

TORONTO BATH REMODELING

Vanities & Countertops

Single and double vanities, floating vanities, quartz, granite, and marble countertops, undermount and vessel sinks, mirrors, and medicine cabinets

19 Expert Answers from Bathroom IQ

torontobathremodeling.com/construction-brain

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What is the price difference between a prefab vanity from a big box store versus a custom-built one from a GTA cabinet shop?

The price difference between a big box store vanity and a custom-built vanity from a GTA cabinet shop ranges from 3-8 times the cost — a stock vanity might cost \$400-\$800 while a comparable custom vanity runs \$1,500-\$4,000 or more, depending on size, materials, and complexity.

Stock vanities from Home Depot, Lowe's, or Rona typically range from \$300-\$1,200 for a complete unit with countertop. These are mass-produced, standard sizes (24", 30", 36", 48", 60"), and come with basic laminate or cultured marble tops. The cabinet boxes use particleboard or MDF construction with melamine or thermofoil finishes. Hardware is basic, and you get what's in the box — no modifications possible. Installation is straightforward since they're designed to fit standard rough-in dimensions.

Semi-custom vanities from GTA kitchen and bath showrooms fall in the middle at \$800-\$2,500. These offer more finish options, better construction (plywood boxes, soft-close hinges, dovetail drawers), and some size flexibility. Brands like Bertch, KraftMaid, or Wellborn are common in the GTA market. You can often modify heights, add features like pull-out drawers or electrical outlets, and choose from dozens of door styles and finishes.

Custom vanities from GTA cabinet shops start around \$1,500 for a basic 36" single vanity and easily reach \$3,000-\$5,000+ for larger or more complex pieces. The price premium buys you exact sizing for your space, premium materials (solid wood, high-end plywood, exotic veneers), custom storage solutions, integrated electrical for outlets or LED lighting, and finishes that match your exact vision. Custom work is especially valuable in GTA condos where standard vanities often don't fit the space efficiently, or in older Toronto homes where plumbing locations don't align with standard vanity layouts.

The construction quality difference is significant. Stock vanities use 1/2" particleboard sides that can swell and deteriorate in bathroom humidity over 5-8 years. Custom vanities typically use 3/4" plywood construction with proper moisture barriers and ventilation. The hardware on custom pieces — soft-close hinges, full-extension drawer slides, adjustable shelves — is commercial-grade and lasts 15-20 years versus 3-5 years for stock hardware.

Custom vanities also solve GTA-specific challenges. Many Toronto condos have awkward bathroom layouts where a stock 36" vanity leaves a 6" gap that collects dust and looks unfinished. A custom vanity can be built to exactly 42" to fill the space perfectly. In older Toronto homes with cast iron plumbing stacks, the drain and supply locations often don't match modern standard vanity layouts — custom work accommodates these quirks without expensive plumbing modifications.

The timeline difference matters for renovation planning. Stock vanities are available immediately, semi-custom takes 2-4 weeks, and custom work requires 4-8 weeks from order to installation. During peak renovation season (spring through fall), custom lead times can stretch to 10-12 weeks, which affects your overall project schedule.

Consider your long-term plans when weighing the cost difference. If you're updating a rental property or planning to sell within 2-3 years, a quality stock vanity provides good value. If this is your forever home or a high-end renovation, custom work delivers better functionality, durability, and aesthetic integration with your overall bathroom design.

For most GTA bathroom renovations, semi-custom vanities hit the sweet spot — better construction than stock, reasonable pricing, and enough customization options to work with most bathroom layouts. Reserve custom work for unique spaces, luxury renovations, or situations where standard sizing simply won't work.

Need help finding a professional bathroom renovator who can guide you through vanity selection and installation? Toronto Bath Remodeling can match you with local contractors who work with everything from stock replacements to full custom bathroom builds.

Q2

Should I pick a wall-mounted medicine cabinet or a recessed one, and what are the rough installation costs in Toronto?

Wall-mounted medicine cabinets are easier to install and more flexible for positioning, while recessed cabinets offer a sleeker, built-in look but require wall cavity space and more complex installation. For most GTA bathroom renovations, wall-mounted is the practical choice unless you're doing a full renovation that involves opening walls.

Wall-mounted medicine cabinets simply attach to the wall surface with screws into studs or appropriate wall anchors. Installation takes 30-60 minutes and costs \$150-\$300 in labour if you're hiring a handyperson or contractor. The main advantage is flexibility — you can position the cabinet at any height and location without worrying about what's inside the wall. This is especially important in GTA condos where concrete walls, electrical conduits, and plumbing lines can be anywhere behind the drywall. Wall-mounted cabinets also work well in older Toronto homes where wall cavities may contain knob-and-tube wiring, cast iron vent stacks, or other obstacles.

Recessed medicine cabinets are installed between wall studs, creating a flush, built-in appearance that doesn't protrude into the bathroom space. This is valuable in small GTA bathrooms and condo powder rooms where every inch of space matters. However, installation is more complex and expensive — expect \$300-\$600 in labour costs

because it involves cutting a precise opening in the drywall, potentially relocating electrical wiring or plumbing, and finishing the cut edges. The cabinet must fit between studs (typically 14.5 inches maximum width for 16-inch stud spacing), and you need to verify there are no electrical wires, plumbing lines, or HVAC ducts in that wall cavity.

For GTA renovations, consider your wall type carefully. Many Toronto condos have concrete exterior walls where recessing is impossible without major structural work. Older Toronto homes may have plaster walls over wood lath, which requires careful cutting to avoid cracking. Interior walls in modern homes are usually drywall over wood studs — the easiest scenario for recessed installation.

Cabinet costs range from \$200-\$800 for quality units regardless of mounting style, with recessed models typically \$50-\$150 more expensive due to the built-in frame requirements. Popular features in the GTA market include LED lighting (adds \$100-\$200), electrical outlets inside the cabinet for electric toothbrushes and shavers (requires electrical work), and soft-close hinges.

Hire a professional if you're installing a recessed cabinet — cutting into walls requires knowledge of what's behind them, and electrical work for interior lighting requires a licensed electrician and ESA inspection. Wall-mounted installation is a reasonable DIY project for handy homeowners with a stud finder and level.

Q3

What's the ideal vanity height — standard 32 inches or the newer comfort height at 36 inches?

The 36-inch comfort height vanity has become the standard in most GTA bathroom renovations, and for good reason — it's more ergonomic for the average adult and matches the countertop height used in kitchens, creating a consistent feel throughout the home. That said, the right height depends on who's using the bathroom and the specific situation.

The traditional 32-inch vanity height dates back decades and was designed around older plumbing standards and smaller average heights. If you've ever used a standard-height vanity and found yourself hunching over the sink, you already know the problem. The **36-inch comfort height** (sometimes called "counter height") puts the sink basin at a more natural position for adults between 5'4" and 6'2", reducing back strain during daily use. This is why nearly every semi-custom and custom vanity sold through GTA suppliers today defaults to 34–36 inches.

Who Benefits from Each Height

36-inch comfort height works best for master ensuites, main bathrooms used primarily by adults, and aging-in-place renovations where the homeowner wants a height closer to wheelchair transfer level. In Toronto's active

resale market, comfort-height vanities are what buyers expect — a 32-inch vanity in an otherwise updated bathroom can make the space feel dated. For a typical mid-range GTA bathroom renovation running **\$25,000–\$35,000**, the vanity height is a detail that affects daily comfort for years.

32-inch or lower heights still make sense in children's bathrooms, shared family bathrooms where young kids need independent access, and powder rooms in homes with shorter residents. Some homeowners with children compromise by installing a 36-inch vanity and adding a quality step stool, knowing the children will eventually grow into the height.

There's also a middle ground at **34 inches** that works well for households with mixed heights or where the primary users are on the shorter side but still find 32 inches too low.

Practical Considerations for Your GTA Renovation

When switching from a 32-inch to a 36-inch vanity during a renovation, your plumber will need to verify that the **drain and supply line positions** work with the new height. In most cases, the existing rough-in accommodates the change without modification, but in older Toronto homes — particularly pre-war houses with plumbing in plaster walls — the drain stub-out height may need adjustment, adding **\$200–\$500** to the plumbing scope.

