

Give your kitchen benches a new look – with a little help from Mitre 10.

The kitchen is usually the hub of the house. And making a dull old kitchen glow with new life again can be both easy and inexpensive.

Fresh paint to revive the walls and a kitchen bench topped with new plastic laminate could be all it takes.

Today’s kitchens have to be modern, durable and functional. So it’s not surprising that plastic laminate is a popular surface choice. It resists most household wear and tear, is easily cleaned, and can be used on any flat surface that will allow an adequate bond for the adhesive.

The smooth decorative finish of laminate looks great too. And the range of colours available today is amazing. There are even timber look-alikes that most people can’t pick from the original. And you’ll be surprised how easy it is to do it yourself with the right tools and advice – from Mitre 10.



Step 1: Preparing the surface

New Surfaces

First you’ll need to make sure the surface to be laminated is suitable for bonding. Particle board, hardboard or plywood are all ideal surfaces. Laminate can even be successfully bonded to plaster or fibre cement sheeting.

However, you should never directly bond laminate to solid timber. This may cause the wood to warp and the last thing you want is an uneven bench or table top. So first cover the timber with hardboard or plywood and nail and spot glue it in place. Punch all nails below the surface to prevent blemishing the applied laminate.

If the surface has already been painted or varnished, you’ll need to sand it back to bare wood before covering it as you would above.

Prepare the new surface by sanding it smooth, and dust down when finished. Be certain that it is flat and even. It must be clean, dry and free from grease and soap scum to ensure a perfect bond without air bubbles.

Existing Laminated Surfaces

You may already have a laminated bench or table top that you’d like to re-laminate. Perhaps it’s the worst for wear. Or you may simply wish to up-date it in one of today’s new fashion colours or designs.

Whatever the reason, there’s no need to waste time and effort by ripping off the old to make way for the new.

If the existing surface has bubbles due to faulty bonding, repair it before you proceed. In some instances this is possible by drilling 12mm holes in the bubbled area and forcing contact adhesive between the laminate and substrate. Then clamp the two surfaces together overnight. If this is not successful, the old laminate will need to be removed. You can do this by lifting the laminate as you apply solvent thinners between the two surfaces. The solvent thinner will loosen the adhesive bond.

