg. chamfer) comes in handy to trim away the excess laminate. The flush cutting bit cuts it flush to the surface and the chamfer bit puts a nice bevel on the edge so it isn't very sharp.

Laminate is not just for countertops. I successfully applied it to the side table of my grill, and will be applying it to the top of a cabinet I am building. Stay tuned for that post as I will show step by step how to apply the laminate to the top surface! Its not as hard as it may sound... I promise!

Until next time,

Happy Creating!

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