For **floating (wall-mounted) vanities**, height is fully adjustable during installation since the vanity is mounted to a wall cleat rather than sitting on the floor. This gives you the flexibility to set it at exactly the height that works best — 34, 35, or 36 inches — and also makes floor cleaning underneath much easier. Floating vanities are especially popular in GTA condo bathroom renovations where every visual trick to make a small bathroom feel larger counts.

Also consider the **countertop thickness** when planning your final height. A thick quartz slab (3 cm or about 1.25 inches) on top of a 36-inch cabinet puts your finished countertop surface at about 37.25 inches — comfortable for most adults but potentially too high if you're under 5'3".

The Ontario Building Code doesn't mandate a specific vanity height for residential bathrooms, so this is purely a comfort and design decision. My recommendation for most GTA homeowners: **go with 36 inches for adult bathrooms and 32 inches for kids' bathrooms**, and if you're building a custom vanity, have the primary users stand at a mock-up height before committing. A bathroom renovation is a 15–20 year investment, so getting this detail right matters.

Can a floating vanity support a heavy quartz countertop, or do I need a floor-mounted one?

Yes, a properly installed floating vanity can absolutely support a heavy quartz countertop — but the key word is "properly installed," which means the wall cleat and blocking behind the drywall must be engineered for the total weight. A 48-inch quartz countertop with an undermount sink typically weighs **75–120 pounds**, and the vanity cabinet itself adds another 40–80 pounds, so you're asking the wall to hold 120–200 pounds of static load.

The critical factor is **wall blocking**. A floating vanity is mounted to a steel or heavy-duty wood cleat that's lag-bolted through the drywall into structural backing — either the wall studs directly or, ideally, a horizontal blocking board (typically 2x6 or 2x8 lumber) installed between studs behind the drywall. In new construction or during a full bathroom renovation where the walls are open, your contractor should install solid blocking at the planned vanity height. This is standard practice for any reputable GTA bathroom contractor, and it's one reason why floating vanity installations are best done during a full renovation rather than as an aftermarket addition.

What Happens in Older Toronto Homes

In post-war bungalows across Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke, and in older Toronto homes with plaster-and-lath walls, installing a floating vanity requires extra care. Plaster walls are harder to work with than drywall, and finding or adding blocking behind plaster often means opening up a section of wall. If you're doing a full bathroom gut renovation — which most GTA homeowners opt for when updating a 50–70 year old bathroom — this isn't an issue because the walls will be opened anyway for plumbing, waterproofing, and electrical updates.

For **condo bathroom renovations** in Toronto, floating vanities are extremely popular because they make compact bathrooms feel more spacious by exposing the floor underneath. Most condo walls are steel-stud framed, which requires **toggle bolts or specialized steel-stud anchors** rather than standard wood screws. A quality installation in a condo uses a continuous steel mounting rail rated for the load, anchored into multiple studs. Your installer should verify the stud locations and wall construction before committing to a mounting plan.

Installation Best Practices

The mounting cleat should span at least three wall studs (typically 32 inches of wall width for 16-inch stud spacing). For vanities wider than 48 inches or particularly heavy stone tops, spanning four or more studs is recommended. Each lag bolt into a wood stud can hold **150–200 pounds in shear**, so three properly placed lag bolts provide more than enough capacity for the heaviest bathroom vanity and countertop combination.

The vanity cabinet itself also matters. **Quality floating vanity cabinets** designed to be wall-mounted have reinforced back panels and internal bracing specifically engineered to transfer the countertop weight to the wall cleat. Budget floating vanities sometimes use thinner back panels that can flex or pull away from the cleat under load. When shopping for a floating vanity with a quartz top in the GTA market, expect to spend **\$1,500–\$5,000+** for the cabinet alone for a quality wall-mounted unit, compared to \$800–\$2,500 for a comparable floor-mounted semi-custom vanity.

One practical tip: **have the quartz fabricator template after the vanity is installed on the wall**, not before. This ensures the countertop fits the vanity's actual installed position perfectly. GTA quartz fabricators typically charge **\$50–\$120 per square foot installed** for bathroom vanity tops, with templating included.

If your renovation budget allows, a floating vanity with quartz is one of the strongest design choices you can make for a modern GTA bathroom. Just make sure your contractor plans for proper wall blocking during the rough-in phase — it's a \$50 detail during construction that would cost \$500+ to add after the walls are closed up.

Q5

What countertop material holds up best against Toronto's hard water spots and soap scum?

Quartz is the clear winner for resisting Toronto's notoriously hard water spots and soap scum buildup, and it's the number one countertop choice in GTA bathroom renovations for exactly this reason. Toronto's municipal water has a hardness level of approximately **124 mg/L (moderately hard)**, and in suburban GTA municipalities like Brampton, Vaughan, and Markham that draw from different treatment plants, levels can be even higher. That calcium and mineral content leaves white spots and film on any bathroom surface that gets wet — and your vanity countertop gets wet multiple times a day.

Quartz (engineered stone) — brands like Caesarstone, Silestone, and Cambria that are widely available through GTA fabricators — is non-porous by design. The resin binder that holds the crushed quartz aggregate together creates a surface that water, soap, and minerals cannot penetrate. Hard water spots sit on the surface rather than absorbing into it, which means a quick wipe with a damp cloth removes them completely. No sealing required, ever. At **\$50–\$120 per square foot installed** for bathroom vanity tops, quartz delivers the best combination of durability, low maintenance, and resistance to the daily reality of Toronto's hard water.

How Other Materials Compare

Granite is a natural stone that performs reasonably well against hard water, but it's porous and requires **sealing every 1–2 years** to maintain its resistance. If the sealant wears off — which happens faster on bathroom countertops than kitchen countertops because of the constant water exposure — hard water minerals can penetrate the stone surface and create stains that are difficult to remove. Darker granite colours hide water spots better than lighter ones. Granite runs **\$50–\$100 per square foot installed** in the GTA market.

Marble is beautiful but genuinely problematic in a bathroom countertop application with hard water. Marble is both porous and chemically reactive — it etches from acidic products like toothpaste, certain facial cleansers, and even some hand soaps. Combine that reactivity with Toronto's hard water mineral deposits, and you get a countertop that shows every water drop, requires frequent sealing, and develops a patina that some homeowners love and others find frustrating. If you want the marble look without the maintenance, consider a quartz product that mimics marble veining — options like Caesarstone Calacatta Nuvo or Silestone Eternal Calacatta Gold are popular in GTA master ensuite renovations for exactly this reason.

Solid surface (Corian and similar) is non-porous and resists hard water stains well, but it scratches more easily than quartz and can be damaged by heat (curling irons, straighteners left on the counter). It's a good mid-range option at **\$40–\$80 per square foot installed** if quartz is above budget.

Laminate countertops are the most budget-friendly at **\$15–\$40 per square foot installed**, and modern laminates resist hard water reasonably well on the surface. However, water that penetrates seams or edges — particularly around the sink cutout — causes the particleboard substrate to swell and deteriorate. In a high-moisture bathroom environment, laminate countertop edges are the weak point.

Daily Maintenance Tips for Any Countertop

Regardless of material, the simplest defence against hard water buildup in a GTA bathroom is **wiping the countertop dry after use**. Keeping a small squeegee or microfibre cloth near the sink makes this a quick habit. For quartz surfaces, a weekly wipe with a mild all-purpose cleaner keeps the surface spotless. Avoid abrasive cleaners or scouring pads on any countertop surface.

For homeowners dealing with particularly hard water in outer GTA municipalities, a **whole-home water softener** (\$1,500–\$3,000 installed) eliminates the mineral content that causes spots on every surface in the house — countertops, shower glass, fixtures, and tile. It's a worthwhile investment that protects your entire bathroom renovation.

If you're planning a bathroom renovation and choosing countertop materials, getting quotes from GTA fabricators through the Toronto Construction Network directory is a great starting point for comparing materials and pricing.

Is a double vanity worth it in a master bathroom, or does it just waste counter space?

