

JUSTYN ROOK CONTRACTING

Comparisons

Weighing one material, method, or approach
against another

12 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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Table of Contents

1. Undermount vs drop-in sink which is easier to maintain?
2. Engineered vs solid hardwood which is better for basements?
3. Quartz vs granite countertops which should I choose?
4. Alcove vs freestanding bathtub which costs more?
5. Single vs double vanity which adds more value?
6. Ceramic vs porcelain tile for bathroom floors?
7. Tile vs vinyl flooring for bathrooms which lasts longer?
8. Pocket door vs barn door for bathrooms?
9. Subway tile vs large format tile for showers?
10. Painted vs stained cabinets which is more durable?
11. Acrylic vs porcelain bathtub which is better?
12. Gas vs electric range which should I choose?

Q1

Undermount vs drop-in sink which is easier to maintain?

Drop-in sinks are generally easier to maintain than undermount sinks, primarily because they don't have the exposed countertop edges around the sink opening that can collect water, food particles, and develop mold or mildew issues over time.

Drop-in sinks sit on top of the countertop with a visible rim, which means the countertop edge is protected and sealed. Cleaning is straightforward - you simply wipe around the rim and clean the sink itself. The main maintenance concern is keeping the caulk seal around the rim fresh, which typically needs refreshing every 2-3 years in Ottawa's climate where temperature fluctuations can cause expansion and contraction.

Undermount sinks create a sleek, modern look but require more diligent maintenance. The exposed countertop edge around the sink opening needs regular sealing - especially important with natural stone countertops like granite or marble. Water can seep into unsealed edges, causing staining, bacterial growth, or even structural damage over time. You'll need to reseal these edges annually and be more careful about wiping up water immediately after use.

Ottawa-specific considerations include our hard water, which can cause mineral buildup more quickly on the exposed edges of undermount installations. The freeze-thaw cycles we experience can also cause more movement in countertops, potentially compromising seals faster than in more stable climates.

Professional installation quality makes a huge difference with undermount sinks. Poor installation can create gaps where water collects, leading to ongoing maintenance headaches. The sink must be perfectly supported and sealed to prevent long-term issues.

For busy households, drop-in sinks are more forgiving of occasional maintenance neglect. With undermount sinks, staying on top of sealing and immediate cleanup is crucial to prevent costly repairs down the road.

Bottom line: If low maintenance is your priority, choose drop-in. If you prefer the aesthetic and don't mind the extra care, undermount can work well with proper installation and regular attention to sealing.

For a free consultation on your kitchen renovation plans, contact Justyn Rook Contracting - we can help you choose the best option for your lifestyle and maintenance preferences.

Q2

Engineered vs solid hardwood which is better for basements?

Engineered hardwood is significantly better for basements due to its superior moisture resistance and dimensional stability in Ottawa's climate conditions. While solid hardwood can work in some basement situations, engineered flooring is specifically designed to handle the moisture challenges that basements present.

Moisture is the key factor that makes engineered hardwood the clear winner for basement applications. Basements naturally have higher humidity levels and greater potential for moisture intrusion, especially in Ottawa where we deal with freeze-thaw cycles and seasonal groundwater changes. Engineered hardwood's multi-layer construction with a plywood or HDF core provides much better dimensional stability than solid wood, which can cup, crown, or gap when exposed to moisture fluctuations.

Engineered hardwood offers several basement-specific advantages. The cross-grain construction resists expansion and contraction, making it less likely to develop gaps during Ottawa's dry winter months when furnaces drop indoor humidity. Most engineered products can be installed as floating floors over proper underlayment, which is ideal for basement concrete slabs. You'll also find engineered options specifically rated for below-grade installation, something you won't see with solid hardwood.

Installation considerations favor engineered as well. In Ottawa basements, you're typically working with concrete subfloors that may have minor moisture issues even with proper waterproofing. Engineered floors can be installed over concrete with appropriate moisture barriers, while solid hardwood traditionally requires a wood subfloor system, adding height and complexity to your basement renovation.

Cost and performance factors make engineered practical for basement living spaces. Quality engineered hardwood runs \$8-15 per square foot installed in the Ottawa market, compared to \$12-20+ for solid hardwood. Since basement floors see heavy traffic from family use and potential rental tenants, the durability and refinishing capability of engineered (typically 2-4 times) provides excellent value.

