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SOLID WORKTOPS

Fitting solid worktops can be either quite simple or extremely difficult and time consuming depending on your chosen worktops and the configuration. Square edged worktop with a standard sink and hob, can simply be butted together at the corners and holes cut for the sink and hob. Solid worktops with a rounded edge and a Belfast sink fitted are a different matter altogether.

GENERAL

Compared to laminate worktops, solid wood worktops need a lot more care and maintenance to keep them looking good. They are prone to movement and can warp if too much moisture is allowed to seep into them, which is why great care must be taken when preparing and fitting them. There are many kitchen fitters that won't fit solid worktops as they know the trouble they can be and the problems that could arise should the tops warp with moisture. That said, if you are determined to fit them yourself, read on.

TOOLS REQUIRED

If you are not cutting mitred joins or Belfast sink cut out you may be able to get away with just a circular saw. If cutting mitred joins you will need the tools listed in the book for laminate worktops. As with most tasks, a good tool will make the job easier and depending on the configuration of your worktop you will need some or all of the following.

The usual measuring and marking tools including a long spirit level
½" Router 1600W with 30mm collet
Worktop Jig
Workmates – at least 2
Jigsaw
Square
Clamps – at least 2 preferably 4
Sandpaper – various grades rough to smooth
Battery screwdriver
Clear silicone / colourfill

NOTE

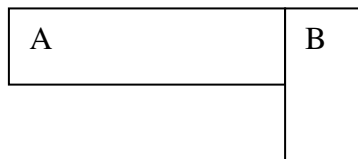
Solid wood has a tendency to move so allowances must be made for it. My method is to leave a gap of around 5mm between the worktop and any adjoining walls. Ceramic tiles will cover that gap but if you are not fitting tiles you will need to leave a smaller gap that can be filled with silicone sealant. Do not wedge the worktop between walls as if it does try to move the only way it can go is upwards causing the worktop to bow.

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SQUARE EDGED WORKTOPS WITH BUTT JOIN

This type of join consists of 2 worktops simply butted against each other to form the join, as diagram below.



Length 'B' is simply cut to length – if either of the ends have been sawn they will need to be sanded down to a glass like finish and sealed with worktop oil.

Length 'A' is cut to length to suit but attention must be paid to the sawn edge. The best results will be achieved using a router as this will leave a perfectly straight and relatively smooth face. A circular saw can also be used but you will need to do more sanding.

Once it is cut, sand the sawn face down, going through the grades of sand paper until a smooth glass like finish is achieved. Take care not to sand any of the top edge off as it will affect the straight finish you are trying to achieve.

If you have a worktop jig, cut boltholes on the underside of both worktops in readiness for the join.

If you have a biscuit cutter, cut slots for biscuits in both sides.

If you have neither you can join the worktops and use metal plates on the underside to keep the join together.

There are many variations and opinions on whether to glue or not glue the worktops together. The method that works for me is to PVA both faces of the areas to be joined, allow to dry and then apply a thin bead of clear silicone sealant along the bottom edge. Once the worktops are pulled together the silicone should travel up the join but do not allow any to come through the top of the joint otherwise the finishing oil will look a different colour to the rest once applied. Another method is to simply use colourfill and wipe any excess from the top of the join as soon as possible.

Apart from a nice looking joint, the other main aim is to make sure the joint is water tight as once water gets in there will be major problems.

Once you are happy with the join and have made a 'dry run', glue in the biscuits and apply the sealer or colourfill. Assemble the join and tighten the worktop bolts or fit the metal plates whichever you have chosen. Check the surface many times if you are underneath and only tighten or screw once you are happy with the joint. Check the top of the join to make sure no sealant is visible and wipe any away immediately if there is.

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Follow the process for screwing the worktop to the base units as described in the book.

The decision to apply the oil before making the joint or afterwards is another matter for opinion. My method is to fit the worktop and then apply the finishing oil as there is less chance of the oiled finish getting marked once all the work is done.

Apply the oil to the manufacturer's instructions and then fit foil backed tape to the undersides that may be affected by water or steam, such as dishwashers or washing machines.

MITRED JOINS IN SOLID WOOD WORKTOPS

Solid worktops with rounded edges require a mitred joint that is cut with a router and jig. Square edged worktops can also be fitted with mitred joints but it is much easier to butt join them.

The only variation to the methods for cutting mitred joints as opposed to laminate and described in the book are as follows.

1. You will need to make more passes with the router as solid wood is a lot tougher than laminate.
2. Take care at the end of each pass with the router as it is quite easy to chip the end of the worktop. A method I use is to pin a thin batten to the worktop edge to prevent it from chipping. The batten is removed afterwards and usually the pinholes are not noticeable as the worktop is against the wall.

The joint is assembled as the book for laminate worktops and make sure both surfaces are waterproofed.

FINISHING

Any sawn surfaces that are visible must be sanded down to a glass like finish (before applying oil!) by going through the grades of sandpaper. There is nothing worse than expensive solid worktops with poorly finished ends so do take the time and effort to do them properly.

Cut outs for standard sinks and hob

The holes are cut in a similar way to those described in the book but solid wood is harder than laminate so remember to fit the correct blade to your jigsaw. The sawn surface of the cutouts needs to be sanded to a smooth finish (not glass like) and then treated with waterproof PVA before the hob or sink are fitted. As with laminate worktops, make sure that either the tape or putty used to fit the sink/hob will provide a complete water barrier between the sink/hob and the worktop cut-out.

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Cut outs for belfast/butler and under mount sinks

One method is to search www.screwfix.com for jigs and you will find a jig for either of the above sinks. It is just a case of following the instructions to achieve the desired cut out of the right size.

Another method is to make a template from 6mm MDF for the cut-out required (remembering to take into account the offset for the guide bush) and follow it round with the router. If you choose this method, it is best to make a dummy run on MDF to make sure it is the correct size for your sink.

Remember to make the cut out at least 10mm smaller than the inside of the sink to allow the worktop to overhang the sink unless your sink will sit above the worktop, in which case the cut out will be the same size as the sink.

With either method, the finish to cut outs is very important. They must be sanded to a high finish and oiled as water is a constant factor in sinks. Make sure the silicone between under mount sinks and the worktops is watertight and that grooves for draining are cut into the top. Jigs for the grooves are also available from Screwfix and are necessary for the job.

It is difficult to describe every situation for every worktop installation but if you need help either before or during you project please email me at SteveLake@DIYKitchenFitting.co.uk