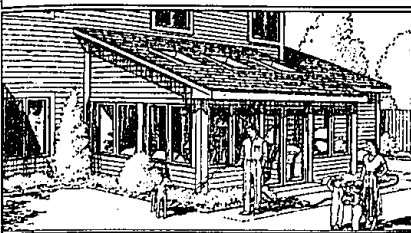


The Weekly Do-It-Yourselfer



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Know what you want in kitchen

(MPS) - When planning a kitchen project, the easiest part is often aesthetics. Most individuals know overall colors and styles that they want to incorporate into the space. The harder part is knowing what materials and products to include in order to create the desired look.

"It is very important to have an understanding of the pros and cons of the various cabinets, appliances and surface materials that are available," explains Doris Lacroix, CKD, CDE, 1997 president of the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA). "Only then can you evaluate them properly in relation to your needs."

Part of the process, according to Lacroix, is knowing the terminology. Following are some important definitions to learn as you prepare for a kitchen project.

Cabinets

A recent study conducted by the NKBA shows that cabinetry accounts for a major portion (53 percent) of the total cost of a kitchen project. Indeed, cabinets can be a focal point in kitchen in both an economic sense and a design sense.

"There are numerous options available in kitchen cabinetry today," Lacroix says. "To determine what cabinets are right for your space, begin with the different methods used manufacture them."

Stock cabinets - These are standard cabinets that are produced in large quantities in advance. As they are produced in quantity, special units are not available. However, manufacturers offer a wide range of widths and styles and they are the least expensive choice.

"Purchasing stock cabinets does not mean sacrificing style," explains Lacroix. "Decorative moldings can be added to stock cabinetry for a unique look, and interest can be added with a clever layout."

Custom cabinets - These cabinets are manufactured on a kitchen-by-kitchen basis after the kitchen has been designed. Then these cabinets are produced for a perfect fit in any kitchen. And, they are available in a wide range of wood species, finishes and special sizes.

"Although they are more expensive, custom cabinets give a kitchen a distinctive, upscale look," Lacroix says.

Semi-custom cabinets - Semi-custom cabinets are produced by both stock and custom manufacturers on a stock basis. According to Lacroix, semi-custom cabinets have many more standard interior fittings and accessories than regular stock units.

Appliances

Preparing meals, cooking and cleaning up are still the primary activities that take place in the kitchen. To accomplish them, an individual must have the right equipment. "Everyone completes these tasks differently, and therefore, appliance choices are very individual," Lacroix says.

Cooking equipment - Cooking equipment is available in three types, according to Lacroix. Built-in equipment provides an oven at waist height or, if using double ovens, one at eye level and one below.

"Using a built-in piece will allow more counter space. Also, it can be designed so that the oven and the cooktop are together or separate," Lacroix explains. "If separated, a built-in cooktop with two to six cooking elements can also be planned."

Slide-in - free-standing equipment features an oven below the cooking surface. According to Lacroix, this is a good choice if budget or space limitations exist.

"One popular choice in free-standing equipment is the commercial-look oven," Lacroix says. "Today a commercial-style equipment is available for residential

application."

The third option is the drop-in range. It is similar in looks and price to the slide-in, but it is installed between base cabinets and supported by cabinetry.

Like other types of kitchen equipment, refrigeration units also can be built-in or free-standing. Separate refrigerator and freezer units are available, although combined units are more popular. "Smaller, individual refrigerators can be planned under the counter near the sink to allow storage of cold items closer to where food preparation is done," Lacroix says. For combined units, several options are available, according to the NKBA. The freezer may be located on the bottom, on the top, or the refrigerator and freezer may be side by side. Refrigerator/freezer units that have freezers placed on the top tend to have a lower energy consumption than units with side-by-side or bottom freezers because the freezer section is farther away from the warm compressor a condenser, according to the NKBA.

Countertops

Choosing the appropriate countertop material is essential because it adds the overall aesthetics of the design, but it must also be practical.

"Each countertop material has its advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, the selection is often based on the individual and how he or she will use the space," Lacroix says.

Decorative laminate - According to Lacroix, laminate is very durable and easy to clean and it is available hundreds of colors and pattern. However, it is subject to cuts a burns from hot pots, and once da aged, it cannot

be repaired.

Solid surface - Solid surface materials are easy to customize to given space, and they combine with other materials. If damaged, solid surface materials can be repaired.

"This material is a good choice you want to add a feeling of luxury and elegance to a space," Lacroix says. "Color and pattern choices are some what limited when compared with laminate options, and solid surface counters can be expensive."

Ceramic tile - This material offers tremendous versatility in color, patterns and customizing. It is also quite durable and will not cut, bubble, blister or peel. It is, however, expensive and not practical for use everywhere in the kitchen.

"When incorporating ceramic tile, it is important to consider how the counter will be used," Lacroix explains. "Tile is not a good choice for an area where a great amount of food preparation will be completed. It should not be used in a space where you will be rolling dough, for example."

Marble/granite - Like solid surfaces, these materials add elegance to the kitchen. They are very fashionable and durable. If they are broken, however, neither can be repaired. Also, marble is easy to stained.

"It is important to note that it is not necessary to choose just one countertop material," Lacroix says. "Solid surface, laminate, tile, marble and granite can be combined with each other, offering several benefits."

"The combination gives the kitchen a unique look while cutting down on costs and retaining durability in high-use areas."

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