However, solid hardwood isn't completely ruled out for basements if conditions are right. In a fully finished, climate-controlled basement with excellent moisture management and proper subfloor preparation, solid hardwood can work. But you'll need professional moisture testing, likely a plywood subfloor system, and perfect environmental controls.

For Ottawa basement projects, always ensure proper moisture management regardless of flooring choice. This includes perimeter drainage, proper vapor barriers, and maintaining consistent humidity levels year-round. The Ontario Building Code requires moisture protection for below-grade spaces, and your flooring choice should complement these systems.

For specialized basement flooring guidance and moisture assessment, visit our dedicated team at OttawaBasements.com. Want to discuss the best flooring solution for your specific basement project? We offer free consultations to evaluate your space and recommend the optimal approach.

Quartz vs granite countertops which should I choose?

Both quartz and granite are excellent countertop choices, but quartz typically wins for Ottawa homeowners due to its durability, low maintenance, and consistent performance in our climate. The choice ultimately depends on your priorities: maintenance level, budget, and aesthetic preferences.

Quartz countertops are engineered stone surfaces made from 90-95% ground quartz mixed with resins and pigments. They offer superior stain resistance, never need sealing, and provide consistent patterns and colors. In Ottawa's market, expect to pay \$80-120 per square foot installed for mid-range quartz, with premium options reaching \$150+ per square foot. The non-porous surface means spilled wine, coffee, or cooking oils won't penetrate, making cleanup effortless. This is particularly valuable in busy Ottawa kitchens where maple syrup, red wine, and daily cooking create plenty of staining opportunities.

Granite countertops are natural stone slabs, each with unique patterns and character. They typically cost \$70-110 per square foot installed in the Ottawa market, making them slightly more budget-friendly initially. However, granite requires sealing every 1-2 years to prevent stains and bacteria absorption. The natural stone can chip more easily than quartz, and repairs are more noticeable since you can't perfectly match the natural patterns. That said, many homeowners love granite's authentic natural beauty and the fact that no two slabs are identical.

Climate considerations for Ottawa are important. Both materials handle our temperature swings well, but granite's natural porosity means winter road salt tracked into the kitchen can potentially cause staining if the sealing isn't maintained. Quartz performs consistently regardless of seasonal maintenance schedules.

For most Ottawa renovations, quartz makes practical sense if your budget allows. It's virtually maintenance-free, highly durable, and offers consistent quality. Choose granite if you prefer natural stone's unique character and don't mind the ongoing maintenance. Both materials will last decades when properly installed.

Professional installation is essential for both materials due to their weight and the precision required for proper support and seaming. Poor installation can lead to cracking, especially with Ottawa's settling clay soils affecting home foundations over time.

For a detailed assessment of your specific kitchen layout and usage needs, contact Justyn Rook Contracting for a free consultation. We can help you weigh the pros and cons based on your family's lifestyle and renovation budget.

Alcove vs freestanding bathtub which costs more?

Freestanding bathtubs typically cost significantly more than alcove tubs - expect to pay 2-3 times more for the tub itself, plus additional installation costs due to the more complex plumbing and finishing requirements.

Alcove Bathtub Costs in Ottawa:

- Basic acrylic alcove tub: \$300-800
- Mid-range fiberglass: \$600-1,200
- Higher-end acrylic with features: \$800-2,000
- Installation (straightforward replacement): \$800-1,500

Freestanding Bathtub Costs in Ottawa:

- Entry-level acrylic freestanding: \$1,200-2,500
- Mid-range cast iron or stone resin: \$2,000-4,500
- Premium natural stone or copper: \$3,500-8,000+
- Installation (new install): \$2,000-4,000

The higher cost for freestanding tubs comes from several factors. The tubs themselves are manufactured as complete, finished units requiring premium materials and craftsmanship on all sides. **Installation complexity** drives up labor costs significantly - plumbers need to run supply lines and drainage through the floor rather than through walls, often requiring floor modifications and careful positioning. The surrounding area also needs complete finishing since all sides of the tub are visible, unlike alcove tubs where three sides are against walls.

Ottawa-specific considerations include ensuring proper structural support for heavier freestanding tubs, especially in older homes. Many heritage properties in areas like the Glebe or Westboro may need floor reinforcement. Winter installation can be more challenging if floor access is required from below, particularly in homes with crawl spaces rather than full basements.

