

ZENITH



WHERE TO SAVE

APPLIANCE ADVICE The pros agree: unless you're a budding Mario Batali or a contestant wannabe on *Top Chef*, you really don't need to spend a fortune on couture appliances. While a top-name refrigerator or range can help move a house if it's on the market, *Consumer Reports'* tests show that \$4,000-plus professional-style ranges perform no better than conventional models. (Ditto other appliances.) "You can purchase a GE refrigerator that has the nice built-in look everyone wants for \$2,000 instead of laying down \$7,000 for a Sub-Zero," says Sam Owen, owner of Garth Custom Kitchens in Scarsdale.

token trend (top photo) White subway tile is classic, chic, and comparatively inexpensive. (Kitchen designed by R.S. Granoff Architects, P.C., Greenwich, Connecticut)

haute side (below) You don't need to buy break-the-bank designer appliances to get a designer look. (Shown here: GE Monogram induction cooktop)

TILE SUBWAY STYLE You can save money—and achieve a classic upscale look—with white subway tile as a backsplash. It's relatively inexpensive, simple to keep clean, easy to match, and—score 10 for lasting value—never goes out of style. If you want to add a splash of color, invest in accent tiles. "I like to think of accent tiles as jewelry," says Gail Sirota. "If used sparingly, they add drama to the kitchen."

WHAT LIES BENEATH Flooring is another good place to save money—and in some cases, your sanity as well. "A lot of people like the look of limestone floors, but they're expensive and require a lot of maintenance," says Sam Owen. "For one-third the price, you can purchase simulated or faux limestone flooring. It looks the same and is much easier to care for." Before you invest, research what's hiding under the current flooring: in older homes it's possible to find a pristine wood floor buried underneath decades of grimy linoleum or dingy carpet. All you have to do is refinish it—a giant savings.

PAINT BY NUMBERS Cabinetry is one of the biggest drains on any budget, but there are ways to economize on this essential. Kathy Abbott suggests having the cabinets delivered unpainted and hiring a professional painter to brush-paint them on site. "Even if you ordered the cabinets from a catalog, having them hand painted will give them a custom look," Abbott suggests. "You should do the same thing if you're investing in custom cabinets, because even high-end cabinetry is often spray-painted so it ends up looking like it came from a factory."



WHERE TO SPEND

COUNTER TOP BUY Ah, the luxe lure of stone! Most experts agree that granite is worth its weight in—well, granite. “Granite is no more expensive than Corian, but it looks much richer,” says Claude Smith, owner of an eponymous design firm in White Plains. “Marble has its charms, but it loses its sheen over time.” Sam Owen adds that stone and man-made quartz are de rigueur these days. “Nobody uses laminate anymore. You want something that’s going to hold up for the long run.”

LET THERE BE LIGHT You don’t want to be chopping lettuce in the dark, so make sure you invest in quality lighting. Most designers agree that layered lighting is the way to go in the kitchen. A combo of recessed, under cabinet, and pendant lighting creates a scheme that’s both functional and decorative. Kathy Abbott suggests installing lots of small high hats to create a warm ambient light; just make sure that all of your kitchen lights are on dimmers so you can change the mood at the touch of a switch.



a good light Layered lighting—such as a combination of recessed, under-counter, in-cabinet, and pendant lighting—is a best bet for illuminating a kitchen. (Kitchen designed by Jason Landau of Amazing Spaces, LLC, in Briarcliff Manor)



cast the stone first
Gorgeous granite is here to stay, especially offset by an elegant Napa undercounter sink, Iron/Tones sink, and Revival faucet, all by Kohler.