A double vanity is absolutely worth it in a master ensuite if you have the space — it's one of the most consistently requested features in GTA bathroom renovations and a genuine quality-of-life upgrade for couples sharing a bathroom. That said, forcing a double vanity into a bathroom that's too small for one creates more problems than it solves, so the answer depends entirely on your room dimensions.

The practical threshold is **bathroom width**. A double vanity typically requires a cabinet that's **60–72 inches wide**, and you need at least **4 inches of clearance** on each side between the vanity edge and the adjacent wall or fixture. You also need the Ontario Building Code minimum of **21 inches of clear space** in front of the vanity (24 inches is more comfortable). If your master bathroom can accommodate a 60-inch or wider vanity with proper clearances and still fit a toilet and shower or tub comfortably, a double vanity is almost always the right call.

The Real-World Benefits

The biggest benefit isn't the two sinks — it's the **two separate zones**. Each person gets their own mirror space, their own counter area, and their own under-counter storage. The morning routine conflict disappears. In a busy GTA household where both partners are commuting to work, that parallel morning prep time is genuinely valuable.

From a **resale perspective**, a double vanity in a master ensuite is considered a standard expectation in GTA homes priced above \$800,000 — which is most of the market. Home buyers touring properties in Mississauga, Oakville, Richmond Hill, or midtown Toronto expect a double vanity in the master bath. Its absence can make an otherwise updated bathroom feel incomplete. Real estate agents consistently cite master ensuite upgrades as having some of the strongest ROI in the GTA market.

When a Single Vanity Is the Better Choice

In bathrooms **under 50 square feet** — common in older Toronto homes, semi-detached houses in the east end, and many GTA condos — a double vanity creates a cramped layout. A quality **single vanity at 36–48 inches** with generous counter space on both sides of the sink often feels more luxurious than a tight double vanity where the two sinks are squeezed together with minimal counter between them. A 48-inch single vanity with a large undermount sink and expansive quartz countertop provides plenty of counter space and a more open feel.

Condo master ensuites in the GTA are a particularly common scenario where a single vanity wins. Many Toronto condo master bathrooms are designed around a 36-inch or 48-inch vanity, and the room dimensions simply don't accommodate a 60-inch double without sacrificing the shower size or toilet clearances.

Cost Comparison

A **semi-custom double vanity** (60–72 inches) with a quartz countertop, two undermount sinks, and two faucets typically runs **\$2,500–\$5,000** for the vanity, top, and sinks, plus **\$800–\$1,500** for plumbing (you need two drain connections and two sets of supply lines). A comparable quality single vanity (36–48 inches) with quartz top runs **\$1,200–\$3,000** plus **\$400–\$800** for plumbing. So a double vanity adds roughly **\$1,500–\$3,000** to your renovation budget — a relatively modest premium for a feature you'll use every single day.

One design tip: if you have the width for a 72-inch vanity but the room feels tight, consider a **floating double vanity**. Wall-mounting the cabinet opens up the floor beneath it, making the bathroom feel significantly larger. This is the most popular double vanity configuration in modern GTA ensuite renovations.

The Bottom Line

If your master bathroom is 60 square feet or larger and can fit a 60-inch-plus vanity with proper clearances, install the double vanity — you'll use it daily and it strengthens your home's resale value in the competitive GTA market. If the bathroom is under 50 square feet, invest in a high-quality single vanity with a generous countertop instead.

How do vessel sinks compare to undermount sinks for everyday use and cleaning?

For everyday practicality and ease of cleaning, undermount sinks win decisively over vessel sinks — and that's why undermount sinks are the overwhelming choice in GTA bathroom renovations where the homeowner prioritizes function alongside aesthetics. Vessel sinks have a striking visual presence, but they come with real-world trade-offs that you should understand before committing.

Undermount sinks are installed beneath the countertop, creating a seamless edge where the counter surface meets the sink bowl. This design means water, toothpaste, soap residue, and hair can be wiped directly from the countertop into the sink with one motion — no lip or rim to catch debris. The countertop-to-sink transition is smooth and easy to keep clean. With Toronto's hard water leaving mineral deposits on every surface, the fewer seams and edges you have around your sink, the less scrubbing you'll do. Undermount sinks pair beautifully with quartz and granite countertops, which is why they dominate mid-range and high-end GTA bathroom renovations in the **\$25,000–\$45,000** range.

Vessel sinks sit on top of the countertop, creating a dramatic design statement. The bowl is fully exposed, which looks stunning in a well-designed bathroom. However, the practical challenges become apparent quickly in daily use.

Cleaning Realities

The biggest maintenance issue with vessel sinks is the **seam where the bowl meets the countertop**. Caulk or sealant fills this joint, and over time it collects soap scum, toothpaste, hard water deposits, and mould. Cleaning around and behind a vessel sink is significantly more work than maintaining an undermount installation. The outside of the bowl also needs regular cleaning — water splashes, toothpaste flecks, and soap residue all show on the exterior surface. With an undermount sink, those exterior surfaces don't exist.

Splash management is another consideration. Vessel sinks sit several inches above the countertop, which means the faucet needs to be taller (typically a vessel-specific tall faucet at \$200–\$600 versus a standard faucet at \$150–\$400). The greater distance between the water stream and the drain increases splash radius, and in a compact GTA condo bathroom or a standard 5x8-foot bathroom in a Toronto semi-detached home, that extra splash hits the countertop, the mirror, and the wall behind the sink more aggressively.

Height and Ergonomics

A vessel sink adds **4–6 inches** of height above the countertop. On a standard 36-inch comfort-height vanity, the rim of a vessel sink sits at **40–42 inches** — which can feel uncomfortably high for shorter users and creates an awkward reach for children. Some homeowners compensate by installing a shorter vanity (30–32 inches), which brings the vessel sink rim to a more natural height but means the counter surface is too low for comfortable use.

Best Applications for Each

Vessel sinks work best in powder rooms and half baths where the sink gets light, occasional use and the visual impact is prioritized. A beautiful glass, stone, or ceramic vessel sink in a main-floor powder room makes a design statement for guests without the daily-use cleaning burden. Powder rooms in GTA homes are the ideal vessel sink application.

Undermount sinks work best in master ensuites, main bathrooms, kids' bathrooms — any bathroom that sees daily heavy use. The easier cleaning, better ergonomics, and cleaner countertop lines make undermount the practical choice for high-traffic bathrooms.

Cost Comparison in the GTA Market

Vessel sinks themselves range from **\$100–\$800** depending on material (ceramic, glass, natural stone, concrete), plus a vessel-specific faucet at **\$200–\$600**. Undermount sinks run **\$150–\$500** for the sink, plus a standard faucet at **\$150–\$400**. The countertop cost is similar for both, though vessel sink countertops require only a drain hole while undermount countertops require a precisely cut opening — your GTA fabricator handles either as standard work.

For most GTA homeowners renovating a bathroom they'll use every day, the undermount sink is the smarter, more practical choice. Save the vessel sink for the powder room where it can shine without the daily cleaning trade-offs.

Q8

What's the best vanity solution for a very small bathroom under 40 square feet?

In a bathroom under 40 square feet — which describes a huge number of bathrooms across Toronto's older housing stock, inner-city semis, and GTA condos — a wall-mounted floating vanity in the 24–36 inch range is your best option for maximizing both function and the feeling of space. Every inch matters in a small bathroom, and the right vanity choice can make the difference between a bathroom that feels cramped and one that feels intentionally designed.

Floating vanities are the single most effective space-maximizing trick in small bathroom design. By mounting the vanity to the wall and exposing the floor beneath it, you gain two things: **visible floor area** (which makes the room

feel larger than it is) and **accessible storage underneath** for items like a small step stool, a scale, or a cleaning caddy. In a compact GTA condo bathroom where the floor area might be 35–40 square feet, a floating vanity can make the space feel 15–20% more open than a floor-mounted cabinet of the same width.