Professional installation is essential for freestanding tubs due to the precision required for plumbing connections and the potential for expensive mistakes. The drainage and supply lines must be positioned exactly right before flooring is installed, and any errors typically mean tearing up finished floors.

For most Ottawa bathroom renovations, alcove tubs offer better value and functionality, especially in smaller bathrooms typical of older Ottawa homes. Freestanding tubs work best in larger master bathrooms where they can serve as a focal point and where the extra cost can be justified by the dramatic visual impact.

For a detailed assessment of which option works best in your specific Ottawa home, contact Justyn Rook Contracting for a free consultation.

Q5

Single vs double vanity which adds more value?

A double vanity typically adds more value to your Ottawa home than a single vanity, especially in primary bathrooms, as it's seen as a premium feature that appeals to couples and families. However, the actual value depends heavily on your bathroom size, layout, and target market.

Double vanities are considered a luxury upgrade that most homebuyers actively seek in master bathrooms. They provide practical benefits like separate storage and counter space, reducing morning routine conflicts. In Ottawa's competitive housing market, homes with double vanities in the primary bathroom often command higher prices and sell faster, particularly in the \$400,000+ range where buyers expect premium finishes.

The value equation changes based on space constraints. If your bathroom is under 60 square feet, forcing a double vanity can make the space feel cramped and actually hurt value. Ottawa's older homes (pre-1980s) often have smaller bathrooms where a well-designed single vanity with ample storage might be the better choice. The key is proportion - a beautiful 48-inch single vanity in a smaller space will add more value than a cramped double vanity that makes the room feel tight.

Market positioning matters significantly in Ottawa. In executive homes in areas like Kanata, Barrhaven, or Manotick, double vanities are practically expected in primary bathrooms. However, in starter homes or condos downtown, a high-quality single vanity might provide better return on investment since buyers in these price ranges prioritize quality over size.

Cost considerations are important for ROI calculations. A quality double vanity installation in Ottawa typically runs \$3,000-\$8,000 including plumbing modifications, while a premium single vanity ranges \$1,500-\$4,000. The double vanity generally provides better percentage return on investment, but requires sufficient bathroom width (minimum 8 feet) to avoid costly structural changes.

Consider your home's overall market position when deciding. If you're planning to sell within 2-3 years, the double vanity often pays for itself in increased home value and faster sale time. For long-term homeowners, choose based on your family's actual needs - the daily functionality matters more than theoretical resale value.

For a detailed assessment of what works best in your specific bathroom layout and budget, we'd be happy to provide a free consultation to discuss both options and their potential returns.

Ceramic vs porcelain tile for bathroom floors?

Porcelain tile is generally the better choice for Ottawa bathroom floors due to its superior water resistance and durability, though ceramic can work well in powder rooms or guest bathrooms with lighter use.

When choosing between ceramic and porcelain for your bathroom floor, the key difference lies in their composition and performance characteristics. **Porcelain tile** is made from finer clay fired at higher temperatures, making it denser and less porous than ceramic. This translates to better water resistance - crucial in Ottawa's humid bathroom environments and our freeze-thaw climate cycles that can affect moisture penetration.

Water absorption rates tell the story: porcelain absorbs less than 0.5% of its weight in water, while ceramic typically absorbs 3-7%. In a bathroom where water exposure is constant, this difference matters significantly for long-term durability. Porcelain's density also makes it more resistant to cracking from temperature changes, which is important given Ottawa's extreme seasonal temperature swings.

Cost considerations for the Ottawa market typically range from \$8-15 per square foot for quality ceramic tiles, while porcelain runs \$12-25 per square foot installed. The price difference reflects porcelain's manufacturing process and performance benefits. However, ceramic tiles offer excellent design variety and can be perfect for smaller bathrooms or powder rooms where the cost savings make sense.

Installation factors are similar for both materials, though porcelain's hardness can make cutting slightly more challenging, potentially adding \$1-2 per square foot to professional installation costs. Both require proper waterproofing underneath - especially important in Ottawa homes where foundation settling is common. Your contractor should install a waterproof membrane regardless of tile choice.

For **high-traffic family bathrooms** or basement bathroom installations (common in Ottawa's secondary suite market), porcelain's durability justifies the extra cost. For **guest bathrooms or powder rooms** with minimal water exposure, quality ceramic tiles can provide excellent value while still meeting Ontario Building Code requirements.

