

WESTCHESTER

# home

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# cutting-edge **KITCHENS**

The latest look at what's cooking in the heart of the home, including the hottest new trends and coolest innovations

*By Laurie Yarnell*

Kitchen trends may come and go, but one thing never changes: Whether you're whipping up a four-course gourmet meal for 12 or reheating a slice of pizza, this room is the heart of the home. In fact, the kitchen's multipurpose role as a place to entertain friends, tackle homework and school projects, answer emails, or just hang out with the family is on the upswing, according to local kitchen experts like Jason Landau, a professional interior designer with a master's in architecture and owner of Amazing Spaces in Briarcliff Manor.





Perhaps the strongest trend in kitchen design is the open floor plan, in part because the kitchen "is the most social room of house" and "all family life revolves around food," says Landau. "The cook or hostess wants to be part of the party without everybody piling into the kitchen workspace."

In many cases, open floor plans allow rarely used formal dining and living rooms to be incorporated into one large area with the kitchen or great room. Individual dining-room and kitchen tables are replaced with a single dining area with counter chairs or bar stools at a connected table or island.

Also increasing in popularity, says Landau, are kitchens with two sinks in separate, dual work zones, with the refrigerator located between the two. The first zone, for the casual user, clean-up helpers, and everyone except the cook, features the main sink, the dishwasher, its own counter space for "making a sandwich or jellifying an English muffin," and access to everyday dishes and glasses. The second, a work area for the cook, has its own sink, counter space, and the cooktop and oven.

In terms of style, transitional looks—somewhere between traditional ("fussy, Louis XV seating") and contemporary/modern ("ultra-modern Knoll chairs")—continue to gain popularity, says Landau. While five to seven years ago, traditional was all the rage, clients these days are looking for a cleaner look with few curves and ornamental details, according to Landau. Almost every kitchen he designs now leans toward transitional, although modern looks are stronger than in the past. In keeping with the transitional feel, color palettes feature a lot of neutrals—grays, blacks, and whites—with a white kitchen still the most popular. "A white painted kitchen is like a black dress," says Landau. "You can wear it with pearls to look conservative or cool diamonds to look trendy," he adds, noting that lighting and hardware are similar to jewelry; paint color and cabinetry to makeup; and flooring, such as natural stone or wood laminate, to shoes; and all are different ways to accessorize a look. What makes a kitchen unique, he says, is a cool color for your range hood, interesting hardware, a unique backsplash, and "all the other materials."



Above: A bright red range hood (custom-painted at an auto-body shop!) is a great way to add colorful accents and "accessorize" a monochromatic kitchen; Below: Open floor plans, which help rooms "flow" harmoniously, are one of the hottest new kitchen trends; Right, above, and below: Ornate and fussy is out; sleek, chic, and functional is in. And granite-only countertops? That ship has sailed, too.







## Finishing Touches: COUNTERTOPS & BACKSPASHES

Among the most important of “all those other materials” are countertop and backsplash surfaces, which Landau says impart a kitchen with a truly custom look. Surfaces of metal and stone—either natural or man-made, like Caesarstone or Silestone—continue to be popular. The man-made materials offer a cleaner look, more solid colors, and, especially, a more exciting variety of textures, like suede, velvet, brushed, or leathered; textured surfaces are big in today’s kitchens. “When people enter the kitchen,” says Richard Brooks, president of Brooks Custom, a Mount Kisco company that specializes in surfaces, “the first thing their eyes go to are the countertops.”

Brooks says several trends have emerged as particularly strong in this area, including increased use of wood, especially American black walnut with a stain-proof and waterproof marine-oil finish in dark chocolate brown. And butcher blocks continue to have a place in the kitchen as food-prep surfaces, he notes. “But where we used to do a blond maple chopping block, now we do a walnut version in chocolate brown.” Among the most innovative wood-related trends, however, is the use of live-edge wood countertops, in which the organic edge of the tree remains and the natural wood’s “figure”—its knots and natural waves in the grain—are highlighted. “The bark is pulled off to the white sap wood and then we use a marine-oil finish,” says Brooks. “The uneven edges puts you in touch with the natural aspect of the wood for a more organic feel.” While oak and rare woods are often used, walnut, says Brooks, is the most popular choice here.







Behemoth refrigerators are on the wane; smaller units in more than one place are popular. Here, wine fridges are everywhere—even in the island.

Another trendy countertop choice, for a very post-industrial look, is concrete. "It started about 12 or 15 years ago and is really growing now beyond our expectations, for countertops as well as islands," says Brooks. "What's happening in the commercial sector is now coming into residential." While shades of gray and earth tones are used most often, concrete can be offered in any color in the Benjamin Moore color chart, says Brooks. Also cutting-edge for countertops—and backsplashes—are hammered, distressed, and textured zincs and metals in a dull pewter gray, especially for a secondary seat bar, says Brooks, with no coating or lacquer required. "Not everyone is aware of it, but zinc is a bacteriostatic, or hygienic, material," he says. "Germs die faster on it than on stainless steel." And brushed stainless steel—like the front of a refrigerator—is increasingly popular for backsplashes and is easy to keep clean—just use Windex. Glass, either in tiles or glossy sheets of very forward-looking back-painted glass, is gaining traction. White glass, like concrete, can be painted any color in the Benjamin Moore chart, light gray, metallic silver, and a muted gray-blue are especially on-trend. So what doesn't Brooks see a lot of anymore? Kitchens that are totally granite or marble. "We no longer do everything in one material," he notes.

