

KITCHEN

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the kitchen and away from everyone else in the house in the past have become more, figuratively and literally.

"In the old days it was a place to cook the food and, typically, the female of the household was sequestered away," said Bob O'Brien, general manager of Kurtis Kitchen and Bath Center in Livonia, Farmington Hills, Ann Arbor, Clarkston, Lincoln Park, Royal Oak and Warren.

GATHERING POINT

More and more families ask for floor plans that include kitchens in open settings with other rooms to give the cook access to conversation.

Household chores are often shared, since 65 to 70 percent of women work outside their homes, O'Brien said. He said that kitchen designs have reflected this cultural change.

Homeowners are focusing more on their families and making them more comfortable since the Sept. 11 terrorist attack and the subsequent

stock market decline, says Jeffrey S. Stella, owner of Stella Contracting Inc., Kitchens by Stella in downtown Plymouth.

"The kitchen is the gathering point where we meet in the morning for breakfast, make lunches and figure out what we're going to do during the day. At night we go there to talk about what happened in the day and what we'll do for tomorrow," he said.

"For the investment, there's a 75- or 100-percent return on your dollar for improvements in kitchens," The kitchen is also the communication center of the house, where often the main phone and answering machine are located, said Stella. Mechanical devices are easily stored in cabinets and are quickly available but out of sight, he said. Recycling areas are also popular.

"We're putting two or three recycle bins in the kitchen so we don't have to go out to the garage with each cereal box."

Homeowners are also asking for more lighting at work stations and for ambience, he said.

DECORATING STATEMENTS

Richer colors — such as ginger,

toffee and caramel wood glazes — on cabinets are nudging out the light oaks that were popular in the past 10 to 15 years, O'Brien said.

Forty percent of all cabinets in the Midwest are maple and 30 percent are oak. The remaining 30 percent is split among the other woods.

Cabinets have become much more than just a place to store the peanut butter. They're a backdrop for decorating statements, too.

"It's furniture now," O'Brien said, pointing to real wood drawers and lifetime guarantees that are far superior in quality to those of 20 or 30 years ago.

Other trends include hard wood floors and ceramic tiles with radiant heat pads to keep them warm. More and more people are also choosing natural stone, including granite, for their floors, countertops and backsplashes. Perfectly shaped tile in 4-by-4-inch pieces is being replaced with a multitude of sizes, including the popular tumble tile. Known for its distressed look, granite and homeowners also use tile to make an artistic statement in self-designed murals.

Many homeowners are choosing kitchen cabinets that follow the simple Prairie, Arts and Crafts style developed by Frank Lloyd Wright, says Linda Welch, a designer at Mans Kitchen & Bath Design Center in Canton.

"We're seeing a lot of natural surfaces on countertops using less and less laminate and more and more granite and fabricated stones."

CONVENIENCES

Homeowners are asking for kitchen conveniences, too, says Deborah Bell, designer at Bella Cucina in Sylvan Lake.

An example is warming drawers that are perfect for

Right appliances give helping hand

BY DAVE GALE ANDREASSI
CORRESPONDENT

Some of the stress of the holidays can be defused if you add beauty and practicality to a well-designed kitchen and if you have the right appliances to make cooking and baking jobs easier.

With the right layout, your kitchen can look beautiful, no matter how big it is, says Sam Warwick, owner with Maciej Trzos of Living Spaces in Sylvan Lake.

"When you see some of the kitchens we do at Living Spaces, they're interesting. When you walk into the kitchen, especially at Thanksgiving, people don't say, 'What kind of wine do you have?' They say, 'This is a wonderful kitchen!'"

He's a jewel in this area that most people don't know about, Warwick said of his partner. "He has a unique way of arranging space that no else sees."

If you don't have time to remodel your kitchen for this holiday season, consider stacking it with appliances that will help your baking and cooking jobs easier.

A combination convection-toaster oven allows you to bake a number of items at the same time, says Alex Vasilovick, sales manager of

Williams Sonoma in Novi with other locations in Livonia, Rochester, Troy, Lansing, Ann Arbor and Grand Rapids.

Such a combination oven allows for an even browning on pastries and smaller appetizers. If you want to bake something small, such as a pie, you can use the combination oven instead of the larger oven. On, use your large oven and the convection-toaster oven simultaneously to get the dinner done quicker, Vasilovick said he believes this appliance is essential. Placing a knife block on your kitchen counter will make your life simpler, too, he said. The block eliminates storing a multitude of knives in a junk drawer and having to scramble to find the one you need.

"You can grab the one you want easily and it helps you to be a little more organized during those hectic holiday times."

Remote thermometers, which are relatively new, give cooks mobility. The probe goes into the oven and you carry the main unit with you as far as 100 feet away.

"Instead of putting all that focus in the kitchen, you can be outside or preparing holiday linens," Vasilovick said it also has a timer.

Just because it's the

holiday season and the temperatures have dropped, you can still treat your guests to the flavor of a barbecued dinner on an electric, indoor, smokeless, non-stick grill. An accessory piece allows you to add water and herbs or smoking chips.

Silpat mats also takes the hassle out of holiday cooking and baking.

These silicone mats can be placed on a pan or roaster and are excellent for extreme temperature changes, such as freezing for candy making or extreme heat for baking projects. The non-stick surface eliminates the messy cleanup.

Another way to save time and energy is buy ready-made ingredients, such as turkey gravy, which is also available at Williams Sonoma.

You can add your own turkey drippings to the gravy if you choose, but it's not necessary. If you're deep frying your bird, there aren't any juices to create your own gravy.

Other ready-made foods are also available at Williams Sonoma.

"They're exquisite and they're handy. When you have limited time, getting a high-quality food product is sometimes easier than making it in a hectic world."

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