The bottom line: if budget allows, choose porcelain for main bathrooms. For lighter-use spaces, ceramic offers good performance at a lower price point. Either choice requires professional installation with proper waterproofing to ensure long-term success in Ottawa's climate.

Tile vs vinyl flooring for bathrooms which lasts longer?

Ceramic or porcelain tile will significantly outlast vinyl flooring in bathrooms, typically lasting 20-50 years compared to vinyl's 10-15 year lifespan. However, the "best" choice depends on your budget, installation timeline, and specific bathroom conditions.

Tile Longevity and Performance Porcelain and ceramic tiles are virtually indestructible when properly installed. In Ottawa's climate, tile handles temperature fluctuations exceptionally well and won't expand or contract like vinyl materials. Quality tile with proper waterproofing can last decades - we regularly work on bathroom renovations where 30-year-old tile is still structurally sound, just outdated stylistically. The grout lines require resealing every 2-3 years and occasional re-grouting every 10-15 years, but the tile itself remains intact.

Vinyl Flooring Considerations Modern luxury vinyl plank (LVP) and luxury vinyl tile (LVT) have dramatically improved from older vinyl products. Quality vinyl flooring typically lasts 10-15 years in bathroom applications, though high-traffic areas may show wear sooner. Vinyl is completely waterproof (unlike tile grout), making it excellent for basement bathrooms or areas prone to flooding. However, sharp objects can puncture vinyl, and it may discolor over time from UV exposure through bathroom windows.

Ottawa-Specific Factors In Ottawa's climate, both materials perform well indoors, but tile has the edge for longevity. Many older Ottawa homes have original 1950s-60s tile that's still functional. For basement bathrooms common in Ottawa homes, vinyl's waterproof nature makes it attractive, but tile with proper waterproofing membrane is still the longer-lasting choice. Radiant floor heating works excellently with both materials, though tile retains and distributes heat more effectively.

Cost and Installation Reality Tile installation costs \$8-15 per square foot installed in Ottawa, while quality vinyl runs \$4-8 per square foot. However, when you factor in tile's 2-3x longer lifespan, the long-term cost often favors tile. Tile installation requires more time (3-5 days vs 1-2 days for vinyl) due to setting time and grouting.

Professional Installation Importance Both materials require proper subfloor preparation and moisture management. Tile needs experienced installation - poor tile work leads to cracking and water damage. Vinyl is more forgiving for DIY, but professional installation ensures proper moisture barriers and transitions.

For maximum longevity in your bathroom renovation, tile remains the superior choice, especially when installed with modern waterproofing techniques. Want to discuss which option works best for your specific bathroom project? We offer free consultations to help you make the right long-term investment.

Pocket door vs barn door for bathrooms?

Pocket doors are generally the better choice for bathrooms due to superior privacy, sound control, and space efficiency, while barn doors work better in casual powder rooms or open-concept designs where privacy isn't the primary concern.

When choosing between these space-saving door options for Ottawa bathrooms, the decision largely comes down to privacy needs and your home's style. **Pocket doors slide completely into the wall cavity**, making them invisible when open and providing a full seal when closed. This makes them ideal for main bathrooms and ensuites where privacy and sound control are essential. The door sits flush in the frame, eliminating gaps that could allow sound, steam, or odors to escape.

Barn doors slide along an exterior track and remain visible even when open, creating a striking design element that works beautifully in farmhouse, industrial, or contemporary homes. However, they typically leave small gaps around the perimeter, which can compromise privacy and allow bathroom sounds to carry - not ideal for a main family bathroom or when guests are visiting.

Installation considerations in Ottawa homes vary significantly between the two options. Pocket doors require the wall cavity to be framed specifically to accommodate the door mechanism, which is easier during new construction or major renovations. In existing homes, you'll need to open the wall, potentially relocate electrical or plumbing, and ensure the wall isn't load-bearing. This typically costs \$800-1,500 installed in Ottawa, depending on complications. Barn doors are much simpler to install since they mount to the wall surface, usually running \$400-800 for quality hardware and installation.

Maintenance and durability also differ considerably. Pocket door hardware is hidden within the wall, making repairs more complex if the mechanism fails. Quality pocket door systems can last decades, but cheaper hardware may require wall opening for repairs. Barn doors have exposed hardware that's easily accessible for maintenance, but the track collects dust and requires regular cleaning to operate smoothly.