Sizing It Right

For bathrooms under 40 square feet, vanity widths typically fall into three categories:

- **24 inches** — the minimum for a functional bathroom vanity. Accommodates a small undermount or drop-in sink with minimal counter space. Suitable for tight three-piece bathrooms in older Toronto homes where the original 18-inch pedestal sink is being replaced with something that offers actual storage.
- **30 inches** — the sweet spot for most small GTA bathrooms. Provides enough counter space for daily essentials beside the sink, and the cabinet below offers meaningful storage for toiletries, cleaning supplies, and towels. A 30-inch floating vanity with a single drawer and an open shelf is the most popular configuration in GTA condo bathroom renovations.
- **36 inches** — the maximum for most small bathrooms while maintaining Ontario Building Code clearances (15 inches from toilet centre to nearest obstruction, 21 inches clear in front of the vanity). If your layout allows it, the extra 6 inches of counter and storage over a 30-inch unit makes a noticeable difference.

Design Strategies That Work

Corner vanities are an underutilized option in small GTA bathrooms. A corner-mounted vanity tucks into dead space that would otherwise hold nothing, freeing up wall space for the toilet and shower. Corner vanities are less common at retail stores but can be ordered through GTA bathroom suppliers or built as custom pieces for **\$1,200–\$3,000**.

Integrated sink-and-countertop units eliminate the gap between the sink and the countertop surface, creating a clean, seamless look that makes a small vanity feel less cluttered. These are available in cultured marble, solid surface, and even porcelain at **\$400–\$1,200** for a 24–30 inch unit.

A large mirror above the vanity — ideally a frameless mirror or a full-width medicine cabinet — visually doubles the perceived depth of the room. In a small bathroom, the mirror is as important as the vanity itself. A recessed medicine cabinet provides hidden storage without projecting into the room, which is critical when every inch of clearance matters. Expect to pay **\$200–\$800** for a quality recessed medicine cabinet in the GTA market.

Wall-mounted faucets free up counter space on narrow vanities by moving the faucet off the countertop entirely. This requires plumbing rough-in in the wall (add **\$300–\$600** for the rough-in during renovation), but in a 24-inch vanity where counter space is precious, the extra 4–6 inches of usable surface is significant.

What to Avoid in Small Bathrooms

Avoid **bulky furniture-style vanities** with decorative legs, ornate hardware, and protruding countertop edges — they consume visual and physical space that a small bathroom can't spare. Skip **vessel sinks** in small bathrooms — they add height without adding function and the tall faucets they require create more splash in a tight space. And resist the temptation to go **too small** — a tiny 18-inch vanity saves floor space but provides so little counter and storage that you end up with clutter on every other surface in the room.

For a small bathroom renovation in the GTA, budgeting **\$800–\$2,500** for a quality floating vanity with countertop and sink is realistic for the vanity package alone. The full renovation of a small bathroom typically runs **\$15,000–\$25,000** in the current Toronto market, and getting the vanity selection right is one of the most impactful decisions in that budget.

Q9

Should I buy a pre-built vanity from a store or have a custom one built for my renovation?

For most GTA bathroom renovations, a semi-custom vanity from a reputable supplier hits the best balance of quality, selection, and value — but there are specific situations where a fully custom-built vanity is worth the premium, and other situations where a stock pre-built unit makes perfect sense. The right choice depends on your bathroom's dimensions, your design goals, and your renovation budget.

Stock Pre-Built Vanities (\$300–\$1,200)

Stock vanities are mass-produced in standard sizes (24, 30, 36, 48, and 60 inches) and come with an integrated or included countertop and sink. They're available immediately from GTA building supply retailers and can typically be picked up or delivered within days. The advantages are **low cost, fast availability, and predictable quality** — you can see and touch the product before buying.

Stock vanities work well for **budget renovations under \$20,000**, rental property bathrooms, secondary bathrooms that don't need a design statement, and situations where timeline is tight. The limitations are standard sizes only, limited finish options, and construction quality that ranges from adequate to mediocre. Particleboard boxes with thermofoil doors are common at the lower end, and they don't hold up well in the humid GTA bathroom environment over time — swelling and peeling at the edges is a common complaint after 5–7 years.

Semi-Custom Vanities (\$800–\$2,500)

Semi-custom vanities are manufactured by established cabinet companies (brands like Vanico-Maronyx, Cutler, Foremost, and others available through GTA bathroom showrooms) in a wider range of sizes, finishes, and configurations than stock units. You're choosing from a catalogue of options — wood species, door style, finish colour, hardware, drawer configurations, and countertop material — but the cabinet is built to your selections rather than pulled off a shelf.

This is the sweet spot for most GTA bathroom renovations in the \$25,000–\$35,000 range. Semi-custom vanities offer plywood box construction (much better moisture resistance than particleboard), soft-close hinges and drawer slides, and enough size options to fit most bathroom layouts without the cost of full custom. Lead time is typically **3–6 weeks** from order, so plan accordingly in your renovation timeline.

Custom-Built Vanities (\$1,500–\$5,000+)

A fully custom vanity is built by a cabinetmaker or millwork shop to your exact specifications — any size, any configuration, any material, any finish. This is the route when your bathroom demands something that doesn't exist in standard or semi-custom catalogues.

Custom makes sense when your bathroom has non-standard dimensions (a 27-inch space that's too wide for a 24-inch stock unit and too narrow for a 30), when you want a specific design (a floating vanity with integrated LED lighting, a reclaimed wood vanity, a concrete vanity), when the bathroom has unusual plumbing positions that require the cabinet to accommodate pipes in non-standard locations, or when the vanity is a centrepiece design element in a high-end master ensuite renovation.

In the GTA, custom vanity shops typically quote **\$2,000–\$5,000** for a single vanity and **\$3,500–\$8,000** for a double, not including the countertop (add **\$50–\$120 per square foot** for quartz from a separate fabricator). Lead times run **4–8 weeks** depending on the shop's workload. Toronto and the GTA have an excellent network of millwork shops, many concentrated in areas like the Junction, Etobicoke's industrial pockets, and Vaughan's woodworking district.

Making the Decision

Ask yourself three questions: **Does a standard size fit my space?** If yes, semi-custom or stock will work. **Is the vanity a design focal point?** If it's a high-end ensuite renovation where the vanity sets the tone, custom or premium semi-custom is justified. **What's my total bathroom renovation budget?** If you're working within **\$15,000–\$25,000**, a stock or entry-level semi-custom vanity makes financial sense, leaving more budget for tile, waterproofing, and plumbing — the elements that protect your investment long-term.

Your bathroom contractor can often source vanities through trade accounts at GTA suppliers for **10–20% below retail pricing**, so discuss vanity options with your contractor before purchasing independently.

How do I add storage to a bathroom that has a pedestal sink and no vanity?

Adding storage to a pedestal sink bathroom is one of the most common challenges in older Toronto homes and GTA condos, and there are several effective solutions that don't require replacing the pedestal with a vanity — though that remains the most impactful option if you're planning a renovation. Many charming Toronto homes in neighbourhoods like the Annex, Roncesvalles, Leslieville, and Cabbagetown have original pedestal sinks that homeowners want to keep for their character, so working around them is a practical skill.

Solutions That Work Around the Pedestal

A **recessed medicine cabinet** is the single best storage addition for a pedestal sink bathroom. Unlike a surface-mounted cabinet that projects 4–5 inches into the room, a recessed cabinet fits between the wall studs (standard 14.5-inch cavity between 16-inch-on-centre framing) and provides **3–4 inches of depth** for toiletries, medications, and daily essentials without reducing bathroom clearance. Quality recessed medicine cabinets run **\$200–\$800** in the GTA market, and installation involves cutting the drywall opening and framing a simple header — a straightforward project for a handyman or your renovation contractor. In older Toronto homes with plaster-and-lath walls, the installation is slightly more involved but still very doable.

Over-toilet shelving and cabinets take advantage of the vertical space above the toilet that's almost always unused. Options range from freestanding étagères (\$50–\$200) that lean against the wall to wall-mounted cabinets (\$150–\$500) that provide enclosed storage. Wall-mounted options are more secure and look more intentional — anchor them into studs, not just drywall anchors, especially if you're storing heavier items.

Floating shelves on the wall beside or above the pedestal sink provide open storage for folded towels, decorative items, and daily-use products in attractive containers. Install **2–3 shelves at staggered heights** using heavy-duty shelf brackets into studs. Wood, glass, or metal floating shelves in the **\$30–\$100 per shelf** range (plus installation) add both storage and visual interest. In a small Toronto bathroom, a vertical stack of floating shelves beside the mirror is a classic solution.

