



Cooking up the Latest Kitchen Trends

Kitchens have always been the center of a house. It's where everyone congregates at a party, regardless of the host's intentions. It's where the mail, the keys and the family news are dropped on the way in. The kitchen is so important to most people that it is the feature most likely to make or break the purchase of a home.

Building Success 101

Q: What is "solid surface" material for countertops?

A: Solid surface refers to a relatively new breed of countertop and surfacing finish that offers a denser, thicker, and color-through material alternative to ceramic tile, laminate, and stone (such as granite). Made from a combination of real and synthetic minerals and high-strength polymers, these surfaces appear and act like genuine stone, but can also be formulated and installed in a wider range of styles and colors—including combinations—to suit any decor. Their formulations are also impact, scratch, and burn-resistant, and protect against microbial growth to

Not surprisingly, the kitchen is a lightning rod for design and lifestyle trends. In addition to such products as cabinets, appliances, and plumbing fixtures (to name only a few), the layout, function, and look of the kitchen continually evolves to meet modern needs. Here are a few current trends to consider:

Outdoor kitchens. Once you experience a true outdoor kitchen with a full range of function, you'll never go back to a rollout charcoal grill again. Outdoor kitchens have become a legitimate industry. Manufacturers offer improved products that better withstand the weather (such as polymer-based cabinet fronts) and refreshment centers that more aptly accommodate outdoor needs, such as snacks and beverages.

New fronts. Raised-panel cabinet fronts are a mainstay in kitchens, but the natural wood look is waning a bit in favor of paint finishes in deep reds and lighter greens. Designers mix and match painted and natural-wood finishes to add distinctive style and to identify subtle differences in function. For appliances, popular stainless steel finishes have evolved into brushed metallic and graphite-like looks to broaden the options and upgrade style.

Secondary kitchens. Also called butler's pantries or prep kitchens, these smaller spaces allow caterers and party-throwers to keep the mess out of the main kitchen (where, as we said, everyone gathers) while also creating a convenient access to food and refreshments from the dining room. Smaller-scale appliances, including warming drawers, built-in coffee makers, and wine chillers, not to mention specialty storage options, suit the function of these spaces. Morning kitchens, located in or adjacent to the master suite, are also gaining popularity.

Specialization. Once upon a time, there was only one sink in the kitchen. Now, there can be a handful, serving specific functions and equipped with varying styles of faucets. Long trough sinks, those with built-in cooking elements, multi-basin designs with integral cutting boards, small bar basins, and deep, single-basin sinks for large pots and pans dot every corner of the kitchen.

Zoned approach. The advent of secondary spaces has affected the main

maintain a clean and healthy surface.

kitchen. Smaller-capacity appliances and other products have fostered "snack zones" for busy families. Equipped with a microwave oven, dedicated storage for non-perishables, and various undercounter drawers for refrigerated foods, dishwashing, and warming chores, these zones accommodate a wider (and hopefully healthier) mix of quick meals in a self-contained area.

Center of the universe. The open kitchen plan that includes kitchen, casual eating area and family room is now firmly established. The newest expansion of kitchen function is the kitchen island that extends farther into the living space, serving as an area for homework and crafts, dining and catering, and all-round hang-out. Equipped with flush-mounted and/or concealed, undercounter electrical outlets, overhead lighting, and ample storage, today's island is, indeed, the center of the home.

Warm regards,

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