



Photo courtesy of Drury Design

Kitchens are often no longer separate rooms but part of an overall living space. Warm colors and contemporary style with clean lines are increasingly popular, as are large islands, high performance countertops, multiple sinks, and bold statement lighting.

BY LISA SLOAN

TAKING YOUR KITCHEN TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Local experts share the latest ways to revitalize the heart of your home, whether you're looking for a full-scale remodel or a partial update.

You've probably been spending a lot more time at home in recent months, and chances are, the kitchen has become one of your main hangouts. Perhaps you've noticed a few things that are lacking — either in how the space looks or how it functions. Whether you're considering a full remodel or are eager to tackle a few problem areas, local kitchen remodeling and design experts are ready to help. Here's their take on what's trending:

1. FUNCTIONAL FIXES

Demand for remodeling projects, in particular those related to the kitchen, are on the rise. "What might have been a plan for the future is becoming a plan for now," says Ashley Noethe, designer for Normandy Remodeling in Hinsdale. "Kitchens are always on people's minds, but when you are using it exponentially, the pain points are more obvious."

Kristin Petro, owner of Kristin Petro Interiors in Elmhurst, agrees. "When people call me now, there is almost a sense of frustration — they want a space that feels larger, less crowded. And the last

number of months have put a lot of wear on our kitchens because of increased usage."

Using a space more frequently provides the opportunity to take an inventory of what you need, and today's homeowners are placing a greater value on how the kitchen functions than ever before.

Hannah Bond, a designer for Slaten Residential in St. Charles, has observed that people are seeking expanded pantries and large drawers for tucking away items to cut down on clutter. "People are going back to cooking and family dinners," she says. "For a very long time, the trend was more aesthetic, but now people want a countertop

where they can roll out their homemade bread or kids can do schoolwork."

Gail Drury, owner and creative director at Drury Design in Glen Ellyn, says that islands with workstations for children and built-in charging drawers for electronic devices and computers have also become frequent requests of late.

2. HEALTH-CONSCIOUS CHOICES

Ted Kawczynski, president of The Kitchen Master in Naperville, says that the pandemic has also had an impact on kitchen design. "Health and safety are the watchwords everywhere we go. But nowhere are they more important than in our kitchens," he observes.

He notes that many new product introductions are geared toward helping maintain a healthy kitchen, including cabinetry that can be built with a surface material that is not only scratch- and wear-resistant but also has antibacterial properties. Other health-minded products include stainless steel sinks and quartz composite blend sinks made with a special type of silver ion that is antibacterial.

There are also ozone-water faucets that claim to kill viruses, bacteria, mold, yeast and algae for an ecologically safe way to clean food and water-safe surfaces. Even powerful range hoods can provide increased ventilation by bringing fresh air into the kitchen.

3. CONTEMPORARY LOOKS

From cabinets to range hoods, the

pared-down, clean look is very much in evidence. "We are doing more straight-out modern kitchens in traditional west suburban homes," says Dan McFadden, owner of PB Kitchen Design in Geneva, pointing to a recent project that paired lighter-colored textured laminate cabinetry with boldly patterned black granite on the counters and backsplash as an example. "I'm seeing a more contemporary look regardless of the house style," echoes Bruce George, president of Charles Vincent George Architects in Naperville. This often leads to a shift throughout the home — blending some of the traditional features with the more modern.

"There's definitely been a rejection of the more embellished homes," says George. "Clean lines are almost universal now."

4. CALMING COLORS

Brian Hogan, owner of Hogan Design & Construction in Geneva, believes that classic looks, such as white Shaker-style cabinetry, will continue to be a top choice because of their versatility. "It will stand the test of time," he says, "and can be updated to fit the look and feel of the moment with hardware choices."

While white is still a cabinet mainstay, it is being augmented by other hues that carry a softer palette, such as blues and grays. "There is a drive toward colors that are calming and soothing," Drury observes.

Touches of dramatic black are making a comeback, from the range hood to the

island. "These richer colors are mingling with lighter hues, including bleached or lighter aged wood tones. The practice of pairing lighter perimeter cabinets with a contrasting or colorful island is still in favor, as is mixing painted and stained looks.

5. NON-WOOD CABINET ALTERNATIVES

Though painted wood cabinetry has long been the standard, more man-made cabinet materials are coming to the forefront, says Drury, noting that they are very durable and offer the look of exotic woods without the high cost.

"Non-wood looks, like textured laminate, are an emerging trend and I think we are going to see more of it," says McFadden. "It's a higher style and quality of laminate than we have seen in the past."

6. STATEMENT PIECES

While islands obviously make a fitting focal point, oversized hoods, hoods encased in marble or shiplap or even multiple metals are becoming statement pieces in today's kitchens. Lighting or perhaps a beautiful, on-trend faucet is another great way to make a statement. "Unique pendants, a contemporary chandelier, or a rich metallic faucet will draw the eye and be a great conversation starter," Hogan says.