For **Ottawa's climate**, consider that bathroom humidity can affect door operation. Pocket doors in poorly ventilated bathrooms may swell and stick, while barn doors handle moisture changes better due to their exposed position and adjustable hardware.

Choose a pocket door if you need maximum privacy, have a traditional home style, or want the door to completely disappear when open. **Choose a barn door** if you love the aesthetic, need easier installation, or you're renovating a powder room where privacy is less critical.

For a free consultation on your bathroom renovation and door options, contact Justyn Rook Contracting - we'll help you choose the best solution for your specific space and needs.

Q9

Subway tile vs large format tile for showers?

Both subway and large format tiles work beautifully in Ottawa showers, but large format tiles are increasingly popular due to fewer grout lines and easier maintenance. The choice ultimately depends on your style preference, budget, and the specific conditions of your shower space.

Large format tiles (typically 12"x24" or larger) offer several practical advantages for shower applications. With fewer grout joints, there are fewer places for water to penetrate and mold to develop - a significant consideration in Ottawa's humid summers. The continuous surface creates a sleek, modern look that makes smaller bathrooms appear larger. Installation costs are often lower per square foot since fewer tiles need to be set, though the tiles themselves may cost more. However, large format tiles require perfectly flat walls and skilled installation to prevent lippage (uneven edges between tiles).

Subway tiles (traditionally 3"x6") bring timeless appeal and design flexibility to shower spaces. The smaller format naturally accommodates slight wall imperfections common in older Ottawa homes, making them ideal for heritage properties or homes with settling issues. Subway tiles offer more pattern options - herringbone, vertical stack, or classic brick pattern - allowing for creative design elements. The numerous grout lines do require more maintenance, but modern epoxy grouts and proper sealing minimize this concern.

Cost considerations in the Ottawa market typically see subway tiles ranging from \$3-12 per square foot for materials, while large format tiles range from \$5-20 per square foot. Installation costs are similar at \$8-15 per square foot, though complex subway patterns may increase labor costs. Both options require proper waterproofing behind the tile - essential in Ottawa's freeze-thaw climate where water penetration can cause significant damage.

Professional installation is recommended for both options, especially in shower applications where waterproofing is critical. Improper installation can lead to costly water damage, particularly problematic in Ottawa's older homes where structural repairs become complex.

For a detailed assessment of which option works best with your specific shower layout and home's characteristics, Justyn Rook Contracting offers free consultations to help you make the right choice for your bathroom renovation.

Painted vs stained cabinets which is more durable?

Painted cabinets are generally more durable than stained cabinets for Ottawa kitchens, particularly when using high-quality paint systems designed for cabinetry. The paint creates a harder, more protective barrier that better withstands daily wear, moisture, and cleaning.

Paint durability advantages are significant in our Ottawa climate. Quality cabinet paint (like Benjamin Moore Advance or Sherwin Williams ProClassic) creates a tough, non-porous surface that resists water damage, grease, and everyday kitchen abuse. This is especially important in Ottawa homes where winter humidity fluctuations can stress wood finishes. Paint also hides minor dings and scratches better than stain, and when damage does occur, touch-ups are typically easier and less noticeable.

Stained cabinets show character but require more maintenance. While a good polyurethane topcoat over stain provides decent protection, it's still more porous than paint and shows water rings, scratches, and wear patterns more readily. However, stain does have the advantage of being more forgiving with wood movement - something to consider in Ottawa's temperature swings from -30°C winters to +30°C summers.

The key factor is surface preparation and product quality. In our experience renovating Ottawa kitchens, properly prepared and primed cabinets with two coats of high-quality paint will outlast most stained finishes by 3-5 years. We typically see painted cabinets looking fresh for 8-12 years, while stained cabinets often need refinishing after 5-8 years, especially on high-touch areas like door edges and drawer fronts.

Professional application makes the difference. Whether you choose paint or stain, proper sanding, priming, and spray application (rather than brush/roller) dramatically improves durability. Many Ottawa homeowners attempt DIY cabinet painting but struggle with brush marks and inadequate prep work, leading to premature chipping and wear.

For maximum durability in Ottawa kitchens, we recommend painted cabinets with a semi-gloss or satin finish. If you prefer the natural wood look, consider a high-quality conversion varnish over stain rather than standard polyurethane. Want to discuss refinishing your existing cabinets or planning new ones? We offer free consultations to help you choose the best finish for your specific kitchen and lifestyle needs.

