

# keep it up

Period images courtesy Fenderskirts Vintage

## Housekeeping with Sandy



Sandy Wright, a 20-year pro in the battle against creeping crud, runs My Wright Hand, an independent housekeeping service in Portland, Ore. We sat down with her to talk about ranch kitchens—what's easy care, what's a pain, and how much effort it really takes to keep it all up ...

### Tedium Trending

The two main challenges in the kitchen are granite countertops and stainless steel appliances. **Granite** surfaces need to be washed with hot, soapy water and dried to alleviate smears. Most homeowners use a sponge, which leaves tracks and is not as sanitary; a dishcloth is far better. Any of your modern-day countertops that reflect light—granite, marble, solid surface—almost always tend to look dirty; a duller finish hides smears and wear and tear better.

There are different grades of **stainless steel**, and some are much easier to keep up than others. Stainless steel butcher blocks get marred from knife cuts, but the heavy-gauge steel keeps a nice sheen and is easy to polish. With appliances, the grade varies; some polish up beautifully, while others are a constant battle. If you get water on stainless, wipe it off immediately, as it seems to eat into the finish and leave permanent marks. My best tip is to not use appliance handles as towel bars; that's a surefire way to end up with water damage.

When it comes to stainless steel cleaner-polishes, each one is different and has specific instructions to follow.

Some want you to leave a paste on for a few minutes and then buff off with a cloth; most aerosols are spray on, wipe off; others say to spray onto a cloth. Hope's Perfect Stainless is one of the most durable polishes and you need to buff it off with a paper towel; if you don't, the surface will smear. My current favorite is Rock-it Oil Lustre, which lasts longer than any others I've tried. And for sinks with spots and streaks, or fingerprints at the top of dishwashers, Bar Keepers Friend cleanser applied with a damp cloth, then rinsed, dries to a nice sheen. It's slightly abrasive but won't scratch.

### Counter Intelligence

**Laminate:** You have to be careful about what you use on stains, as powdered cleansers will mar laminate. If you used Soft Scrub with bleach and leave it on a hair too long or rub too hard, when you look at in the right light, there may be a permanent mark.

**Solid surface:** Silestone can be stained by extended contact with a wet item like a soap dispenser, and matte vs. sheen matters, as does color and mate-



rial porosity. Darker colors show less smearing, just as long as you dry them.

**Ceramic tile:** If you get a stain on white grout, use a product containing bleach right away. If it is stubborn, scrub with a toothbrush and let the cleaner sit, then rinse with hot, soapy water and dry. To keep grout looking its best, use Zap! restorer once or twice a year, followed by resealing.

Overall, there's nothing better for cleaning than hot, soapy water and drying surfaces—no need to rinse. Wearing gloves, I use hot water at full temperature on a dishrag, squirt on dish soap, wring it to distribute the soap, scrub the surface and dry. If it's super greasy, go over it twice. And natural dish soaps don't clean as well as grocery store brands like Dawn or Joy. They more or less smear grease instead of cutting through it. If I use natural dish soap, it takes double or triple the product; they're fine for daily use but not for overall sparkle.

The most durable, and the easiest counter material to care for is laminate; it's very forgiving. Granite and other hard surfaces certainly hold up, but if you want them to be beautiful, it's more work.

### Floor Me

**Wood floors** are pretty durable, but will get marked more than in other areas of the house from drips and spills. **Engineered laminate** lasts well and is as easy to clean as wood, but a scratch is there forever, unlike real wood. Between a name brand such as Pergo and a generic, some

require drying after mopping to avoid watermarks; others mop and dry like a dream. And the less product you use on them, the better. Start with water, and then go to ¼ cup of vinegar in a gallon of tepid water.

**Sheet vinyl** or **VCT tiles** are pretty darn good, too; the only thing to avoid is vinyl with the textured pits—once dirt builds up in those, it is virtually impossible to keep clean without

using a scrub brush on your hands and knees.

**Ceramic tile** or **slate** is fantastic as long as you pick the right color grout. For slate, a charcoal or black; for ceramic tile, the lightest would be sand color. If you choose very light grout, you need to have super thin grout lines and clean often. And these surfaces are not forgiving, so if you drop anything breakable, consider it gone.

With **linoleum**, you must be careful with what tool you use to pick up loose dirt [personal experience with lots of superficial scratching from dog claws and a Dyson upright—editor], but it holds up great. A more mottled overall design in a neutral color will hide the most dirt and scratches, and using Forbo's floor finish a few times a year helps with durability and restores the shine.

For **wood floors**, the softer the tool the better: I like a canister vacuum with a brush head, or an old-fashioned cotton or microfiber loop mop. Disposable dusting pads like Swiffers work well, but you will go through a lot of pads. I do not recommend pre-moistened, pad-type cleaners; they leave a film that builds up and is not easy to remove.

Ultimately, wood hides dirt the best. But if you have pets, a tile floor in a color that is similar to your dog can be amazing—it really masks the fur. ✨

In our next issue, Sandy tackles bathrooms....