7. LIGHT MOVES

Lighting sources are key to making a kitchen look nice and work well. "Lighting

While greater functionality — like high capacity storage drawers (below) and built-in desks and charging stations for electronic devices (right) — is key, aesthetic considerations like creative lighting (far right) also remain important.



Photo courtesy of Normandy Remodeling



Photo courtesy of Drury Design



Photo courtesy of Drury Design

NEXT LEVEL KITCHENS

makes or breaks a design,” says Drury. “You can have a very expensive kitchen look cheap if the lighting is not right, and you can make an inexpensive kitchen look great with the right lighting.”

Lighting systems that allow for control of a room’s lighting setup at the push of a button or include motion sensors make life easier and help to conserve electricity.

While in-cabinet lighting has been around for a while, McFadden says it has become more attainable and is translating into cabinet drawers as well. While it makes it easy to see the drawer contents, it’s more about the aesthetic. “We never see this kind of lighting on somebody’s wish list, but we have it in the showroom and when they see it, they want it,” he notes.

In new construction and some remodeling projects, extra or larger windows are brightening kitchen spaces with additional natural light. “We are finding that people want to add more windows in the kitchen,” says Petro, “even if that means sacrificing some storage. It gives the space more of an open feel.”

8. TEXTURED BACKSPASHES

Texture is key, particularly in the backsplash area. “Looking at a backsplash is one thing, but being able to touch it is another. More and more people are experimenting with a textured backsplash, and this is typically seen in a more modern setting,” says Victoria Pelly-Lauer, a designer for Sebring Design Build in Naperville

While subway or metro tile is still a classic look, longer, leaner versions that include subtle pattern or artisanal texture are coming into play. As an alternative to tile, Hogan suggests whitewashed or painted brick to bring texture to the space.

9. DYNAMIC AND DURABLE COUNTERTOPS

Engineered stone, especially quartz, remains the top-selling countertop, and comes in a wide range of colors and styles. “People want surfaces that are beautiful but not vulnerable to staining,” explains Drury.

But just as pairing cabinet finishes has been popular, a combination of several different countertop materials within

a kitchen is a growing trend, and these often feature different thicknesses as well.

For example, some might use quartz for the perimeter counter and select granite or marble with interesting veining for an island or backsplash. McFadden says some of his clients who seek natural stone are intrigued by quartzite, which is harder than granite and offers an option for an easy-care, yet natural, material.

10. UPCYCLING WITH PAINT

McFadden says upcycling kitchens with paint and doing partial remodels is another trend. Though not everyone has a layout that works or cabinets of a quality that can be repurposed, he says, those who do may be able to change the look of their kitchen by replacing some key elements and having cabinets repainted. His company has been revisiting projects from the past and working with those clients to refresh their spaces.

“People are not redoing the whole kitchen but are updating,” says Bond. “I have recently had three projects that involved painting the existing cabinets, getting rid



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of the breakfast area and putting in a huge island that seats four to six people.”

11. SMARTER APPLIANCES

Zachary Gasiorowski, marketing manager for Sub-Zero Group Midwest in Glendale Heights, says recent events and concerns about aging in place continue to drive the trend toward universal design and accessible, but stylish kitchens.

“With more and more people staying home, not moving, not going out to eat, and spending more time in their kitchens, we have seen a ton of redesigns,” explains Gasiorowski. “I think now that people are spending time with their kitchen and appliances, they are realizing how much they need an upgrade. Not only are they looking for a better flowing kitchen, they want quality appliances to prepare better meals.”

Convection steam ovens continue to be best sellers, and rightfully so, says Gasiorowski. “The versatility of this oven in combination with amazing results is a trend that is only going to continue.”

George is seeing more use of specialized appliances, such as warming and cooling drawers as well as separate coffee stations or beverage service areas.

12. SMALL UPDATES WITH BIG IMPACT

Those in the design industry suggest that there are ways to bring life into an existing kitchen with classic style and make it feel a bit more current, whether that involves changing out the light fixtures or updating hardware.

Large islands surrounded by seating can replace kitchen tables. The island also offers extra counter space as well as a place to tuck away appliances. That goes along with the trend of making the kitchen a clutter-free zone — ensuring appliances are accessible when needed but aren't sitting out on the countertop.

Whatever the latest trend, those in the business recognize that everything circles back to what works best for your personal style, situation and budget.

“More important than any design trend is to make sure that the room is functioning for your needs and that the flow makes it an enjoyable space to be in,” says Hogan. “We always tell our clients that function is the ultimate design feature that will create a space they will love to be in.” ■



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