

## Focus on Kitchen and Bath

### -- Trends and New Products --

Housing trends have been affected by growing concerns over housing affordability and higher home heating and cooling costs. Although housing sales have slowed considerably, home improvement activities have continued, especially in kitchens and bathrooms. Economic concerns and rising energy costs, however, have caused some families to make compromises and focus more on actual needs, such as accessibility and environmentally friendly products with non-toxic, energy wise, water saving features.

### Is It the Time To Consider an Update?

If you are thinking about a possible kitchen or bathroom remodeling project, make a checklist of major and minor problems. Keep notes of the features you dislike and like the most. Look at both your actual needs and your budget as you think through the options. Here are a few questions to consider.

- Is there adequate space? Are you satisfied with the amount of storage space, floor space, and open area? Are you satisfied with the style, appearance, and placement of cabinets, appliances, or fixtures in the area?
- Are the kitchen and bathrooms located in logical areas of your home? Are the spaces designed in a logical way with good traffic flow through the area? Are the doors and windows located in the best place?
- Is the design appropriate for the number and ages of family members? For instance, you may need two cooking centers in the kitchen. If several people are getting ready for work and school each morning, you may need a second or third bathroom to accommodate everyone. Adding a second bath to a one-bath home also has good resale value.
- Are the appliances and fixtures dated? If so, they may be costing you money. For instance, new technological advances with dishwashers, disposals, and refrigerators could save you a considerable amount of money and may be well worth the investment. Purchasing a dishwasher with low-energy consumption, delay timer, and economy cycle or half-load button will result in saving water and money. Water conserving features with bathroom fixtures can save money as well as help the environment.
- Can everyone easily use your kitchen and bathroom areas? Universal design features help make these areas accessible to everyone regardless of size, age, or physical ability. Will you be able to use your kitchen safely as you get older? Can a visitor using crutches or a walker easily enter the bathroom and move around? Universal design can be included into any remodeling project. Or you can tackle projects one by one, such as replacing regular doorknobs with lever-style handles, removing thresholds between rooms, and adding better lighting.
- Do the kitchen and bathroom have a 1980s or earlier look? Do the colors and styles look dated? Is the counter showing nicks or burns? Are the cabinets looking drab even though you clean them thoroughly?

Some changes can update your home and protect your housing investment. They can also make your home

a better place for daily living. Basic changes may also help the resale value of your home since kitchens and bathrooms are two of the areas that buyers notice first.

## Housing Trends

Be aware of the housing trends in your area before making any changes in your home. The National Home Builders Association and other housing and design professionals have noticed the following changes in how people are viewing their homes and where they are placing priorities.

**Bigger is no longer better.** As costs rise for upkeep and heating and cooling costs, many people are rethinking their housing space needs. Residential architects report that home sizes are decreasing rather than increasing. Also, the volume of space, including ceiling heights, seems to be steadily decreasing over the past two years.

**More emphasis on how space is used.** More households are putting less focus on the *amount* of space in their homes and more focus on *how* that space is being used. The ease of accessibility around the home is combining with an emphasis on informal areas that have multiple functions. Many households have found that an improved use of existing space in their homes reduces the need for additional square footage. More emphasis on outdoor living areas helps to expand the indoor living areas.

**Green building and sustainable design is here to stay.** This area is growing rapidly, and the kitchen and bath industries are at the forefront of green design with new technologies and products. Many types of products are available to support the three basic principles of green design:

1. *Energy efficiency* often goes beyond local codes. Many green homes today are 50 percent more efficient than conventional homes, while zero energy homes are also being built across the country. Appliances and lighting are two areas to especially watch in kitchens and bathrooms. Look for energy efficient windows, washing machines, and dishwashers, as well as other appliances and lighting options.
2. *Resource conservation* is another principle that uses dwindling resources to their best use. Water is perhaps the most important resource to conserve. Dual flush toilets and water saving showers are just two examples of how new products save water. Use of rapidly renewable materials (such as bamboo flooring) and recycled materials are appearing in markets everywhere.
3. The third principle is indoor *air quality and healthy living environments*. As a general rule, selecting the least toxic materials is the best place to start, but that isn't always as simple as it appears. There are tradeoffs since few products pass every test, but making safety, durability, and resource conservation an important part of the process mix is an important step in the right direction. There are trade-offs to make in selecting the best option for each situation.

### Selecting Green Building and Household Products

There are several questions to consider.

- What risks will the material pose to people living in the house?
  - Was the material produced or harvested in the least disruptive manner possible?
- Can it be recycled at the end of its useful life?
- Will the application be durable?
- How much energy was used to make the product and how far did the product travel to reach your home?
- Will it offgas entirely before you are living with it in your home? People selecting green products must consider these questions and make the best decision for each situation.

**Accessibility designs and features are growing in importance.** More manufacturers are catering to baby boomers with new products that feature accessibility and ease of use while still offering lots of style. From dishwashers accessible from a wheelchair to cabinet drawers that open automatically, manufacturers are recognizing the importance of universal design. Homes are planned with wider hallways, fewer steps, and more single-floor design. Doors have lever handles, and faucets in kitchens and baths are often single lever and even electronic, hands-free designs. Not only are baby-boom consumers planning for their own retirement years, they are also concerned about aging parents or other relatives in their homes and also want to accommodate visitors who may have mobility issues.

