Home Zone: Sturdy basins based on practicality

by Linda Pescatore

The place where chopping, washing and drinking are done daily is arguably the cornerstone of every kitchen. Your sink needs to be as functional and durable as it can be.

The designers at Swanstone Corp. of St. Louis recently introduced two styles of sinks that not only make working a little easier, they also last long while looking great.

TAKE IT FOR GRANITE - The Ascend sink from Swanstone Corp. is made from 80 percent natural quartz and has a shallow drainboard where drying dishes can rest, off the countertop and out of sight. CNS Photo courtesy of Swanstone.

DECLARATION OF NEUTRALITY - Seven sunny shades of parchment paper become a neutral backdrop for this room featured in `Perfect Neutrals' by Stephanie Hoppen. CNS Photo.

Because we do so many varied tasks at the basin, the two new styles - called Ascend and Large/Small Bowl - were designed with dual sizes for multiple purposes.

Ascend's shallow platform keeps drying food or dishes at a comfortable 6-inch-deep height. That allows them to drain while keeping them off the countertop and out of sight. The platform also makes an optimal resting place for pots that need filling. Because it is shallow, the adjoining basin saves water for most uses, yet the entire basin is deep - 10 inches - which makes washing large pots and baking dishes easier.

The Large/Small Bowl model similarly has a split personality. A built-in divider separates a fast-filling, 7-inch-deep small basin from the large basin, which is not only deeper but longer.

The surfaces of Swanstone sinks stay smooth because they are made with compressed molding using granite that is 80 percent natural quartz. The sinks are virtually indestructible, according to the company. Swanstone says independent tests showed its solid surfacing has the highest heat resistance than any other solid surface, and can withstand temperatures up to 450 degrees.

Yet, unlike solid granite, the sinks require no special care and can usually be wiped clean with standard household cleaners or buffed when scratched, said spokeswoman Elizabeth Hise, who added that Swanstone includes with each fixture a "care package" that details how to keep it looking like new.

Both sinks are available in drop-in or undermount models. The latter does not come with a faucet deck and has smaller rim dimensions for easier installation.

Both are priced at $415 for the drop-in models and $454 for the undermount. Look for them at home stores, kitchen showrooms and online at www.swanstone.com, or call 800-325-7008.

SHIFT IN NEUTRAL

In "Perfect Neutrals: Color You Can Live With" (Watson-Guptill Publications; $35), author Stephanie Hoppen demonstrates that you have more to choose from than just white or off-white for backgrounds to your rooms.

Neutral need not be bland, drab or nondescript. Hoppen makes the case that hues such as cherry red, grape and teal can be used as neutrals.

"When thinking about which colors are perfect neutrals, forget about the true colors and instead consider the 'dirty' ones," she writes. "This sounds unappealing, but I don't know how else to describe all those wonderful 'off' shades of every color that tend to be as neutral as beige, but - oh, my - are so much more interesting and uplifting to live with."

Her book, vividly photographed by the neutrally named Luke White, includes chapters on off-whites, grays, greens, blues, pinks, sunny tones, and "earth and spice" colors. And you needn't tear out your hair trying to duplicate the hundreds of rooms showcased; the book details all the paint colors and even the fabrics and flooring.

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