

## West Roxbury homeowners insulate through Renew Boston



*Lenny Brown and sons Max (left) and Zeke will be warmer next winter thanks to new insulation in their home's walls.*

➤ Boston Building Resources members Lenny Brown and Jill Wurster knew their 130-year-old West Roxbury home needed to be insulated, but there were complications. The walls were back-plastered (there was a layer of lath and plaster between the inner and outer walls), which made it difficult to blow in cellulose insulation from the outside. There were questions about older knob-and-tube wiring. A decision about getting the work done “was about balancing money, time, and aggravation,” Lenny said.

Then, Jill saw a Renew Boston announcement in a neighborhood newspaper and signs about the program at Boston Building Resources. When they found out that they qualified for up to \$7,000 in free weatherization improvements for two out of three of the house’s apartments, the money-time-aggravation equation tipped in their favor and they moved forward with the insulation work recommended during an energy assessment, provided free of charge by Renew Boston.

Like many older homes, “our house was definitely not straightforward,” Jill said. The aspect of the project that impressed them the most was that an entire team of workers contributed to the process of solving problems they encountered. “If you’re dealing with an unknown, when you start to do the work, you always find something that keeps you from doing what you planned,” Lenny said.

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## Countertops > *A look beneath the surface*



*A cross-section of Richlite shows how this countertop material is made up of layers of recycled paper.*

**Some new options for countertops have become popular with homeowners and architects. These join tried-and-true surfaces to make for a wide range of choices that vary by price, practical qualities, and environmental impact.**

➤ One of the newest, and greenest, choices is a **paper-based** countertop material, such as Richlite. It is made of Forest Stewardship Council–certified or recycled paper treated with resin, pressed, and baked into sheets. Softer and warmer than stone, this material is the same color throughout and comes in a limited palette of solid colors. It can be cantilevered for longer spans than other materials without additional support.

It is available with numerous edge details and in several thicknesses. It is heat-resistant to 350 degrees and scratch-resistant, though not meant to be cut upon. Although nonporous, it still requires periodic resealing with mineral oil to maintain a consistent appearance. Richlite is made in the U.S. and costs between \$85 and \$110 per square foot, including templating and installation.

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## Featured products

### Moby rain barrel



This extra-large rain barrel holds 65 gallons of rainwater and has many great features, including brass fittings and a removable top. Stop by to meet Moby, or visit [bostonbuildingresources.com](http://bostonbuildingresources.com) for more details.

### Majesty windows

*now available in black*

Harvey Building Products' popular Majesty wood replacement window is now available with black aluminum exterior cladding. Black is popular for historic homes, such as those in the South End.



### Kohler, and Toto too

Sinks and faucets and tubs, oh my! Yes, Dorothy, you can order any Kohler and Toto bathroom fixtures through BBR and save 18% off the list price. Choose your item online ([Kohler.com](http://Kohler.com) and [TotoUSA.com](http://TotoUSA.com)) and give us the item number and details. We'll have it for you in a few days. We also have Toto's low-flush and dual-flush toilets in stock every day.



### Countertops *continued from page 1*

**Quartz**, or engineered stone, has many of the qualities of natural stone, but is nonporous, making for a cleaner surface and eliminating the need for the periodic resealing. This material is highly rated as one of the most maintenance-free countertops available. Made of ground-up natural quartz and a binding resin, it is more homogenous in color and pattern than stone. Brands include Cambria, Caesarstone, Silestone, and Zodiac; Cambria is made in the U.S. Prices run between \$72 and \$100 per square foot, including templating and installation.

**Natural stone** is not new, but has enjoyed a resurgent popularity. Stone countertops are most commonly available in granite, but also in soapstone and marble. Each piece is unique, and larger tops may require seams. Granite should be resealed every one to two years. Stone (and quartz) countertops offer numerous edge details—but the more complex the detail, the greater the cost. Because stone is so hard, it has no resiliency; if you drop a glass on it, the glass will break. This same quality makes it scratch-resistant and able to tolerate extreme temperature variations. Stone countertops vary greatly in price,

from \$60 to \$100 per square foot including templating and installation.

While we think of stone as a material that will last forever, it is porous and needs to be sealed on a regular basis. Highly acidic foods and cleaners will react with the stone and discolor it. Each installer will provide a fact sheet on how to care for the stone.

