

Builder/Architect

**Raising the Bar on
Kitchen Designs**

**Marketing Advantage
Facing the Music**

**State Unveils Some
Ambitious Housing Proposals**

Forefront Homes

Homes of Warmth
and Character

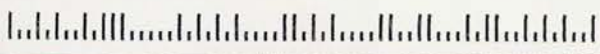


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Meet Kitchen Envy

And Deliver a Kitchen That's a Star on Its Own

By Cheryl Cullen

Are you designing your kitchen or is famous cook Rachael Ray? That may seem like a silly question, but it's one builders are facing today because home buyers are asking for rooms like they see on her popular television series, as well as other cooking shows — even HGTV's purely promotional *I Want That! Kitchens*. People don't just get their ideas from visiting each others homes; they are also "visiting" the kitchens of these television stars. Because of this, the bar on kitchen design has been raised.

I WANT THAT!

Certified Kitchen Designer Melissa Morgan Smith, ASID, Hermitage Kitchen Design Gallery, Nashville, TN, agrees the nation is going through kitchen envy and says it's because "people are loving the idea of cooking, taking cooking classes, exploring different cultural foods and sharing the experience."

Elizabeth Garrett, Vice President of Design at HWD Homes in Houston, adds that because on-air shows such as *Iron Chef America* and *Top Chef* have spurred a renewed interest in cooking for pleasure, homeowners are spending more disposable income on high-end appliances, chef's tools and cookware that can increase culinary skills, and they expect their kitchens to keep up to that scale.

Kathy Dames, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Kipling Homes based in Shorewood, IL, agrees. She says, "Most appliance companies have already answered the call with products such as a professional range, Sub-Zero refrigerator, warming drawers, dual dishwashers, as well as wine coolers, convection microwaves and so forth."

EYA, a production builder of high-end urban-style communities in Washington, DC, and the surrounding area, offers buyers plenty of options to customize their homes.



Builders, interior designers and appliance manufacturers agree that when it comes to kitchen design, ample storage is paramount. In this kitchen, HWD Homes takes that rule to heart by offering plenty of cabinets.

"The kitchen continues to be redefined as its uses are expanded," adds Mark Johnson, Senior Manager of Architecture and Design for appliance manufacturer Whirlpool Corporation, Benton Harbor, MI. "Homeowners today want a kitchen that accommodates new lifestyle preferences. Whether the homeowner loves to entertain or is a serious gourmet, the kitchen must be efficient, inviting and able to solve personal needs."

CUSTOM LIFESTYLES AT ALL PRICES

The demand for personalization of the kitchen to accommodate more time in that room has turned even production builders into masters of customization. "Home builders are taking the concept of zoned kitchens, those that better accommodate a variety of activities in multiple zones or areas, to the next level to better meet lifestyle preferences — even on a mass customization level," says Johnson. Specifically, zoned kitchens include areas designed to facilitate entertaining (which might have extra seating), baking (with plenty of counter space)



Kipling Homes in Shorewood, IL, built a lot of drawers in this kitchen. Some experts say that drawers often outnumber cabinets in good kitchen design for their ease of use and storage options.

or office/homework (with desks or cubbies). “Even large builders are exploring these areas to differentiate their designs, leading the buyer to the best semi-custom design to fit lifestyle needs,” Johnson says.

Karen Lowrance is product development manager for one of those production builders — EYA, which builds high-end, urban-style communities in the Washington, DC, area. She says one way production builders can give buyers what they want is to offer greater multitudes of standard options. For example, EYA offers optional layouts to maximize different lifestyles; one layout might include a larger pantry with the trade off being less countertop while a second layout might maximize countertop and island seating space but offer less pantry space.

At the same time, “As a production builder, we can’t afford to offer multiple cabinet layouts, so we design one layout that maximizes the space available and provides flexibility to the homeowner to customize through cabinet inserts, hardware, multiple door styles/finishes, multiple countertop and backsplash selections and optional secondary sinks,” Lowrance explains.

Customization also means builders must offer a variety of options and upgrades for appliances and kitchen tools, builders say. EYA, for example, offers multiple cabinet door styles and finishes at numerous price points, optional soap dispensers and instant hot water dispensers, prepackaged un-

HGTV and the Food Network have sparked an interest in cooking, so people are falling in love with the idea of taking professional classes and sharing what they learn with friends and family. Design by Melissa Morgan Smith.



der-cabinet lighting customized to each cabinet layout and optional cabinet inserts such as recycling centers, pull-out trays and lazy susans.

None of this would be possible without proper planning, designers say. Lowrance suggests beginning cabinet design early enough in the process to have flexibility within the architectural plans later in the process. She also recommends designing standard bulkheads above wall cabinets to house exhaust vents.

Cabinet design is key today because storage is a definite must-have among buyers, adds Garrett. “The biggest challenge faced today is designing a kitchen that has adequate space for all the homeowner’s tools and ingredients, along with enough counter space to function easily and efficiently while working.”

Luis Jauregui, President of Jauregui Architecture Interiors Construction in Austin, TX, agrees that ample storage is a must have, and said he favors designs where large drawers outnumber cabinets for ease of use, as well as clean lines of site.

Since many of today’s kitchens function as home offices and entertainment areas, builders also must consider functional spacing and additional wiring. “Today’s buyers use their kitchens not only for daily cooking, but for socializing and entertaining. We must think with an eye towards details like adequate seating and prewiring for sound and elegant lighting,” says Garrett.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE TRIANGLE

Today’s builders have many new tools for helping home shoppers find the kitchen of their dreams. For example, the KitchenAid brand offers an online tool for building and design professionals to share with clients to discover ideal kitchen preferences. Johnson also suggests, however, that builders make full use of kitchen designers and the many kitchen design showrooms that can help them better understand what’s going on with today’s tastes.

