

Kitchens

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Add to that the recent spate of mortgage refinancing, and it appears as if people plan to spend more time in their existing homes, Prey said.

As for kitchen styles, that varies from area to area, Prey said, but many homeowners are buying into a traditional, raised-panel cabinet style made from hardwoods like maple painted in white or light-colored tones. "Not in a European, contemporary style, but softer — not so plastic."

Dark colors are out, she said, adding light colors make rooms appear larger.

Islands used

Islands remain popular, sometimes supplanting the kitchen table, Prey said. Old formal dining rooms, often found off the kitchen in older homes, are being opened up by knocking down kitchen walls. The new space is used as a seating area for gathering, but eating is done at the kitchen islands.

Work and desk areas are also built into kitchens — often near the phone — to create a space for daily planning.

In addition to a preference for maple over traditional oaks, homeowners seem to be gravitating toward different materials in kitchens.

Granite and Corian countertops are popular, but are also expensive. Many buyers are opting for an expensive countertop on the island, which helps enhance it as a kitchen focal point, and use more traditional laminates in the remainder of the room.

Recessed, incandescent lighting is used almost exclusively over harsher, colder fluorescent lighting.

More buyers are also opting for ceramic tile and hardwood floors, but longer lasting linoleum remains popular, she said.

Cary Seal, a designer at KSI Kitchen and Bath Showrooms in Livonia, said function wasn't high

on the priority of home builders until very recently.

One of the most basic items in the kitchen today, the microwave oven — was almost nonexistent 20 years ago, Seal said. Consequently, people have to make do with less countertop space or microwave carts.

A wall cabinet will have a place designed for a microwave, increasing the functionality of the kitchen.

People want more than plain cabinets with doors and drawers.

Buyers are clamoring for television nooks, microwaves suspended over cooktops with built-in lighting and venting, in-cabinet recycling bins, and numerous gadgets like pullout trays, built-in wine and spice racks, swing out pantries, and drop down cookbook holders that generally make life in the kitchen easier.

"Things like that make the kitchen more livable," he said.

Minimal changes

Not everyone needs a new kitchen. Many companies now offer services such as cabinet refacing, meaning the cabinet fronts are replaced, but the utilitarian shelves and frames remain.

Kitchen Tune-Up in Rochester Hills takes this idea one step further. "Let's say you're happy with what you have, but the kitchen just looks a little dull — that's where we come in," said Tony Julian, co-owner of the Kitchen Tune-Up franchise for Oakland County.

Kitchens are one of the highest traffic areas in the house, he said, and it stands to reason they suffer the most from everyday wear and tear.

Kitchen Tune-Up removes the dirt and oil built up over years, repairs cracks, broken hinges and drawer glides to generally return the cabinets as new as possible to near-new condition, he said.

Badly damaged doors can also be duplicated, he added.

Remodeling

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major kitchen remodeling includes an updating of a 200-square-foot kitchen with design and installation of functional layout of new mid-priced cabinets, laminate countertops, energy efficient oven, cooktop and ventilation system, microwave, dishwasher, disposer and lighting.

Also included are new resilient flooring, wall coverings and ceiling treatments. The kitchen includes 30 linear feet of cabinets and counter space and a 3-by-5 foot island.

For a \$6,000 minor kitchen remodeling, homeowners can recoup 84 percent in the Detroit market.

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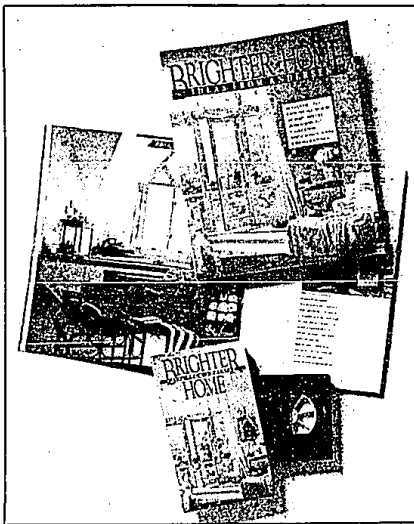
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The Michigan Architectural Foundation will conduct its first construction industry regulations seminar Monday and Tuesday, April 19 and 20, at the Shanty Creek Shores Mountain Resort in Belle Isle.

The conference is being held to promote understanding and cooperation between the industry's design, construction and regulatory entities. Supporting organizations include AIA Michigan, Society of

Marketing

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"In the kitchen, give them a little better than builder basic," Rector said. "Try to make the bath a little special. Give them choices. Let them personalize the house and let them upgrade."

Use children in advertisements, he added.

Luxury for move-ups

Second move-up buyers want more luxury, Rector said. "They want all the rooms and all the rooms to be big and spacious. They want the house to have some pizzazz. Show the dining room furnished for eight. It kind of expands the space."

"In the kitchen, give them as many choices as you can," he said. "Give them two separate ovens and a microwave." The message is you're moving up and the advertisement focus should be on the product as opposed to people, Rector said.

Other general points made during the seminar:

■ "Would you give the same presentation to a striver as a believer? I wouldn't. Their orientation to life is different. They will tune out without knowing why." — Webb

■ "Why not look at other parts of the newspaper (to advertise)? Where will my targeted buyer look if not in the real estate section? Sports? Entertainment? — Rector

■ "The basic reason for having a sales information center is to stop the customer long enough to find out who they are and send them off in a direction you want them to go. The key is to get them talking." — Webb

Builders respond

Builders and sales reps who attended the seminar liked what they heard for the most part.

"Target marketing and merchandising definitely is the way to go," said Laurie Frankel, vice president of sales and marketing for the Herman Frankel Organization in West Bloomfield.

"In the past, a house sold itself. Now, it's a lifestyle," she said. "It's a whole different mind set. You have to get more emotionally involved."

But builders have to be careful about specializing too much because all buyers aren't what they might seem, Frankel said.

"There are a lot of consumers," she said. "You can never totally merchandise it to a target because it's never 100 percent. You never have a community that's one type of person."

"I don't think we're emphasizing enough the different types of people we're catering to," said Don Pratt, a Troy builder. "It's always good to get people to give you facts and figures on demographics, whether we're targeting the market correctly."

The largest growth in households by age of household head between 1970 and 1990 occurred in the 35-44 age group, said Evan Barrington, GE manager for regional forecasting. Single persons and marrieds without children showed the largest growth in households by family type.

Nearly as many births were recorded in 1990 as during the peak of the baby boom, he reported.

"Ours is a very cyclical industry and it's going to continue to be cyclical," Barrington said. "Never plan your business under the assumption we're going to have growth forever."

"Clearly the desire is there for people to own a home if at all possible," he said. "We have to have jobs that create income that create demand for consumer spending."

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