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Q11

Acrylic vs porcelain bathtub which is better?

For most Ottawa homeowners, porcelain (actually porcelain-enameled steel or cast iron) bathtubs offer better long-term value despite higher upfront costs, while acrylic provides an affordable option with decent performance for budget-conscious renovations.

When choosing between these materials, you're really comparing durability, maintenance, and cost over the life of your bathroom. **Porcelain-enameled tubs** - whether on steel or cast iron bases - typically last 20-30 years with proper care. The hard, non-porous surface resists stains, scratches, and fading exceptionally well. In Ottawa's hard water conditions, porcelain handles mineral buildup better and cleans more easily with standard bathroom cleaners. The main drawbacks are higher initial cost (\$800-2,500 installed) and significant weight, especially cast iron versions that may require floor reinforcement in older Ottawa homes.

Acrylic tubs offer excellent value for budget renovations, typically costing \$400-1,200 installed. They're lightweight, retain heat well (great for our cold Ottawa winters), and come in numerous colors and styles. Modern acrylic tubs are much more durable than older fiberglass units, often lasting 10-15 years. However, they can scratch more easily, may show wear patterns from cleaning, and lighter colors can yellow over time, especially near windows with UV exposure.

For Ottawa's climate specifically, both materials handle temperature changes well, but porcelain's thermal mass means it stays warmer longer once heated - a nice benefit during our long winters. If you're planning a **secondary suite conversion** (a JRC specialty), acrylic often makes more sense due to lower costs and easier installation in tight basement spaces.

Professional installation considerations include proper support framing for both materials, but porcelain requires more robust structural support. In older Ottawa homes with original plumbing, we often recommend upgrading drain assemblies regardless of tub choice, as 50+ year old connections may not seal properly with new fixtures.

My recommendation: Choose porcelain if this is your forever home and primary bathroom - the durability justifies the cost. Go with quality acrylic for guest baths, rental units, or when budget is the primary concern. Either way, proper installation with adequate support and quality plumbing connections matters more than the material choice.

For a free assessment of your specific bathroom renovation needs and to discuss which option works best for your Ottawa home, contact Justyn Rook Contracting.

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Q12

Gas vs electric range which should I choose?

For most Ottawa homeowners, electric ranges offer better value, reliability, and convenience, though gas provides superior cooking control for serious home chefs. The choice depends on your cooking style, existing utilities, and long-term costs.

Electric ranges are the practical choice for most renovations. They're significantly cheaper to install (typically \$200-500 for a new 240V outlet vs \$1,500-3,000 to run a new gas line), heat more evenly in the oven, and are easier to clean with smooth cooktops. Modern induction electric cooktops actually heat faster than gas and offer precise temperature control. In Ottawa's market, you'll find better selection and pricing for electric models, and they work perfectly during power outages if you have a generator.

Gas ranges excel for cooking enthusiasts who want instant heat adjustment and visual flame control. Professional chefs prefer gas for techniques like charring peppers or flambéing. However, installation costs can be substantial if you don't already have a gas line to your kitchen. Running new gas lines requires licensed TSSA (Technical Standards & Safety Authority) technicians and proper permitting through the city.

Ottawa-specific considerations make electric particularly practical. Hydro Ottawa's rates are relatively stable, while natural gas prices have seen more volatility. Most Ottawa homes built after 1980 already have 240V electrical service to the kitchen area, making electric installation straightforward. For homes with existing gas service, the choice becomes more about cooking preference than cost.

Safety factors also matter in your decision. Electric ranges eliminate concerns about gas leaks or carbon monoxide, important considerations in basement kitchens or secondary suites where ventilation might be limited. Gas ranges require proper ventilation and regular maintenance of connections.

Professional installation is essential for both options. Gas work must be done by licensed technicians - never attempt DIY gas connections due to safety and insurance liability. Electric ranges need proper 240V circuits and outlets, which should be installed by licensed electricians to meet Ontario Electrical Safety Authority (ESA) requirements.

For most kitchen renovations we complete in Ottawa, homeowners choose electric for the lower installation costs and convenience. However, if you're a serious cook with existing gas service, the superior cooking control might justify the investment.

Want to discuss which option works best for your specific kitchen renovation? We offer free consultations to help you make the right choice for your home and cooking needs.

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