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# real estate

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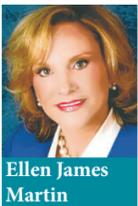
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## SMART MOVES

### Choosing between a one- and two-story house to purchase

A home-buying couple in their 50s had a heated dispute about whether to buy a one- or two-level house.

"There was a lot of drama for these two. The husband wanted a grand, opulent two-story mansion ... But his wife wanted the ease and convenience of a less showy one-level house," says William Wegener, the real estate broker who assisted the couple.



Ellen James Martin

In the end, the woman's preferences prevailed.

Wegener says that disputes about whether to buy a horizontal or vertical house like the one above are hardly infrequent.

Sandy Jurich, another veteran broker who works solely with home purchasers, tells of a couple with whom she worked who never reached agreement about whether to buy a vertical or horizontal house.

"Finally they just threw in the towel and divorced," says Jurich, who's affiliated with the National Association of Exclusive Buyer Agents (naeba.org).

Mark Nash, a longtime real estate broker and author of "1001 Tips for Buying and Selling a Home," says homebuyers who have mixed feelings about housing styles should make sure they visit at least two horizontal properties and two vertical ones.

"Picking one over the other can be a huge decision with significant implications for how you live," Nash says.

Here are a few pointers for buyers:

**SMART continues**

## Countertop selection key to a new kitchen

By Nancy E. Oates, [neoates@earthlink.net](mailto:neoates@earthlink.net)

Inspiration can pop up in the most unexpected places. Ann and Stephen Aylward, in the process of designing their new home, had collected ideas for years from magazines, home shows and vendors and tradesmen in the construction industry. While catching a show at the Lumina in Chapel Hill, they stopped at the theater's wine bar, and its granite countertop caught their attention.

The Aylwards told Josh Friend, owner of Carolina Countertops, about their find. He stopped by the theater and knew right away where to get the stone. Now the granite serves as the countertops throughout their kitchen.

Quarried stone — granite, quartz and marble — can transform any room from ordinary into elegant by the end of the day. More than a pretty face, granite is low-maintenance, durable and surprisingly affordable. Home sellers know an investment in quarried stone boosts the value and marketability of a home. Even in mid-priced homes, buyers today expect to see granite in the kitchen and perhaps the baths and closets as well.

Several of Carolina Countertops' customers have been homeowners reading their place for sale.

"A lot of people who put in granite or quartz because they are interested in selling their home say they wish they had done it sooner so they could enjoy it before they sell," Friend said.

The Aylwards built their dream house, a contemporary timber home, last year on acreage along the edge of Carrboro. Natural materials featured prominently in their design. They used five types of wood for the flooring, beams and cabinetry and almost as many different kinds of granite for the kitchen, coffee bar, baths, closets and

in-law apartment.

Ann, who works with contractors through her job at a national home-improvement retailer, knew to start the countertop selection process by first choosing a fabricator, a company that buys stone, cuts and polishes it and installs it. She and Stephen selected Carolina Countertops because Friend came highly recommended.

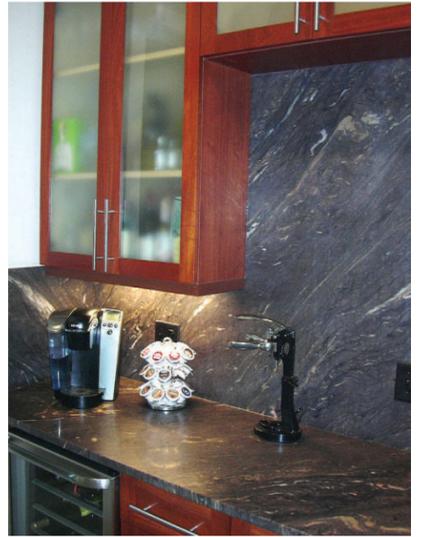
Though the Aylwards were comfortable browsing granite yards on their own, Friend typically accompanies his customers to granite showrooms in the Triangle. Fabricators typically have no exclusive relationship with any dealer. Friend gets a sense of what his customer wants and starts with the dealer he expects will have that material. Usually, he gets it in one.

In his initial meeting with a prospective customer, Friend explains the pros and cons of the three main types of stone.

Granite is rock from the earth and, as such, has natural veins of color that form an irregular pattern. Usually it is less expensive than quartz or marble, though price depends on the rock's source and rarity. Porous, it should be sealed annually, which requires rubbing an inexpensive lotion over the surface. Once installed, granite is virtually indestructible by everyday use.

Quartz is a manmade blend of 93 percent rock and 7 percent epoxy. Generally more costly than granite or marble, it has a consistent pattern. It does not have to be sealed, but untended spills will stain. High heat from a pan taken from the stove could damage it. Quartz resists chipping and holds less risk of breaking during installation.

Marble is a mineral and thus is soft. Friend doesn't recommend it for kitchens because it scratches and stains



The Aylwards chose a high-level artistic granite for the coffee bar and extended the backsplash to meet the top cabinets.

PHOTO BY NANCY E. OATES

easily. Save it for baths or decorative areas, he said.

"The choice comes down to look," Friend says. "Do you want something plain with no distraction? Choose quartz. Do you want natural movement? Go with granite. And what's your price point?"

Once at the granite yard, inspect the slab for any obvious flaws. Ann Aylward recommends confirming the yard has enough of the stone you select, especially if you have a large area to cover or choose a rare granite. Slabs from different lots can have different striations or shading that would be

**COUNTERS continues**

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