The **butcher block** countertop is another classic material with strong environmental qualities. It is usually made of laminated strips of hard maple. Most come with an oil finish that is easily renewed. They need to be resealed periodically and maintained with mineral oil. There are standard sizes available, so seams may be necessary on large or irregular shapes. Butcher block is a good surface for cutting and is fairly heat-resistant, but is not recommended near sinks because water will stain it. Butcher block countertops run between \$20 to \$30 per square foot.

**Plastic laminate** countertops are the most economical option and offer the most color choices. Laminate is fairly durable, but will scratch and burn. Once the surface of a laminate countertop is marred, it cannot be repaired. Several edge options are also

available with laminates, including postform, a factory-molded top with an integral backsplash. One disadvantage of laminates is that they cannot be used with an under-mount sink. Prices vary from \$11 to \$30 per square foot.

**Solid-surface** countertops are made of manmade composite materials. Like quartz, granite, and Richlite, and in contrast to laminates, the color or pattern runs throughout the material. Solid-surface countertops will scratch and burn, but damage can be sanded out. Brand names include Corian, Fountainhead, Gibraltar, and Swanstone. Solid-surface countertops include color choices that look and feel like stone and offer unlimited options for edge details. A major advantage is the capacity to hide seams. Solid-surface countertops run from \$70 to \$90 per square foot and must be manufactured and installed by a licensed fabricator.

Choosing a countertop is a matter of balancing function, environmental characteristics, and the colors and patterns that please you. It is well worth spending time learning about the different choices before deciding which one is right for you. Kitchen specialists Linda Lesyna and Kim Eifrid can help guide you through the many options. ◀

## New name celebration



*Reuse Center board member Bob Francey, left, displayed some of the artful objects he has made from creatively reused materials from Boston Building Resources. The exhibit was part of BBR's new name celebration on April 30. More than 150 people took part in demonstrations, and the Reuse Center's new access ramp was dedicated that day.*

## Don't throw it away...



*Concord residents brought reusable lumber, light fixtures, cabinets, and more to the Boston Building Resources truck at the town's May 7 DropOff SwapOff day, where the items were happily received by staff member John Robles. Several other communities sponsor similar events to encourage reuse and reduce needless waste.*

**Renew Boston** *continued from page 1*

But the team from Next Step Living sought and found the solutions they needed to overcome the obstacles and move ahead. To deal with the back-plastering, they blew in insulation from the inside. Older wiring turned out to be a non-issue, and some roof work was needed to add ventilation in the attic.

The fact that Renew Boston was a grant-funded program gave Jill a degree of comfort that the contractors were above-board, and the customer service kept the whole project moving forward. They were both impressed by the professionalism of the workers and the way the site supervisor explained how the work was being done. Insulating from the inside is thought to be a messy job, but, Jill said, "other than the holes in the walls, you'd never know they were there." After the work was finished (and those holes patched up), an inspector from Conservation Services Group came in to verify that everything was done correctly.

When the attic was insulated in February, the tenant on the third floor immediately felt a difference. The wall insulation was finished in May. The couple ended up paying about \$2,000 out of pocket for both the roof work to add ventilation and for insulation work that exceeded the program limits, but feel it was money well spent. "It was a really good experience for us," Jill said. And, when the heating season rolls around again, the long-term benefits of energy savings will more than balance out their investment. ◀

*Editor's Note: While Jill and Lenny had a positive experience, some of our members have encountered obstacles. Often, existing conditions in the home, such as high carbon monoxide levels, knob-and-tube wiring, or improper ventilation of the attic or bathroom can prevent the weatherization work, or even the assessment, from taking place. The city is hoping to arrange for some funding to help residents pay for remediation of some of these problems so the air sealing and insulation work can be done.*

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## Summer projects

### Fix broken windows or torn screens

Learn how at one of our window and screen repair clinics, free to Boston Building Resources members. You pay for materials only. **Offered the first Saturday of each month, 9:00–10:00 a.m. Call 617-442-2262 to sign up.**

### Painting

Indoors or out, summer is a good time to touch up your trim or refresh a whole room. **The Reuse Center at BBR has high-quality paints in “oops” colors for just a few dollars.**

### Window restoration

If you have older double-hung windows, the warmer months are a great time to tune them up so they work properly and to improve their energy efficiency by adding weather stripping. **Visit BBR for bronze weather stripping, Spanish cedar parting bead, sash chain and cord, and a variety of locks and other hardware.**

### Clean out

Is your attic or basement filling up with supplies you bought for a home improvement project but never used? **Consider donating them to the Reuse Center at BBR.** You'll free up storage space, be eligible for a tax deduction, and help someone else access home repair supplies at affordable prices.