A **pedestal sink storage cabinet** is a purpose-built unit designed to wrap around the pedestal base, providing cabinet doors and internal shelving while leaving the sink and pedestal visible. These are available through GTA retailers for **\$80–\$250** and are a clever compromise — they add meaningful under-sink storage without the cost or commitment of replacing the pedestal.

If You're Ready for a Bigger Change

Replacing the pedestal sink with a vanity during a bathroom renovation is the most transformative single change you can make for storage. A 30-inch vanity with drawers and a cabinet provides more storage than all of the above solutions combined. The plumbing rough-in is already in place from the pedestal sink, so the conversion is relatively straightforward — your plumber adjusts the supply lines and drain connection to fit inside the vanity cabinet, typically for **\$300–\$600** in labour.

If you love the look of a pedestal sink but need storage, consider a **console sink** — a wall-mounted sink with exposed legs and an open shelf below. Console sinks provide the elegant, open feel of a pedestal with a built-in shelf for towels or baskets. Quality console sinks run **\$500–\$2,000** in the GTA market and are increasingly popular in updated traditional-style bathrooms.

Creative Additions

A slim rolling cart (6–8 inches wide) that tucks between the pedestal and the wall or between the toilet and vanity provides surprising storage capacity. **Wall-mounted towel hooks** instead of a towel bar save space and keep towels organized — install a row of 3–4 hooks behind the door. **A wall-mounted hair dryer holder** and toothbrush organizer keep the pedestal sink surface clear.

For condo bathrooms in the GTA where wall modifications may require building management approval, freestanding and over-toilet solutions avoid the need for permits or condo board review. For freehold homes in Toronto, wall-mounted options like recessed medicine cabinets and floating shelves are the most elegant long-term solutions.

Q11

What's the difference between quartz and quartzite for a bathroom countertop?

Despite the similar names, quartz and quartzite are completely different materials — quartz is an engineered product manufactured in a factory, while quartzite is a natural stone quarried from the earth — and the difference has significant implications for maintenance, durability, and cost in a GTA bathroom.

This is one of the most common sources of confusion among homeowners planning bathroom renovations in Toronto, and choosing the wrong one can lead to unexpected maintenance headaches.

Quartz (engineered quartz, engineered stone) is made by combining approximately **90–94% crushed natural quartz crystals with 6–10% polymer resins and pigments**, then pressing and curing the mixture into slabs. Brands like Caesarstone, Silestone, Cambria, and Hanstone — all widely available through GTA stone fabricators — produce quartz in hundreds of colours and patterns, including convincing marble and natural stone lookalikes.

The key advantage of engineered quartz is that it's **completely non-porous**. The resin binder seals the surface, so water, soap, toothpaste, and Toronto's hard water minerals cannot penetrate. No sealing required, ever. Just wipe it clean.

Quartzite is a natural metamorphic stone formed when sandstone is subjected to extreme heat and pressure deep underground. It's quarried in slabs just like granite or marble. Quartzite is incredibly hard — harder than granite — and has a beautiful, often translucent quality with flowing veining patterns. However, quartzite is **porous** and requires **sealing every 1–2 years** to resist staining and water absorption. Each slab is unique, with natural variations in colour and veining that can be stunning but also make colour matching between slabs more challenging.

Performance in a GTA Bathroom

For everyday bathroom use in Toronto, quartz outperforms quartzite on practically every functional metric. The bathroom countertop is one of the wettest surfaces in your home — water from handwashing, toothbrushing, makeup application, and daily routines constantly contacts the surface. Quartz handles this moisture exposure effortlessly because nothing penetrates the non-porous surface. Quartzite handles moisture well when properly sealed, but if the sealant degrades (and it does, especially with daily water exposure), water and minerals can penetrate and cause staining over time.

Hard water performance is another important distinction for GTA homeowners. Toronto's moderately hard water leaves mineral deposits on surfaces that get wet. On quartz, these deposits sit on the surface and wipe away easily. On quartzite, mineral deposits can settle into the natural micro-pores of the stone if the sealant is worn, creating stains that require professional treatment to remove.

Resistance to bathroom products favours quartz as well. Quartzite, like marble, can be sensitive to acidic products — certain facial cleansers, nail polish remover, and even some toothpastes can etch the surface if left in contact. Quartz resists virtually all common household chemicals.

Cost Comparison in the GTA Market

Quartz countertops for bathroom vanities run **\$50–\$120 per square foot installed** through GTA fabricators, with most mid-range selections falling in the \$65–\$90 range. Quartzite is a premium natural stone that typically costs **\$80–\$200 per square foot installed**, putting it at the high end of the bathroom countertop market alongside premium marbles.

For a standard 48-inch bathroom vanity countertop (approximately 4–5 square feet), you're looking at roughly **\$250–\$600 for quartz** versus **\$400–\$1,000 for quartzite** — a meaningful difference, especially when the lower-cost option also requires less maintenance.

Which Should You Choose?

Choose quartz if you want a low-maintenance, worry-free bathroom countertop that handles daily use without any special care. This is the right choice for the vast majority of GTA bathroom renovations — master ensuites, main bathrooms, kids' bathrooms, and condo bathrooms.

Choose quartzite if you want a genuinely unique natural stone surface and you're willing to commit to annual sealing and more careful daily maintenance. Quartzite makes its strongest case in high-end master ensuite renovations where the countertop is a design statement and the homeowner appreciates natural stone character. Some quartzite varieties have a luminous, almost gem-like quality that engineered quartz cannot replicate.

For most homeowners renovating a bathroom in the GTA, quartz delivers the best combination of beauty, durability, and low maintenance — which is why it accounts for the majority of bathroom countertop installations across Toronto and the surrounding municipalities.

Q12

Can I use a kitchen-style butcher block countertop in my bathroom, or will the moisture ruin it?

You can use a butcher block countertop in a bathroom, but it requires significantly more maintenance than quartz, granite, or solid surface options — and in the GTA's humid climate, the risks are real. Wood is naturally porous and absorbs moisture, which means a butcher block vanity top in a bathroom will be constantly exposed to splashing water, steam from showers, and the ambient humidity that Toronto homes experience year-round, especially during the hot, humid summers when indoor humidity can climb above 60%.

The biggest concern is water damage at the sink cutout and around the faucet holes. Every time water pools around the base of the faucet or splashes near the sink edge, it can penetrate the wood grain and cause swelling, warping, discolouration, and eventually rot. In a kitchen, spills are intermittent and can be wiped up quickly. In a bathroom, the moisture exposure is constant and often goes unnoticed — condensation drips, toothbrush splashes, and steam from a nearby shower all contribute to a much harsher environment for wood than a kitchen.

Making It Work

If you're set on the butcher block look, there are steps to improve durability. **Start with a hardwood species that handles moisture better** — teak, white oak, and walnut are far more resistant than maple, birch, or pine. Teak in particular contains natural oils that resist water penetration and is commonly used in marine applications. Expect to

pay \$60–\$120 per square foot for a quality teak or white oak butcher block top from GTA suppliers, compared to \$30–\$60 for maple or birch.

Sealing is non-negotiable. Apply a marine-grade polyurethane or an epoxy finish to all surfaces — top, bottom, edges, and especially around all cutouts. Mineral oil alone, which is common for kitchen butcher blocks, is completely inadequate for bathroom use. The finish needs to create a waterproof barrier, not just a food-safe surface. Reapply the finish every 12–18 months, or sooner if you notice the water is no longer beading on the surface.

Pay special attention to the underside and edges. GTA homes with forced-air heating experience significant humidity swings between summer and winter — from 60%+ humidity down to 20–25% in heated winter air. This causes the wood to expand and contract seasonally, which can crack finishes and open seams. Sealing all six sides of the countertop helps stabilize the wood against these humidity cycles.