He suggests design is even more critical today because the traditional work triangle has expanded so traffic flow is more complicated. The National Kitchen and Bath Association defines that triangle as an imaginary straight line drawn from the center of the sink, to the center of the cooktop, to the center of the refrigerator and finally back to the sink. Johnson suggests that the modern kitchen includes multiple work triangles instead. These zones now allow family, friends and guests to cook together or visit without getting in each other’s way. Whether the kitchen is for a family with small children or a couple who frequently entertains, the layout should enhance the ability to get to the cooking tools, invite sharing of meals and allow comfort for

Design solutions have moved beyond the typical sink-stove-refrigerator work triangle to deliver high-performing, customized kitchens based on zones. The kitchen shown was designed with zones for baking, food preparation and clean up.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KITCHENAID

entertaining, as well as the right amount of space to function in all these ways. "This is why open kitchen plans are gaining momentum," says Johnson, "because they allow people to move from room to room more freely."

Garrett recommends that builders go beyond functionality to make the kitchen memorable. While homeowners will make their own memories in the kitchen as they share cooking and conversation, Garrett recommends builders also build unique features that will play a part in those memories. These "memory points," as she calls them, should be "something to spark the imagination of the homeowner, whether it is a distinctive vent hood, unusual kitchen sink or faucet, or graphic backsplash design. Memory points allow the buyer to connect with the designer's vision and allow the builder to remain in the buyer's mind long after initial contact," she explains.

So what are today's best memory makers? In and around Virginia and Washington, DC, the most widely practiced trends are contemporary, flat panel door styles with a stained finish versus a finish that is painted or glazed, according to designers in the area. Also hot is "anything green, such as Energy Star appliances, standard recycling centers, recycled glass countertops and energy-efficient lighting," says Lowrance.

Johnson agrees that buyers are looking for energy efficiency. He forecasts induction cooking (cooktops that heat the pan/pot through electromagnetic fields instead of individual burners) as the next hot trend. According to Johnson, induction cooktops "offer homeowners an energy-saving cooking method, incredible performance and universal design all in one. Because heat transfer is direct from the cooktop to the cookware, with no loss through a coil or element of flame, induction is fast and about 90% energy efficient [compared to about 50% to 60% for gas or electric]. Induction cooking also heats evenly and cooks can go from simmer to sear in an instant." (A good background on how induction works is available at www.theinductionsite.com.)

In Houston, Garrett says that the kitchen sink is garnering attention. "It is not just your standard basin anymore. We have farm sinks, copper basins and long rectangular prep sinks. The sink is now just as much of a decorative element as the backsplash or cabinet details," she says. She adds that granites with lots of eye-catching movement in the design, clean line cabinets and a move away from ornate decoration are among the other trends.

Outside of Chicago, Dames says the hottest item is the warming drawer. She also sees buyers gravitating toward higher quality appliances and counter space as well as a move toward premium laminates, which now look like granite counters.

Interesting architectural details, such as this ceiling, and functional elements, such as this beautiful range hood, can make a kitchen distinctive and memorable to the buyer. Design by Jauregui Architecture.



Outdoor kitchen lines include features designed to minimize trips back to the kitchen, and maximize the enjoyment of outdoor gatherings.

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

One new factor that weighs on materials selection and design considerations for the kitchen inside the home is the kitchen outside the home. The love of cooking extends beyond the kitchen door today into the backyard and, because the two rooms affect each other, many builders and designers are thinking about them both at the same time.

Outdoor kitchens, as well as other forms of outdoor living, are booming, and not just in the warm weather states, but up North, too, where temperature-augmented environments have extended the outdoor living season. "In northern climates, this may include patio campfires and outdoor fireplaces to add heat to the area, while cooling devices such as patio misters are ideal for making outdoor kitchens in hot climates more comfortable," says Johnson.

However, while manufacturers are working hard at replicating every indoor appliance so that it can be operated outdoors, "not every appliance, such as larger refrigerators, can be recreated outdoors," Johnson says.

Because of this, storage capacity is a consideration for the layout of the house. Kitchenettes located close to the outdoor areas, for example, are ideal as staging areas. "These save a lot of needless trips from the indoor kitchen to the outdoor grill. Outdoor kitchen appliances, such as ice makers and under-counter refrigerators, make it convenient to get drinks and marinades without running in and out of the house. They make outdoor entertaining easier and more fun," Johnson adds.

FITTING TOGETHER THE PIECES

Because of the wide range of choices, as well as the lifestyle changes of homeowners, kitchen design today is more critical than ever. And sometimes the problems are surprisingly simple. For example, "It's tough to find a great location for the microwave. You want it to be close to family dining yet not a visual focal point, and not too low or too high for safety reasons," says Jauregui.

"A kitchen is like a jigsaw puzzle," adds Smith. She suggests builders not be afraid to take kitchen design off their own plate and heap it onto a professional. "The builder has the challenges of the whole house from preparing the site to overseeing the framing, plumbing, electrical and so on. If a builder can team with a certified kitchen designer who has a great deal of experience not only in the design, but also the mechanical aspects of putting it all together, that builder could save time and money, provide access to the best products and materials, and eliminate costly mistakes," Smith concludes. ■

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