



Photo by Elle Baker, Elle Baker Interiors

KITCHENS THAT MAKE THE CUT

Get the most from the hardest working room in your house
By Caroline Wilkes

The crown jewel of a home is the kitchen. Even if more time is spent sleeping in a bedroom and more people fit in the living room, the kitchen is the nerve center of a home. A well-designed kitchen should look great but its success depends on how well it caters to the cook and the lifestyle of the family. An intuitive space where technology is at arm's reach has always been the hallmark of a properly designed kitchen. It's easy to dive head first into handsome countertops and luxurious cabinets, but style is secondary to supporting a seamless system that starts with the machines that take food on its journey from storage to cooked meal.

Selecting new appliances is a serious decision, especially since it's usually been a decade since the last kitchen renovation. "We are designing kitchens that appeal to people who are pretty serious about cooking," says John Starck, Jr., president of Showcase Kitchens in Manhasset and Massapequa. The trend in kitchens responds to homeowners who want to cook gourmet food with commercial-grade appliances like ranges with six burners and vent hoods to match and separate prep areas with a dedicated sink. ▶

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HOME Appliances

La Cornue. Photo courtesy of Showcase Kitchens

The type of heat source is also changing with the proliferation of induction cooktops that use an electromagnet to heat iron or steel cookware efficiently. "The heat comes on very quickly, the food cooks quickly and then the range cools quickly," says Alison Solar, president of Solara Designs in New Hyde Park.

Interior designer Elle Baker, of Elle Baker Interiors in Rockville Centre, is an avid cook who also entertains for her large family. Preparing meals daily for five people in her kitchen is a proving ground for which designs work best. She's a big believer of steering her clients toward double-wall ovens to provide separation from the cooktop. "With this layout, no one has to stand over a hot oven while at the cooktop," Baker says. "More than one person can work in the space at a time. Someone can be at the stove while somebody else can tend to what's in the oven."

Baker also incorporates built-in, separate refrigeration: An individual refrigerator next to an individual freezer with independent doors. This provides optimal storage space and keeps the freezer separate. Disguising



Photo by Elle Baker, Elle Baker Interiors

these doors behind cabinetry that matches the rest of the kitchen prevents an overwhelming swath of stainless steel.

This gourmet industrial trend is satisfied in a few ways. In some kitchens, Starck installed not one but two complete ranges or selected a special range with a lot of presence, bringing a great deal of aesthetic to the space. French manufacturer La Cornue offers the ultimate oven eye candy. ▶

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HOME | appliances

Available in gorgeous, jewel-tone enamel finishes and adorned with polished brass hinges and latches, they are a stunningly beautiful departure from the stainless steel industrial look. One of their lines is completely handmade and features a unique, patented arched interior ceiling that's proven to enhance cooking by directing heat back down. Other options for a distinct, European-style range that values an old-world appearance over sleek, stainless steel are the ILVE and Verona brands from Italy.

Starck says the biggest trend in kitchen design is the ability to cook in a healthy way while still preparing meals conveniently. One product responding to this demand is the convection steam oven, which uses moisture, heat and convection in concert to cook food quickly while retaining its moisture, flavor and vitamins and reducing cooking time by 25 percent. Last year, Sub-Zero Wolf introduced its convection steam oven, which offers precise control over the use of steam, convection or a combination of both. The oven senses the size and shape of the food and determines the proper setting and cooking time. It also has one of the largest interior cavities in the category and an easy-access water tank that can be refilled without having to open the oven door and interrupt the cooking process.



Wolf Convection Steam Oven. Photo courtesy of Showcase Kitchens

Since most of the cooking is done on a cooktop, there are new, personalized configurations to fit your culinary style. Consumers can mix and match different types of burners or incorporate a grill, steamer or fryer into their cooktop. Elle Baker's other kitchen must-have: "The warming drawer is an essential for families today. I show my clients how an entire pizza box can fit right in, actually multiple pizza boxes, and they are sold."

While it's important to focus on aesthetic details, smart kitchen design values function as well as form. A kitchen designed to entertain a party of 20 as effortlessly as it does a party of one will be as practical as it is eye-catching. Pizza night will never be the same. 🍕



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DUSTY ROGERS, blogger at www.allthingsgd.com

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