The Practical Alternative

Many GTA homeowners who love the warmth of wood but want less maintenance opt for a **wood-look porcelain or quartz countertop** instead. Several quartz manufacturers now offer convincing wood-grain patterns that provide the aesthetic without any of the moisture concerns. At \$50–\$120 per square foot installed, quartz is competitively priced with premium hardwood butcher block and will last decades without refinishing. Another option is using butcher block on a **powder room vanity only** — a half-bath with no shower or tub generates far less moisture than a full bathroom, making wood a more practical choice.

If you do install butcher block in a full bathroom, keep the exhaust fan running during and after every shower (a timer switch set for 20 minutes is ideal), wipe standing water from the countertop immediately, and budget for refinishing every 1–2 years. It's a beautiful material, but in a Toronto bathroom, it's a commitment to ongoing maintenance that quartz or granite simply don't require.

How much overhang should a bathroom countertop have, and does it need support brackets?

A standard bathroom countertop overhang is 1 to 1.5 inches on the front and sides, which does not require any additional support regardless of the countertop material. This modest overhang serves a practical purpose — it creates a drip edge that directs water away from the vanity cabinet face and doors, preventing moisture damage to the cabinetry below. In Toronto's humid climate, this drip edge matters more than you might think, especially in bathrooms where steam and splashing are constant.

For a **standard vanity installation** in a typical GTA bathroom, the 1–1.5 inch overhang is sufficient and keeps the countertop within the vanity footprint, which is important in the compact 5x8-foot bathrooms common in post-war homes across Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke. The countertop sits on the vanity cabinet and is typically secured with silicone adhesive — no brackets needed.

When You Need More Overhang

Some designs call for **extended overhangs of 4–12 inches** — for example, a vanity with a seated makeup area, a countertop that extends over an adjacent knee wall, or a floating vanity where the countertop is intentionally wider than the cabinet below for visual effect. Once the overhang exceeds **6 inches for quartz or granite**, or **8 inches for solid surface (Corian)**, you need support. The standard approach is **steel L-brackets or corbels** mounted to the wall studs or to a support cleat inside the vanity, spaced every 18–24 inches along the unsupported span.

For **quartz countertops** (the most popular choice in GTA bathroom renovations at \$50–\$120 per square foot installed), the general rule is that overhangs beyond 10–12 inches without support risk cracking, especially at stress points around sink cutouts. Your stone fabricator will specify the maximum unsupported overhang based on the slab thickness — **2cm (3/4-inch) quartz** supports less overhang than **3cm (1-1/4 inch)**, and most GTA fabricators recommend 3cm for any countertop with a cutout or overhang greater than 6 inches.

Marble and granite follow similar rules but are slightly more brittle than engineered quartz, so support brackets should be added at 6 inches of overhang rather than waiting until 10. For a marble vanity top at \$75–\$200 per square foot installed, protecting against cracking with proper support is well worth the \$50–\$150 cost of brackets.

Installation Considerations for GTA Homes

In **condo bathrooms**, where vanities are often wall-mounted or floating, the countertop overhang needs to account for the wall-mount bracket system. The countertop may overhang the front of the cabinet by 1–2 inches, but any side overhang near a wall must leave enough clearance for the mounting hardware and allow the cabinet doors to

open fully. Measure the clearance with the cabinet doors at full swing before finalizing the countertop template.

For **corner vanities** or L-shaped countertops, the overhang at the corner joint is a stress point. Your fabricator should use a **seam rod or biscuit joint** at inside corners, and any cantilevered section at the corner should have support from below. Discuss the overhang dimensions with your countertop fabricator during the template visit — they measure on-site after the vanity is installed and can advise on the maximum safe overhang for your specific material and layout.

Q14

What vanity width works best in a standard 5x8 bathroom layout?

A **36-inch vanity is the sweet spot for a standard 5x8-foot bathroom — it provides meaningful counter space and storage while preserving the clearances required by the Ontario Building Code.** This is the most common vanity size installed in GTA bathroom renovations for good reason: it fits the proportions of the room without crowding the toilet or blocking the door swing.

The 5x8-foot bathroom is the dominant layout in the GTA's enormous stock of **post-war homes built between 1945 and 1970** — the bungalows, split-levels, and two-storey homes found throughout Scarborough, North York, Etobicoke, Mississauga, and the inner suburbs. These bathrooms typically have the toilet centred on one 5-foot wall, the tub along the 8-foot wall, and the vanity on the opposite 5-foot wall from the toilet (or sometimes on the same wall). Understanding your specific layout is essential before choosing a vanity width.

Sizing by Layout

If the vanity sits on the 5-foot (60-inch) wall, you have 60 inches of total wall space. A 36-inch vanity leaves 24 inches of open space — enough for comfortable access and clearance from the adjacent wall or door frame. A **48-inch vanity** can also work on a 5-foot wall if the door is on the 8-foot wall and doesn't swing into the vanity. However, a 48-inch vanity on a 5-foot wall leaves only 12 inches of clearance to the nearest obstruction, which can feel tight.

If the vanity sits on the 8-foot (96-inch) wall opposite the tub (a less common but not unusual layout), you have more room to work with. A 48-inch or even 60-inch vanity can fit comfortably, though you need to maintain the code-required **15 inches from the toilet centreline to the edge of the vanity** and **21 inches of clear space in front of both the vanity and the toilet.**

Practical Recommendations

For most 5x8 GTA bathrooms, here's what works:

- **30-inch vanity:** Minimum practical size. Provides a single sink with very limited counter space. Suitable for tight layouts or powder rooms but feels cramped in a primary bathroom
- **36-inch vanity:** The ideal balance. Enough counter space for daily essentials beside the sink, adequate storage below, and comfortable clearances in the room. Available in a huge range of styles from \$400 to \$2,000 at GTA suppliers
- **42-inch vanity:** A good upgrade if your layout allows it. The extra 6 inches of counter space makes a noticeable difference in daily usability
- **48-inch vanity:** The maximum that typically works in a 5x8 layout without compromising clearances. Provides generous counter space and storage. Expect to pay \$600–\$2,500 for a quality 48-inch semi-custom vanity

Depth matters too. Standard vanity depth is 21 inches (front to back), but if the door swing is tight or the bathroom feels cramped, a **narrow-depth vanity at 18 inches** can free up valuable floor space. Several manufacturers now offer slim-profile vanities specifically designed for compact GTA bathrooms and condos. The trade-off is less storage space and a smaller sink bowl, but the improved traffic flow is often worth it.

Before You Buy

Measure the actual room dimensions — not the nominal 5x8. Many older Toronto homes have walls that are slightly out of square, and actual dimensions may be 59 or 61 inches rather than a perfect 60. Measure at the floor and at counter height (36 inches), because walls in pre-war and post-war homes are rarely perfectly plumb. Also note the location of the **water supply lines and drain** — your new vanity needs to accommodate the existing plumbing positions unless you're budgeting for a plumber to relocate them (\$500–\$1,500 for supply and drain relocation in the GTA). Take these measurements to your vanity supplier or bring them to your contractor so they can confirm the fit before ordering.

Q15

Are integrated sink-and-countertop pieces easier to maintain than separate undermount sinks?

Yes — **integrated sink-and-countertop units are significantly easier to maintain because they eliminate the seam between the sink and countertop where mould, grime, and moisture accumulate.** That seamless transition from counter surface into the sink bowl means there is no caulk joint to deteriorate, no gap for water to seep into, and no lip or rim where toothpaste and soap residue collect. For GTA homeowners who want a low-

maintenance bathroom, an integrated top is one of the smartest choices you can make.

With a **separate undermount sink**, the sink is bonded and clipped to the underside of the countertop, and the joint between the stone or quartz edge and the sink rim is sealed with silicone caulk. This caulk seal is the weak point — over time (typically 3–7 years), the silicone degrades, shrinks, and discolours, allowing moisture to wick into the joint. In Toronto's humid bathroom environment, this damp seam becomes a breeding ground for mould and mildew. Recaulking an undermount sink requires removing the old silicone completely, cleaning the joint with a mould-killing solution, drying thoroughly, and applying fresh 100% silicone caulk. It's not difficult, but it's a maintenance task you'll repeat every few years.

