

Shaker Hill Granite

YOUR DREAM KITCHEN MAY BE CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

BY SUSAN NYE | PHOTOS BY GBH PHOTOGRAPHY





A new post and beam style home features a kitchen that's designed for entertaining inside and out.

This kitchen features Elmwood cabinetry in knotty alder with Cartier-style doors, granite countertops, and a wood-look porcelain tile floor by Berkshire.

Inset: Fusion WOW "Light" granite with a brushed finish.



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Rob and Lauri Malz, owners of Shaker Hill Granite.

Why in the world do we do it? There are plenty of houses on the market. Some are brand new or in like-new condition. The answer is simple. We build rather than buy or remodel in our quest for perfection. The rooms of our dreams are tailored specifically for us. From traditional to transitional, urban contemporary, farmhouse, boho, Asian Fusion, French country, or old world Mediterranean, our perfect kitchen, our perfect bath, our perfect house will make us smile every day.

The trouble is arriving at that perfection. If you've ever built a house or renovated, you understand—construction is stressful. The reasons are simple. First, you're spending a whole lot of money. Next, you are faced with a seemingly endless list of decisions and compromises. On top of all that, the agony is rarely short lived. Large or small, the project always takes longer than expected. And what makes it worse is that, until the very end, you're never certain that everything will come together.

MAKING CUSTOMERS HAPPY

When it comes to kitchens, baths, laundry rooms, and mud-rooms, Shaker Hill Granite is here to help. With an extensive line of stone countertops, tile, and cabinets, it is the place to go for kitchens, baths, fireplace hearths, and a few other nooks and niches around the house.



Above: Cabinet options include drawer plate storage.

Inset: Custom cutlery divider.

Below: This project features Great Northern Cabinetry with White Spring Granite countertops and Bark Avorio tile backsplash.

Opposite: Custom shower features Costa Esmeralda Granite on the floor and Mediterranean brushed porcelain wall tile.



“Homeowners are mixing it up by choosing one stone for the cabinets and marble or butcher block for the island.”

—John Napsey



Founded in 1994 by Rob Malz, Shaker Hill has grown, expanded, and diversified over its more than 20 years. As the name implies, the company's first product was granite countertops. Now a must-have, stone countertops made their first tentative steps into high-end design in the 1980s. As granite countertops rapidly gained popularity, Rob grabbed the opportunity. His first task was to partner with a fabricator in Canada. "We were a good match," he says. "I didn't know anything about granite, and he didn't know much about running a business." From day one, Rob figured the easiest way to grow was to make customers happy. And that simple philosophy remains at the heart of the company's success.

In those early days, homeowners had few choices and never knew quite what to expect. They'd look at a few samples, place an order, and hope for the best. As new products and competitors entered the market, Rob realized there was an opportunity, a niche he could fill. It required expanding his business, but it would help customers immeasurably. Along with selling and installing, Rob would stock and cut the stone slabs.

It was a boon for customers. Instead of working with small samples, they could pick out their actual stone. Next, by reviewing and approving the layout, the ebb and flow of the stone's natural beauty would match its new owner's vision of the perfect countertop. And not just granite—Shaker Hill also carries marble, quartz, soapstone, slate, and butcher block. With its consistency and easy care, quartz is becoming increasingly popular, particularly with younger homeowners.

UNDER ONE ROOF

Customer-focused expansion didn't stop with fabrication. Shaker Hill's product line has grown to include both tile and cabinets. Rob explains, "I was happy selling countertops but our customers wanted more." One of Shaker Hill's designers, John Napsey, explains, "Like most people, our customers are extremely busy. We realized that expanding the product line would make their design decisions easier." He adds, "Customers were driving all over the Upper Valley and even down to Massachusetts trying to mix and match the different elements of their design. More often than not, they would arrive with a big canvas bag, maybe two or three, loaded with samples of tiles, cabinet door styles, and color chips."



Above: Soapstone countertop with quartz veining pairs well with a hammered copper sink and satin nickel faucets.

Inset: Green Iron Soapstone.

Below: Cuisine Ideale Cabinetry with quartz countertops in Frost White and Palms Pure Silk tile backsplash.



Shaker Hill Granite
 17 Granite Place
 Enfield, NH
 (603) 632-9800
www.shakerhillgranite.com

Customers still need to go down the road for appliances and fixtures, but Shaker Hill has brought the major design elements for kitchens and bathrooms together under one roof. The expanded line beautifully aligns with some of the latest design trends.

NEW TRENDS AND A STREAMLINED PROCESS

While America loves a white kitchen, John and fellow designer Lois Horan see color gaining ground. Grays and blues, black and sage, even reds and yellows are finding their way into kitchens. And not just one—many kitchens are sporting two colors. “Many customers opt for lower cabinets in one color and uppers in another or they choose wooden cabinets and a painted island. It helps personalize the look,” says Lois. John adds, “The same is true for countertops. Homeowners are mixing it up by choosing one stone for the cabinets and marble or butcher block for the island.”

Lynn Scandroli of Grantham was delighted to find Shaker Hill. The retired schoolteacher recently renovated two bathrooms and her kitchen. Her contractor recommended a handful of suppliers. She says, “I chose to work with Shaker Hill because they really listened,” she says. “I already had a pretty good idea of what I wanted. The other places I visited plunged in and started showing me things. Laura asked questions, listened, and then made good suggestions.”

By starting with an understanding of their customers’ needs and likes, John and Lois can streamline the process. They encourage clients to send them links to their Houzz or Pinterest portfolios or bring in magazine photos. Lois says, “I can see where they are headed and show them materials and designs they will love.” In addition, the store has a number of vignettes to help customers get started. Rob says, “Many customers find it easier to tell us what they don’t like rather than what they do. Seeing a variety of cabinets, tile, and countertops pulled together helps them find direction and get started.”

Bill Andrews, project manager at Old Hampshire Designs, agrees. The award-winning design/build company focuses on new construction but also does renovations. Old Hampshire Designs has been working with Shaker Hill Granite since 2000. Bill says, “The entire team is awesome. They are great at putting things together, and the quality is top notch.”

Along with pulling the design together, Shaker Hill Granite manages delivery schedules to avoid any snags on the construction site. Bill is confident about sending his clients to Shaker Hill and says, “We know they will stay on top of everything. Working with a one-stop shop reduces stress for our clients.” Lynn adds, “Working with Shaker Hill simplified the project. I saved a lot of time and since I bought everything from them, they gave me a very good price.”

Whether it’s a new build or remodel, the experts agree: Do your homework ahead of time. Whether it’s the latest trend or an updated version of your grandmother’s kitchen, take the time to figure out what you love. Pore through decorating magazines, surf the web, and watch design shows for ideas. One caveat with design shows—watch them for color, materials, and design ideas. All the pros agree: Their timelines and budgets fall far short of reality. **TW**