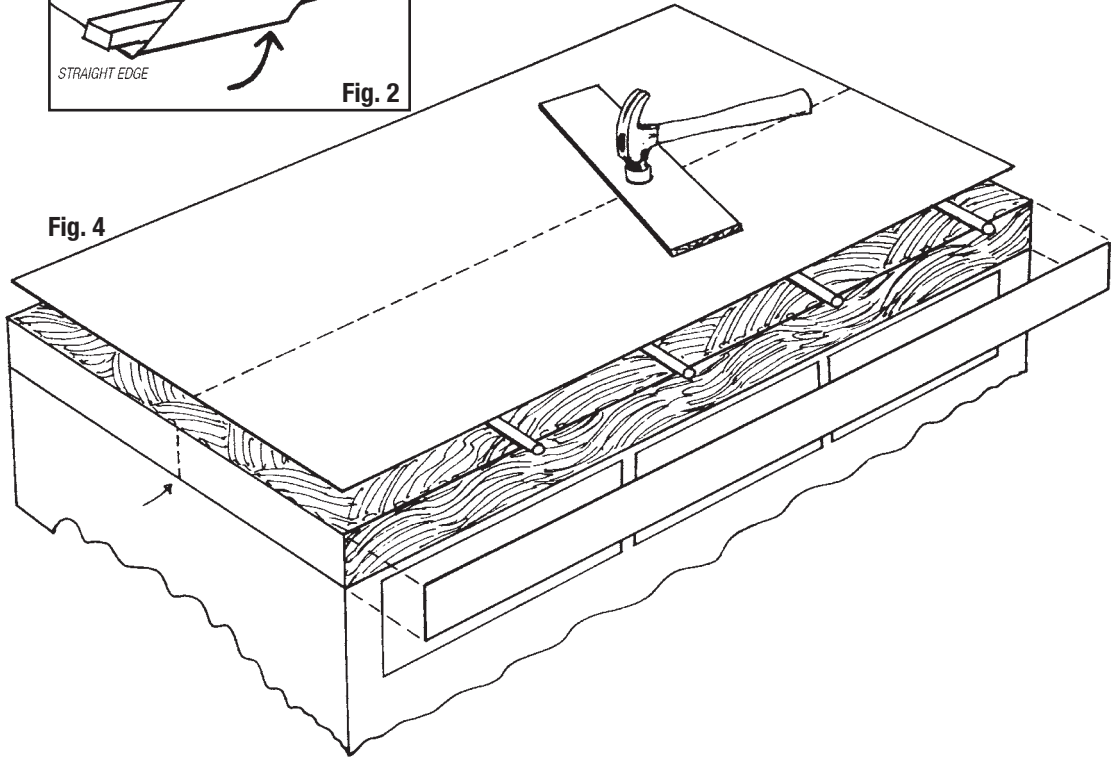
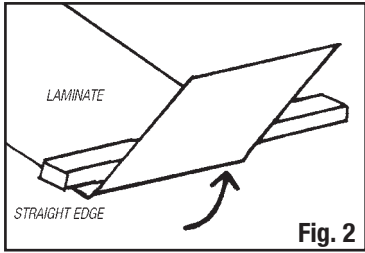
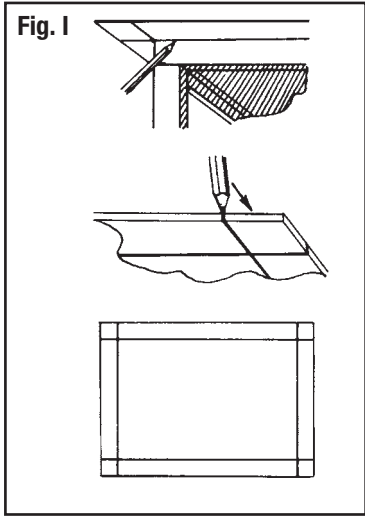
Once any bubbles have been removed, thoroughly rough up the existing laminate surface with very coarse sandpaper or an abrasive disc attachment to your electric drill. Use a random or circular action. Make sure the edges are well roughened.

Then, using the point of a file or sharp end of a chisel, make a criss-cross pattern all over the surface. Brush away all grit and wipe with a clean cloth dampened with methylated spirits or turpentine to remove all grease. Your new laminate can now be bonded to the old surface.

Step 2: Cutting to size

Place your sheet of laminate face-up on the bench or table top and mark the area to be covered on the underside with a pencil. Remove the sheet and transfer you markings to the top of the sheet at each edge (Fig. 1). Then mark lines across the sheet 3-6mm oversize to allow for later trimming.

Lay the laminate sheet face-up on a clean, flat surface. Then, using a timber straightedge as a guide, score a line through the laminate along the marked lines with a laminate cutter or trimming knife with a special laminate cutting blade. You should score in one pass only using firm, even pressure.



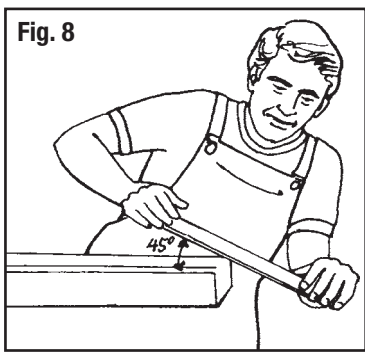
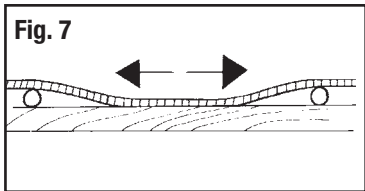
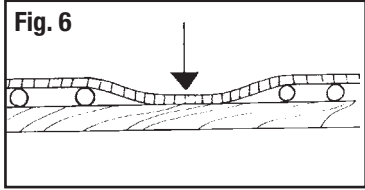
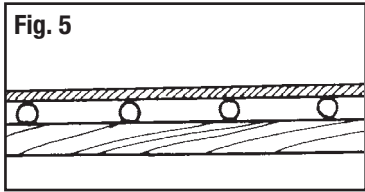
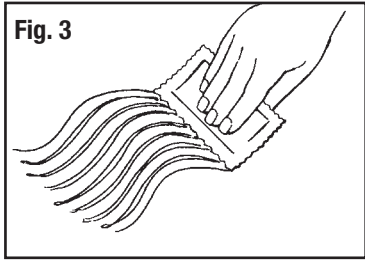
Now place some weight on the straightedge. Grip the offcut part of the sheet and lift it up firmly so that the sheet snaps on the score line against the straightedge. Laminates are brittle and great care should be taken at this stage. (Fig 2).