Integrated Sink Options and Pricing

Solid surface integrated tops (Corian, Meganite, and similar acrylic-based materials) are the most common integrated option in the GTA market. They're available in a wide range of colours and profiles, and minor scratches can be buffed out with fine sandpaper. Expect to pay **\$400–\$1,200** for a solid surface integrated vanity top in standard sizes (24–48 inches), available through GTA bathroom suppliers and fabricators.

Cultured marble integrated tops are a budget-friendly option at **\$200–\$600** for standard sizes. They have a glossy gel-coat finish that's easy to clean but cannot be repaired if deeply scratched or chipped. They've fallen out of fashion in higher-end GTA renovations but remain popular for rental properties and budget refreshes.

Quartz integrated tops are the premium option — some quartz fabricators now offer integrated sink bowls milled directly into the quartz slab, creating a completely seamless stone surface. These are stunning but expensive at **\$800–\$2,500** depending on size and complexity, and require a skilled GTA fabricator with CNC capability.

Porcelain or ceramic integrated tops combine a porcelain countertop with a moulded porcelain sink bowl. These are extremely durable, stain-resistant, and easy to clean. Pricing runs **\$300–\$900** for standard sizes, and they're increasingly popular in modern and minimalist GTA bathroom designs.

The Case for Undermount Sinks

Despite the maintenance advantage of integrated tops, **undermount sinks still dominate mid-range and high-end GTA bathroom renovations** for a few reasons. First, they allow you to choose a natural stone or engineered quartz countertop with a specific colour and pattern, paired with any sink style — white ceramic, stainless steel, or decorative vessel. Second, if the sink chips or stains, you can replace just the sink without replacing the entire countertop. With an integrated unit, damage to either the sink or the counter means replacing the whole piece.

The maintenance trade-off is real but manageable. If you choose an undermount sink with a quartz or granite countertop, plan to **recaulk the sink-to-counter seam every 3–5 years** (or sooner if you notice discolouration or separation). Use 100% silicone caulk rated for kitchen and bath use, and allow 24 hours of cure time before using

the sink.

For a **low-maintenance GTA bathroom** where easy cleaning is the priority, an integrated top is the better choice.

For a **design-driven bathroom** where material selection and flexibility matter more, an undermount sink with a quality stone countertop — and a commitment to periodic recaulking — remains the standard.

How do I protect a marble vanity top from water rings, toothpaste stains, and etching?

Marble is a calcium-based stone that reacts to acidic substances, making it inherently vulnerable to etching — and in a bathroom, acids are everywhere: toothpaste, mouthwash, facial cleansers, perfumes, and even lemon-scented soap. Protecting a marble vanity top requires a combination of proper sealing, daily habits, and realistic expectations about how the stone will age over time.

The first and most important step is **professional-grade sealing**. When your marble vanity top is installed by a GTA stone fabricator (typically \$75–\$200 per square foot installed for marble), it should arrive pre-sealed. However, the factory sealer is a starting point, not a permanent solution. Apply a high-quality **impregnating stone sealer** (not a topical coating) within the first week of installation, and reseal every **6–12 months** depending on how heavily the bathroom is used. Brands like StoneTech BulletProof, Miracle Sealants 511, and Tenax Proseal are widely available from GTA tile and stone suppliers and cost \$25–\$50 per bottle — enough for multiple applications.

Understanding the Difference Between Staining and Etching

This distinction is critical because the solutions are different. **Staining** is when a coloured liquid penetrates the stone's pores and discolours it from within — coffee rings, hair dye drips, and red wine are classic stain sources. A good impregnating sealer prevents staining by filling the pores and blocking absorption. **Etching** is a chemical reaction where acid dissolves the calcium carbonate on the marble surface, leaving a dull, lighter mark. Sealer does NOT prevent etching — no sealer can stop a chemical reaction on the stone surface. This is why marble in bathrooms inevitably develops a patina of fine etch marks over time, which many homeowners consider part of the stone's character.

Daily Protection Habits

Wipe up toothpaste immediately. Toothpaste contains mild abrasives and often has a slightly acidic pH that etches marble on contact. Keep a small towel or cloth on the vanity and wipe the countertop after brushing. This single habit prevents 80% of the etching damage that marble bathroom vanity tops experience.

Use a tray or mat around the faucet area. A decorative tray for soap, toothbrush holder, and daily products protects the marble underneath from water rings and product drips. Water rings on marble form when standing water slowly etches the surface — a trivial problem on quartz or granite, but visible on polished marble within days.

Avoid placing acidic products directly on the marble. Facial cleansers, mouthwash, lemon-based products, vinegar-based cleaners, and even some hand soaps are acidic enough to etch marble. Store these products on a

tray, shelf, or inside the vanity cabinet rather than on the stone surface.

Clean with pH-neutral stone cleaner only. Never use bathroom cleaners containing bleach, ammonia, vinegar, or citric acid on marble. These products etch and dull the surface rapidly. Use a dedicated stone cleaner (available from any GTA tile shop for \$10–\$20) or simply warm water with a few drops of mild dish soap.

Dealing with Existing Damage

For **light etch marks**, a marble polishing powder (tin oxide or aluminum oxide based) can restore the shine. Apply with a damp cloth, buff in circular motions, and wipe clean. For **deeper etching or stains**, a professional stone restoration company can hone and repolish the surface — expect to pay \$200–\$500 for a vanity top restoration in the GTA.

For homeowners who love marble's aesthetic but want less maintenance, consider **honed (matte) marble** instead of polished. Honed marble still etches, but the marks are far less visible on the already-matte surface. Many GTA designers now recommend honed marble for bathroom vanity tops specifically because it ages more gracefully in the wet, product-heavy bathroom environment.

Q17

What's the lead time for ordering a custom vanity top from a GTA stone fabricator?

Expect a lead time of 2 to 4 weeks from template to installation for a custom quartz or granite vanity top from a GTA stone fabricator, though the total timeline from first contact to finished countertop is typically 3 to 6 weeks. This timeline assumes the fabricator has the slab in stock and your project doesn't coincide with peak renovation season, which in Toronto runs from April through October.

The process involves several distinct steps, each with its own timeline. Understanding these steps helps you coordinate the vanity top order with the rest of your bathroom renovation so the countertop arrives when you need it — not three weeks too early (taking up space) or two weeks too late (holding up the entire project).

The Custom Countertop Timeline

Step 1: Slab selection (1–3 days). Visit the fabricator's showroom or slab yard to choose your material. GTA fabricators typically stock 200–500 slabs of quartz and natural stone. If you want a specific quartz colour from Caesarstone, Silestone, or Cambria, most popular colours are in stock. Exotic natural stones or less common quartz patterns may need to be ordered from the distributor, adding 1–2 weeks.

Step 2: Template (scheduled 3–7 days after slab selection). The fabricator sends a templater to your home to measure the vanity cabinet in place and create a precise digital template. This is why your **vanity cabinet must be fully installed and level before the template appointment**. The templater records exact dimensions, sink cutout position, faucet hole locations, edge profile, and any special details. Template appointments are typically booked 3–7 business days out, longer during peak season.

Step 3: Fabrication (5–10 business days after template). The fabricator cuts, edges, polishes, and finishes your countertop from the selected slab using CNC machinery and hand finishing. A standard bathroom vanity top with one sink cutout and a simple edge profile takes less shop time than a kitchen countertop, but it still goes into the production queue. During peak season (May through September), GTA fabrication shops are running at full capacity and the queue can extend to 10–15 business days.

Step 4: Installation (scheduled 1–3 days after fabrication). The fabricator delivers and installs the countertop, setting it on the vanity with silicone adhesive and making any final adjustments. Installation of a bathroom vanity top typically takes 30–60 minutes. The plumber then installs the sink, faucet, and supply lines.

