



In their Eugene kitchen, Carolyn and Dr. Howard Stein anchored a conservation-focused renovation with recycled-glass Vetrazzo countertops.

Collin Andrew/The Register-Guard



Vetrazzo's "Martini Flint" blend has dashes of colored glass, some with recognizable shapes such as this piece of a blue bottle's base.

Curbside to countertop

Recycled glass forms striking countertops that reflect a clear victory over waste.

By Joel Gorthy
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Public trust in curbside glass recycling shattered recently in Eugene-Springfield. A Nov. 24, 2013 story in The Register-Guard shocked many with the revelation that almost all glass put out for recycling by local residents is not reborn as new bottles and jars, but crushed and spread to form roads and drainage beds at the landfill.

While Oregon rules allow this practice by garbage haulers, it reflects challenges with commingled glass pickup (in which all colors are mixed in residential bins) that make it prohibitively expensive in some markets to separate and sell the glass for actual recycling.

So when a green advocate like Carolyn Stein — manager of the "RE:think Business" certification program at BRING Recycling in Eugene — sees any chance to scoop real or symbolic value from this waste stream, she will eagerly do it.

"It's all recycled bottles, jars, that kind of thing," Stein says of the Vetrazzo countertops in her family's newly remodeled Eugene kitchen. "I picked it because recycling and reuse is near and dear to my heart."

While her Vetrazzo counters are

composed of glass sourced from recycling bins in the San Francisco Bay Area, Stein and her remodeling team chose them as the most sustainable of several options.

"This is at the top in terms of sustainability, the (green-certified) manufacturing facilities, the quality of the product, the distance it had to travel," says Alec Dakers, a partner at Rainbow Valley Design & Construction in Eugene, which completed Carolyn and Dr. Howard Stein's remodel.

Rainbow Valley also has used EnviroGlas and IceStone, but those brands embody greater energy use when shipped here from Texas and the East Coast. (It should be noted that Vetrazzo production recently moved to Georgia).

Vetrazzo counters, available in many color combinations, include 85 percent glass from curbside bins and other sources, such as waste from glassware manufacturers.

Stein chose Vetrazzo's "Martini Flint" blend, mostly clear and light-colored glass with dashes of green and blue on a white background.

Portland cement makes up the Vetrazzo surface's other 15 percent.

"A cement binder is important for truly sustainable recycled-glass counters, because a lot of companies use an epoxy binder," Dakers says.

Stein considered a similar product from Fuez in Portland, but chose the Vetrazzo based in part on local installer Pro Contracting's experience with it.

At \$115-\$120 per square foot, the cost of the Vetrazzo surpasses many other recycled-glass surfaces (commonly

around \$100), and the most expensive granite counters (\$65-\$105).

"This represents my values," Stein says. "Granite is cheap and abundant in China, but it's not a sustainable product."

Also in keeping with a green remodeling approach, the Steins retained their kitchen's existing exterior footprint; installed sustainable, formaldehyde-free poplar cabinets; used zero-VOC paint; retrofitted old single-pane windows with efficient double panes; refinished existing oak floors to match new patches; and "reused where we could," from appliances to switchplate covers, "so we could splurge on the counters," Stein says.

If she has her wish, other like-minded re-consumers will help spark demand for glass that originates in Lane County's recycling bins — and beyond.

"There's all kinds of potential for innovation," she ponders, "because there's a lot of glass out there, like old window glass and windshield glass, that just doesn't have a market."

If these counters are a sign of new things to come from old glass, the future is teeming with gleaming possibilities.

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At the Good Earth show

Rainbow Valley Design & Construction will be in exhibits 218 and 222 at the Jan. 24-26 Good Earth show (map, Page 5). And BRING Recycling will be in booths 1124 and 1126.