## To Store It All: CABINETRY

A critical element of any well-designed kitchen, cabinetry is composed of the face or door style, the box or interior, and the hardware or knob and pulls. Anthony Maucieri, president of East Hill Cabinetry in White Plains, says perhaps the most prevalent trend in kitchen cabinets today is customization at all price points. "The cabinet used to be like a Chevy, with just a few door and handle options," explains Maucieri. "Now, the increased automation of factories has made both customization and furniture-grade quality available at more accessible price points, with even the most inexpensive line coming in five different colors with six door detail choices and so much more flexibility in wood species and finishes at the midrange." He says now it's all about personalization and tailored design. "We're seeing more eclectic kitchens and never really do a strict French country or cookie-cutter Georgian any more." Even clients with deep pockets, he notes, are choosing semi-custom cabinets rather than custom because they now offer so many choices.



## SOURCES

### Albano Appliance and Service

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In general, East Hill's clients want streamlined styles, with clean lines and flat panels predominating, even in older homes. "Everything remains more understated coming out of the Recession," says Maucieri. "We are not doing heavy ornamentation or carving, or legs and arches," he explains. "And we're using mostly flat-panel doors for a transitional look, in primarily solid colors rather than glazing or multi-step finishes." Landau's clients are similarly inclined. "For transitional cabinetry," Landau says, "99 percent of the time it's a white painted-wood Shaker door with a square picture and simple recessed center."

And Westchester clients still want wood cabinets, primarily painted maples or cherry, according to Maucieri. "The types of woods haven't changed," he says. "It's the way we cut, stain, and treat the wood or mix different types of woods in the same kitchen." One exciting new way of taking a traditional wood and having it look more up to date, he adds, is quarter-sawn oak. "For old oak kitchens, we'd take the tree and cut board out of it. With quarter-sawn, the tree is cut in fours and turned diagonally with the grain in all one direction," he explains. With regard to color, cooler whites and gray-blue painted or stained wood are very of-the-moment as opposed to warmer, dark browns and earth tones. "Last year, there was a lot of 'greige,' or grays with browns," he notes. "This year, they're much truer grays and even some blues." Finally, Maucieri says he's moved away from highlighting the cabinet hardware and having it appear more distinct. "Now, with all the clean lines, we want fewer details," he says. "So on a white cabinet, instead of a dark oil-rubbed cup, we'll use a clean-lined brushed-nickel or stainless-steel knob or pull to blend in more with the cabinetry."

## Hot Equipment & Cool New Technology: APPLIANCES

Of course no matter how terrific a kitchen looks, you need the right appliances to make it all work. "There's no perfect setup," says Fred Albano, president since 1997 of family-owned Albano Appliance and Service in Pound Ridge. "You have to find the one that best fits your lifestyle." Albano points to the old family fridge as one appliance undergoing dramatic changes. Perhaps the most exciting trend is what he calls the "disassembling" of the unit. "Instead of the box getting bigger and bigger," he says, "now, we're breaking it up into pieces and putting them in all the places where they are needed, particularly 'breaking off' the freezer and putting it out of the main line of fire." So instead of a 48-inch unit, for instance, he'll recommend a 24- or 30-inch refrigerator-only column, with the freezer placed elsewhere in the room. Why? "The main reason is that the chef wants more counter space where all the work happens," he says, "and while they might go into the refrigerator 10 times in one meal prep, they don't often go into the freezer." By switching out a 4-foot-wide fridge for a 30-inch one, a significant amount of counter space is gained. Other new refrigeration trends include the increased use of separate refrigerator drawers, fully integrated or hidden units ("You don't see any compressor or hinges—it's perfectly flush with the adjoining cabinetry"), and convertibility, or being able to convert parts of a refrigerator to a freezer or wine storage as needed.

Exciting things are happening to other appliances as well. "The steam oven is the biggest revolution in the home kitchen," says Albano. "It does everything that the microwave does except heat up a cup of coffee or make popcorn—but the quality of the food is much better. It's particularly good for 'refreshing' food from the day before." Traditional double ovens are primarily a thing of the past, adds Albano, whose preference is pairing a specialty convection oven—particularly good for baking and roasting—with a steam oven or a 240-volt microwave/convection combination. Albano adds that under-the-counter drawer configurations are growing in popularity for microwaves, where they are less conspicuous and take up much less room. He also notes an increase in the popularity of induction cooktops ("It offers the performance of gas—it's as fast or faster than gas and as responsive in cooling off—with the easy clean up of electric") and the return of a modular platform that might combine two gas burners with two electric coils, or maybe a barbecue or steakhouse-style griddle. And new for dishwashers is the addition of a second, smaller 18-inch unit in a butler's pantry or wherever glassware is stored, a plus when entertaining. Finally, says Albano, every kitchen should include a wine-storage cooler for resale value. ☐



Refrigerator "columns," with units built into the wall, flank a wine-storage unit.