

All About Farmhouse Sinks

You spend more time at the kitchen sink than the stove, so why not invest in one of these capacious attention-getters? But first, take a moment to master their surprising nuances

By Deborah Baldwin of This Old House magazine // Photo by John Granen

Farmhouse Sinks

Sexy, supersized appliances used to dominate the kitchenscape, but that was before a sink came along that refused to hunker down in a cabinet. Suddenly all eyes were on the cleanup zone, where a bossy, glossy-white heavyweight pushed aside the humble, hardworking stainless-steel basin.

America's appetite for farmhouse, or apron-front, sinks can be traced to the late 1990s, when companies like [Rohl](#) realized they could romance a boxy U.K. import made from lustrous, rock-hard fireclay by evoking farmhouse style—or a glorified idea of it. “Your choices used to be overmount or undermount, which sound boring, while ‘farmhouse’ sounds like it has a story,” says David McNamara of [Franke](#), a Swiss sink-maker attuned to North American tastes. Even as it has swelled in popularity, the curvaceous classic has been evolving too. “Today the farmhouse sink has been modernized,” adds McNamara, “with tighter lines and new materials, like stainless steel.”

As kitchens continue their move toward large, open gathering spaces, here's a roomy focal point that also hides dirty dishes and practically says “jump right in.” Read on for what you need to know before taking the plunge.

The Precursor



Large workstation sinks moved into American kitchens during the so-called sanitation movement of the 1920s. These wall-hung behemoths, made of enameled cast iron, typically had integrated backsplashes and drainboards, short aprons, and legs in front for added support—no cabinet needed.

Vitals

WHAT DO THEY COST? Stainless-steel and ceramic versions start at less than \$200; those made from pricier materials like fireclay and cast iron sell for \$700 to \$2,000—and on up.

DO I NEED A SPECIAL CABINET? Not necessarily, but most cabinets will need added support (see “Beefing Up the Box,” slide 10). At 20 to 42 inches side to side and 7 to 10 inches deep, these sinks can easily weigh 100 to 200 pounds.

DIY OR HIRE A PRO? Cutting out the cabinet front, reinforcing the box, wrestling the basin into place, and coordinating the sink, cabinet, countertop, and faucet installation are usually best handled by an experienced pro.

HARD TO KEEP CLEAN? Generally, a mild cleanser like Bon Ami takes care of marks and stains on fireclay and enameled cast iron. But materials vary widely; follow the product manufacturer’s guidelines so as not to void a warranty.

Downsized Sinks for Smaller Spaces: Pantries, Bars, and Islands



Chunky sinks with shorter spans offer the same period charm as their bigger brethren. And that extra depth is just as handy outside the kitchen.

For pantries, bars, and islands: This faux-slate sink, just 15 inches square and 7 inches deep, can help ready a long-stemmed bouquet or prep all the ingredients for a big salad. During a party, fill it with drinks and ice.

Shown: Ventana prep sink, \$725; [Native Trails](#)

High-Profile Materials: Concrete



This curved-front number is made from a cement-jute mix that's 40 percent lighter than regular concrete. Factory sealing helps it resist stains. Resealing every 5 to 10 years is recommended.

Shown: Farmhouse Quartet 33-inch sink, \$1,885; [Native Trails](#)

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