

The four types of granite countertop companies:

## The Pretenders



These are those that parade themselves as professional companies equipped with a fully-functional manufacturing facility and modern high tech equipment, not to mention first-rate installation capabilities. They present themselves as the low cost leader within the industry, always ready to provide you with a deal you cannot possibly pass-up, and they're quick to meet with you in your home and/or at a stone importer's facility.

In reality, The Pretenders are more often than not individuals cloaked in a corporate name without a facility or employees on the payroll. Their game is analogous to that of a broker, only they don't tell you they are brokers. They're experts at guerrilla marketing tactics, and they'll come to your house with samples of a slew of low cost granites. The Pretender won't hesitate to tell you that they are "the best" at this that or the other, then give you a price that closes most deals. It's just that simple.

What the basic run of the mill Pretender will not willingly tell you is that he will not be (a) fabricating your countertops or (b) installing your new countertops. These peculiar tasks of both will be outsourced to the lowest bid possible. The fabrication may even be handled by a literal sweat shop in China or some other faraway place. The Pretender simply plays dress-up, presenting a charade in an attempt to win the hard earned dollars of the unsuspecting consumer, pretending to be something he or she is not. Chihuahua or Reindeer? The Pretender will make you think twice.

Why can't The Pretenders simply present themselves as the brokers that they are? The answer is fairly straight forward: Most consumers would not choose to make a relatively high dollar purchase from an individual that has little or nothing to do with the manufacture and/or installation of the actual countertops! Would you purchase from Joe Schmo the countertop broker? It's one thing for Home Depot or Lowe's to be an upfront middle man, but Joe Schmo?

## Wannabes

The classic Pretender does have a cousin: The Wannabe. Invariably it's the Wannabes that do most of the low cost fabricating for The Pretenders.

There are two types of Wannabes. First, there are those that essentially operate as "driveway fabricators," creating your countertops either right in front of your eyes on your property or under a rough and ready cover on their own property. The second kind of Wannabe is a bit more difficult to distinguish as opposed to the first only because he presents himself better, but the fact of the matter is that this more mature Wannabe is equipped with anything and everything but the type of equipment required to consistently manufacture quality stone countertops. The mule may never admit it, but... a mule is a mule is a mule is a mule, period!



The very nature of the Wannabes, specifically the desire to cut every corner and cost possible, leads many of the Wannabes into the realm of their other cousin, the Cheat.

## **The Cheats**

The third group of granite companies is the Cheats. While the base characteristics of the Cheats apply in large part to the Wannabes, unlike the Wannabes, this particular array of granite countertop companies is comprised of adequately wrapped operations, sometimes finely wrapped with the logos and trimmings of multiple industry organizations and associations. Size is not an issue, for the Cheats can be either large or small. Unfortunately, The Cheats operate with little to no regard for the rules as set forth by any or all of the regulatory agencies and governmental departments, i.e. OSHA, EPA, Department of Revenue, etc...

Too many of these operations process a good deal of their stone dry without proper ventilation for their employees (see [silicosis](#)). This type of fabricating is fast and cheap, but it takes a bit of foresight and a conscience to grasp the consequences.

The Cheats have a very real affinity with the illegal discharge of waste water out the back of their facilities into either the sewer system or the ground water table. “Whatever it takes to save a buck” is the implicit motto of the Cheat. (For what it’s worth, a proper water recycling system can easily cost \$50,000.)

Sales tax is a major irritant for the Cheat. But alas, sales taxes can be modified to the benefit of the Cheat. The fact of the matter is that sales tax charged properly results in a higher overall cost of the project to the consumer as opposed to sales tax improperly computed. The Cheats have a tendency to reduce the overall price of their projects by simply reducing the sales tax associated with their project. Get three estimates from three different companies, and then compare the sales tax computations. Odds are you’ll have three different sales tax figures.

Finally, the Cheats haven’t any problem taking unlawful measures to avoid paying payroll taxes, unemployment taxes, worker’s compensation insurances, etc... Their first trick is to pay employees as sub-contractors, thereby avoiding all payroll related taxes. The problem with this cost reduction tactic is that any worker using the company’s tools and/or vehicles is by definition an employee, and the company (employer) is responsible for its share of all related payroll taxes and insurances for that worker. The Cheats second cost reduction trick of this specific genre is to simply give workers cash under the proverbial table, again, with the intention of being in complete avoidance of costly taxes on payroll thereby dropping their cost required to produce the countertops which the Cheat offers for sale. This is a particular favorite of the Cheats when it comes to overtime pay.

Regardless of the chosen tactic or tactics, the Cheat has made the conscious decision to turn away from the ethics of fair competition and operate what is in actual fact an unscrupulous business operation.

## **Professionals**

All too often lost amidst the struggle for market share in an economy that demands low prices are the true Professionals of the granite countertop industry. These are the companies that are committed to their own “in-house” fabrication and installation of quality granite countertops in a forthright and professional manner, as well as the rules of commerce as set forth by OSHA, the EPA, the state Department of Revenue, and the IRS. It should also be stated that more times than not, this commitment translates into a proper benefit package for the employees of these companies.