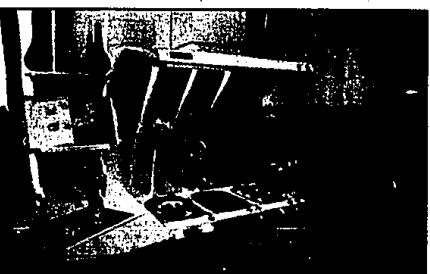




Stylish flavor: Vignettes at Bella Cucina in Sylvan Lake show examples of stylish kitchen designs. A European country look (above) is achieved with maple, in a distressed meringue finish, and furniture feature elements. Alderwood and copper are among the materials in an Arts and Crafts style design (below).



Cooking by design: Catalog drawer pulls and glass fronts are featured on a kitchen island (above). Natural pearwood, polyester glass and stainless steel are some of the materials in a contemporary design (below). Both vignettes are at Bella Cucina.



The Heart of the Home

Kitchen designs follow stylish recipes

BY MARY KLEMIC
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The kitchen is considered the heart of the home. Now it could be the art of a home as well. The recipe is for style in many kitchens today, with ingredients that include elements ordinarily found on furniture, and mixing done with colors, textures and finishes.

Kitchens feature a fresh flavor, with great attention to detail.

Floors and countertops can be made of a wide range of materials. Kitchen cabinets can match cabinets in other rooms. Space is expanded in creative ways. A faucet can have a tall arch that makes it easier to place a pot under it for filling, and fold against a wall when not in use.

"Right now we're seeing creating a living room that you just so happen to cook in," said Carmen Schultz, design consultant at Bella Cucina, 2505 Orchard Lake in Sylvan Lake. There isn't as much interest in expanding the family room as there is arranging a kitchen with sitting areas, two or three sinks, maybe even a fireplace, said Candice Waller of DeGiulio Kitchen & Bath, 724 N. Old Woodward in Birmingham.

"We're seeing the family room getting smaller and the kitchen getting bigger," she said. "People are really niching their kitchens, creating preparation centers, entertaining areas."

Anything goes right now with kitchen styles, colors and materials, said Loreen Keeth, vice president of Kitchen Top Shop, 31160 Eight Mile in Farmington Hills.

"(Customers) want more use out of their kitchen," Keeth said.

"They don't want the square look anymore. More people are willing to knock out a wall to expand their space."

A kitchen can be designed to meet specific needs.

"There is so much out there now," said Joel Bergren, certified kitchen designer at EXPO Design Center, 7200 Orchard Lake in West Bloomfield. "We carry nine different cabinet lines. We can do just about anything ... You can even design a door."

The traditional "work triangle" area in the kitchen has been replaced with work stations, making it easy to accommodate more than one person at work.

Space savers (and makers) abound.

The "miracle corner" is a system of wire racks that unfolds when the cabinet door is open, bringing items from the far back corner — often wasted space — to the front. Towel racks can slide out of view when not in use. Narrow cabinets can hold paper towel rolls or spices.

Refrigerators and dishwashers can be concealed behind attractive fronts. The appliances can be smaller than traditional size.

Colors and materials

Two-tones remain popular, as do oak, maple, cherry and, lately, mahogany woods.

"We're still seeing two-tone," Keeth said. "Some want Shaker, some people want country, but there's more traditional."

Others prefer the contemporary look with more dramatics. Inlaid granite on countertops with laminated edges provides a stark, yet modern, look in today's kitchens.

Among countertop materials are granite, limestone, concrete, serpentine, stainless steel and silestone. Backsplashes take on artistry, with mosaic patterns, tile and granite combinations and tumbled slate, for example.

"We're seeing a lot of restaurant-grade appliances," said Gail Fekorn, showroom manager and kitchen and bath specialist at KSI, 42073 Ford in Canton. "... Stainless steel appliances ... built-in refrigerators."

Because cooking ranges are more powerful, the vent hood must be larger. As a result, the hood is a focal point in the room.

"The hood is the kitchen," Waller said.

DeGiulio's hood designs include copper, oil-rubbed bronze copper, weathered copper, hammered steel, wet plaster, and tile with wet plaster. Some designs by Bella

Cucina feature architectural elements and paintings. Cabinetry features furniture finish (including antiquing and distressing), and such accents as turnings and fluting. Glass is popular for fronts. Staggering the heights of cabinets is also popular.

"People like the open look," Bergren said. Stone, wood, ceramic tile and cork (which is durable and easy on the feet, Bergren said) are popular for floors.

"We never see a surface like linoleum," said Scott Grandis, certified kitchen designer and president of Bella Cucina.

Be comfortable

The designers advise customers to shop around, visit showrooms and ask questions. Feel comfortable. Bring clippings of kitchens that you like with you.

"Say 'I just like the feel of this room.' It gives us an understanding," Grandis said.

"Just look. Don't go in on a mission your first couple of times ... It's way too much to absorb," Bergren said.

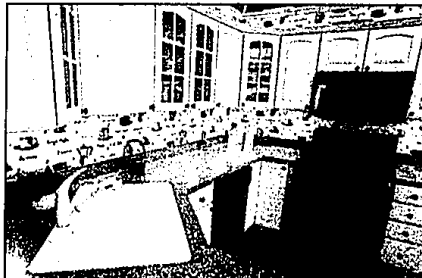
"Have a want list — the different things that you want — and a list of things that you don't like," Fekorn said.

"The first thing is to determine your appliances," Waller said. "That helps to dictate the design of your cabinetry."

Start early, she adds.

"Lead times on cabinetry can be 12 weeks to 24 weeks. It's never too early to work with a kitchen designer. It allows you to get the kitchen that you want."

Staff Writer Ken Abramczyk contributed to this story.



The art of cooking: Colors and cabinetry for the kitchen can resemble those in other rooms of the house, as seen in these vignettes at KSI in Livonia.

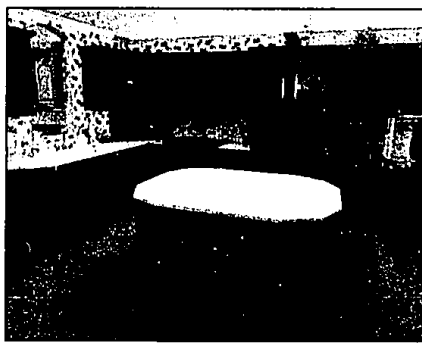


PHOTO BY BRIAN MITCHELL

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