Cost Expectations

Custom fabrication for a bathroom vanity top in the GTA typically runs:

- **Quartz:** \$50–\$120 per square foot installed, with a typical bathroom vanity top (22 x 36 inches = approximately 5.5 square feet) costing **\$400–\$800 total** including cutout, edge, and installation
- **Granite:** \$50–\$100 per square foot installed, similar total cost range for a standard vanity
- **Marble:** \$75–\$200 per square foot installed, with vanity tops running **\$500–\$1,200** depending on the stone variety
- **Most GTA fabricators have a minimum order charge** of \$300–\$500, which a single bathroom vanity top may fall under. Ask about minimums when getting quotes

Timing Tips for Your Renovation

Order your vanity top **as soon as the vanity cabinet is installed** — don't wait until the tile and painting are done. The 2–4 week fabrication lead time can run concurrently with other finishing trades if you plan ahead. If you're renovating during the **spring or summer peak season**, add an extra week to every estimate. Some GTA fabricators offer rush service for an additional 15–25% surcharge, which can compress the timeline to 7–10 days from template to installation.

Also confirm whether your fabricator includes the **sink cutout, faucet holes, and edge profile** in their quoted price or charges separately — these add-ons can total \$100–\$300 if priced individually. Get the all-in installed price in writing before committing.

Can I reuse my existing vanity and just replace the countertop and sink during a renovation?

Absolutely — reusing your existing vanity cabinet and replacing just the countertop and sink is one of the smartest ways to save money on a GTA bathroom renovation without sacrificing visual impact. A new countertop and sink can completely transform the look of a vanity for \$400–\$1,500 installed, compared to \$800–\$3,000+ for a new vanity cabinet, countertop, and sink together. If the existing cabinet is structurally sound, has a finish you like (or can refinish), and fits your layout, there's no reason to replace it.

What to Check Before Committing

Structural condition is the first priority. Open the vanity doors and inspect the interior. Look for water damage on the bottom panel — swelling, delamination, soft spots, or mould stains around the drain and supply line penetrations. Post-war GTA homes (the bungalows and split-levels common across Scarborough, North York, Mississauga, and Brampton) often have vanities that are 30–50 years old, and decades of minor leaks can damage the cabinet floor. If the bottom panel is swollen or soft, you can sometimes replace just that panel (\$50–\$150 in materials) rather than the entire vanity.

Check the cabinet box construction. Solid wood and plywood vanity boxes from the 1970s–1990s are typically worth keeping — they're often better built than budget vanities available today. Particleboard vanities with melamine coatings are more prone to moisture damage and may not be worth the effort of reusing if the finish is peeling or the joints are loose.

Verify that the cabinet dimensions work with modern countertop standards. Most GTA stone fabricators can template a custom top to fit any cabinet, but the vanity needs to be level, square, and securely mounted to the wall. If the existing vanity has shifted or settled (common in older Toronto homes with uneven floors), a good installer can shim it level before templating.

The Replacement Process

Removing the old countertop and sink is straightforward. **Turn off the water supply valves** under the vanity, disconnect the supply lines and P-trap drain, and then remove the old top. Most countertops are held on with silicone adhesive and possibly a few screws from underneath. A utility knife along the backsplash caulk line and gentle prying usually frees the old top without damaging the cabinet.

Once the old top is off, inspect the cabinet top edges. Clean off old silicone residue and verify the surface is flat and level. This is also the ideal time to **replace the shut-off valves and supply lines** — if you have the original gate

valves from a 1970s installation, upgrading to quarter-turn ball valves (\$15–\$30 each, plus \$100–\$200 for a plumber to install) is highly recommended. Old gate valves are the number one cause of "I can't turn off the water" emergencies during bathroom work.

Order the new countertop from a GTA fabricator after the old one is removed and the cabinet is confirmed level and ready. The fabricator templates with the bare cabinet in place. A standard quartz vanity top runs \$400–\$800 installed for a 30–48 inch single-sink top, and the template-to-installation turnaround is typically 2–4 weeks.

Refreshing the Cabinet Itself

If the cabinet finish is dated but the structure is solid, consider **painting or refinishing** rather than replacing. Bathroom vanity painting costs \$200–\$500 if done by a professional painter in the GTA, or \$30–\$80 in materials for a DIY project. Sand lightly, prime with a bonding primer (BIN Shellac or Zinsser is ideal for bathroom cabinet surfaces), and apply two coats of cabinet-grade paint in semi-gloss or satin finish. This, combined with new hardware (\$5–\$20 per pull or knob), a new countertop, and a new sink and faucet, can make a 30-year-old vanity look completely new for a fraction of the cost of full replacement.

The key budget takeaway: **countertop and sink replacement with cabinet refinishing** typically costs \$800–\$2,000 total versus \$1,500–\$4,000+ for a complete new vanity package. For GTA homeowners working within a budget, this approach delivers the biggest visual impact per dollar spent.

How deep should a bathroom vanity be if the door swing is tight or the hallway is narrow?

Standard bathroom vanities are 21 inches deep (front to back), but narrow-depth vanities at 16 to 18 inches solve tight door swings and cramped layouts — a common challenge in older Toronto homes, condos, and compact GTA bathrooms. Reducing the vanity depth by even 3–5 inches can be the difference between a door that opens fully and one that bangs into the vanity edge every time.

This is a particularly relevant issue across the GTA because of the housing stock. **Pre-war Toronto homes** in neighbourhoods like the Annex, Roncesvalles, Leslieville, and the Beaches often have narrow hallway bathrooms where the door opens directly into the vanity wall. **Post-war bungalows and split-levels** across Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke frequently have 5x8 bathrooms where the door swing grazes a standard-depth vanity. And **condo bathrooms** — especially in units from the 2000s–2010s era — often have tight layouts where every inch of depth matters.

Sizing Options

18-inch depth is the most common narrow-profile option and is widely available from GTA bathroom suppliers. At 18 inches, you lose 3 inches of counter depth compared to standard — noticeable but still functional. Most 18-inch vanities accommodate a standard undermount or drop-in sink, though the bowl will be shallower (4–5 inches versus 6–7 inches in a full-depth vanity). Several major manufacturers including Cutler, Foremost, and Glacier Bay offer 18-inch depth lines specifically designed for compact bathrooms.

16-inch depth is the minimum for a vanity that can still house a functional sink. At this depth, you're limited to narrower sink bowls and compact faucets. Wall-mounted faucets are a smart pairing with 16-inch vanities because they eliminate the faucet deck space requirement, freeing up more usable counter area. Expect to pay a slight premium for 16-inch vanities as they're more of a specialty item — \$400–\$1,500 for quality options at GTA suppliers.

Wall-mounted (floating) vanities can be installed at any depth and height, making them extremely versatile for tight spaces. A floating vanity at 18 inches deep with the bottom of the cabinet 6–8 inches off the floor creates the visual illusion of more space and makes floor cleaning easy. Popular in modern GTA condo renovations at \$600–\$2,500 for quality wall-mounted units.

Measuring for Clearance

Before selecting a vanity depth, **measure the actual clearance with the door fully open**. Stand in the bathroom, open the door to 90 degrees (or as far as it opens), and measure from the inside face of the open door to the wall where the vanity sits. Subtract 2 inches for comfortable clearance — this is your maximum vanity depth including the countertop overhang.

Also check the **Ontario Building Code minimum clearance** of 21 inches of clear standing space in front of the vanity. This is measured from the front edge of the countertop to the nearest obstruction (opposite wall, tub edge, or toilet). In a tight bathroom, reducing the vanity depth can actually help you meet this code requirement where a standard 21-inch vanity would put you right at or below the minimum.

Alternative Solutions

If a narrower vanity still doesn't solve the clearance problem, consider these options that GTA contractors regularly use in compact bathrooms:

A pocket door or barn door eliminates the swing problem entirely. A pocket door retrofit costs \$500–\$1,500 installed in the GTA (more if the wall needs framing modifications), but it recovers the full door swing area for vanity placement. Barn doors are a simpler retrofit at \$300–\$800 installed but require clear wall space beside the doorway for the door to slide open.

A pedestal sink or wall-mounted sink without a vanity cabinet reduces depth to as little as 8–12 inches. The trade-off is losing all under-vanity storage, which can be offset with a recessed medicine cabinet, floating shelves, or an over-toilet storage unit. This approach works well in powder rooms where storage needs are minimal.

Corner vanities (triangular or diagonal-front) can free up floor space in awkward layouts where the door swing conflicts with a vanity on the adjacent wall. These are less common but available through custom vanity builders in the GTA for \$800–\$2,500.

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