It is recommended that all cutting is done with a ‘score ‘n’ snap’ cutter. However, it can be done with a fine tooth hand saw. Fully support the sheet, particularly on both sides of the cutting line. Then cut with the saw on a very flat angle (almost horizontal). If the saw is too upright, the sheet will split and splinter. The stroke should be light and even.

Step 3: Bonding the laminate

You’ll need contact adhesive for this. First, spread an even coat of the glue on the bench or table top, then do the same on the back of the laminate. Depending on the type of adhesive purchased, you’ll be supplied with a special notched applicator, a paint brush or a roller. Using this, apply the glue in an ‘S’ motion to ensure the surface is completely covered, especially along the edges (Fig. 3). If the surface material is porous and absorbs the glue you may have to apply two coats.

Now allow the glue to dry for about 20 minutes, perhaps a little longer if the weather’s a bit cold. Don’t be impatient – laminate should never be fixed while the adhesive is still tacky. A simple test for dryness is to gently touch the glue with your knuckles. When it no longer sticks to your knuckles, then the adhesive is ready to bond the laminate to the bench.



Step 4: Fixing the edges

If the laminate is to go right to the edges of your bench or table top, it’s easier to begin by applying the edging first. Edges can be cut from the same laminated sheet as you’re using on top, although some makers can provide rolls of self-adhesive edging strips that match the laminate. These can save you time and effort, but be certain they are available before you buy your main laminate sheet.

Whichever method you use, the edging should be cut slightly oversize in both width and length to allow for accurate trimming. And remember – porous surfaces such as particle board will require an extra coat of contact adhesive. Seal them with a coat first by using a stiff brush or small spatula, and allow to dry.

When you’ve cut your laminate edging strips, apply adhesive to both the surface edge and the laminate. Allow this to dry before sticking the laminate to the edge. Move a cork block or padded wood block along the entire length of the edge, tapping the block firmly with a hammer to ensure a full bond. Finally, file the edges flush with the top and bottom surfaces, filing horizontally in a forward motion only to avoid chipping.

Step 5: Fixing the top

Mark a centre line on the bench or table top before applying the adhesive, and on your sheet of laminate (Fig. 4). Because contact adhesives bond immediately on contact, this will help you ensure that the laminate is positioned correctly before final fixing.

Next, place dowels or thin timber strips across the bench or table top (Fig. 5) at 200mm spaces. Lay your laminate sheet on top of them – they allow you to position the sheet without actually coming into contact with the adhesive. Make sure your marked centre lines on the sheet and bench top line up exactly and that the edges at both ends overlap equally. When the bench and laminate are accurately aligned, remove the two centre dowels and press your sheet down on to the bench top surface (Fig.6). Work from the centre out, removing the dowels one at a time (Fig. 7) and pressing down on the laminate until completely fixed.

Finally, ensure tight, even bonding by moving a cork or padded wood block along the whole surface and tapping firmly with your hammer.

Step 6: The final touch

Now give your new laminate bench or table top that professional edge. Trim off all overlapping edges with your flat file or sharp block plane. Then give a neat bevel edge to the top edge and corners by holding the file at a 45 degree angle and applying pressure as you push forward (Fig. 8). Finish off with fine sandpaper, taking care not to touch the laminate surface or you’ll scratch it. Dip a clean cloth in turps and wipe over your new laminated bench top and tools to clean up any adhesive.

Giving a dull old kitchen bench or table a bright, modern look with laminate is both easy and inexpensive. And you’ll get a real kick out of doing it yourself – with a little help from Mitre 10.