**Technological influences and convenience make a difference in choices.** Consumers often want a high-tech kitchen or bathroom with the latest in electronics and technology. This affects many decisions regarding appliances, lighting, surfaces, cleaning methods, and more.

## Focus on Kitchens

The latest kitchen design trends are the result of current housing trends, changing consumer and family needs, social-economic influences, and technology.

### Five Fast Facts Affecting Kitchen Designs

Have your eating habits changed over the years? They have for many people. Here are some facts that food industry experts have been studying.

- People prefer meals they can make quickly and eat on the run. Latest studies show that about 44 percent of our weekday meals are now prepared in fewer than 30 minutes! Twelve percent of our meals include a frozen dish.
- Time is at a premium. As a result, more foods are frozen, ready to microwave, and often able to be eaten with one hand. Do you need more space for frozen food storage and preparation?
- More of us are recognizing the link between food and health. Heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes are directly affected by diet. As a result, many people are emphasizing fresh ingredients and cooking options such as steaming. This may affect storage and counter space for food preparation.
- Storage needs are changing. We like a greater variety of international foods, resulting in more food products and equipment to store them. Do you need more room for storing kitchen tools, spices, and special foods?
- Food safety demands have increased. As a result, there's more interest in such items as non-porous counter top and food-prep surfaces, more attention to clean-up methods when selecting materials, and greater interest in such items as water filters and purifiers. Long-wearing and easy-maintenance are key terms. Asking questions and looking at options may impact your choice of materials.

All of these facts have an impact on kitchen design, space use, and product choices. How many of these facts affect the way you use your kitchen area and your food preparation habits?

Here's what many consumers are wanting and adding to their kitchen spaces. One of the biggest trends is increased and stylish storage with everything having its place. Added pantry space is usually at the top of the list, but some opt to add an island that combines storage with extra work space. These areas can be custom designed or created from in-stock, ready-to-install cabinets and trim moldings to suit a wide range of budgets. Don't forget to plan for adequate, energy efficient lighting. Without it, the counter and island work

areas will lose some functional appeal.

Closely following storage is an increased popularity of upper-end appliances combining convenience and stylish good looks. The newest ovens and refrigerators on the market feature French-style doors, which take up less space when opened. They also give the kitchen a new and updated feel since the doors add a decorative touch to your appliances. Oven hoods are also making a comeback, creating a focus on the oven as the central part of the kitchen. Two-drawer dishwashers and power boil options on cooktops ease day-to-day cooking activities while maintaining the desired beauty and energy/water saving features.

Today's kitchen is used for more than cooking. It's also a family gathering place, work area, and entertainment spot. A growing number of people are including a computer center. This desk area can be used for Internet searches for recipes and email access, storing mail, financial records, shelving for cookbooks and telephone calls. Kids even do homework there while Mom or Dad is preparing a meal.

There is added focus on products used for countertops and backsplash areas. These are increasingly fashion areas in kitchens. The use of natural stone (granite, marble, stone) has risen significantly while concrete (or other nontraditional material) countertops have caught on only to a limited degree. Synthetic solid-surface countertops seem to be declining in popularity. Natural wood cabinets and drinking water filtration systems are also increasing in popularity.

## Focus on Bathrooms

Bathrooms have increased in number and size in homes but at a smaller rate than a year or two ago. In general, there is less emphasis on upper-end features and more emphasis on products designed for greater accessibility or sustainability.

### Fixtures Add More Than Function

**Large bathtubs and whirlpools.** Although declining in importance overall, extra large bathtubs and whirlpools are still featured in many luxurious bathrooms. However, they are costly and require a lot of space. There are over 400 different styles, shapes, and features of bathtubs, whirlpools, Roman tubs, bodyspa systems, and even soft bathtubs. Before purchasing, be sure to actually sit in the tub and try it out. How does it fit? Is it easy to get in and get out? Will it fit into the space intended?

Both features and placement of controls vary. For instance, the controls don't need to be located under a showerhead or at the end of the tub. Controls placed to one side add convenience and universal design appeal since they are easier to reach and adjust.

**Spa-like shower enclosures and multiple shower jets.** Separate, deluxe shower systems are another major trend. Users are able to get many of the same benefits that they would from a whirlpool tub, such as massaging body sprays and thermostat controls. In an effort to increase accessibility, walk-in showers without doors are increasing in popularity. Look, too, for water jets at multiple levels and larger, "rainforest" showerheads. Hand-held and adjustable showerheads are convenient for bathing, washing hair, and showering while seated and are increasing in use.

**Sinks.** A sink is not just a sink. It now makes an instant design statement. Look for above-counter sinks (vessel sinks) that serve as both a sink and an art statement, especially in powder rooms and guest baths. They have striking blends of bold color and unusual materials. Other sinks can be mounted above or below the countertop. Sinks can be wide and shallow or narrow and deep. Drains may be placed in the middle, to one side, or as a slot running through the middle of sink or to one end. To allow separate use, double-sink vanities or multiple vanities are more popular. Pedestal sinks and wall-hung sinks continue to gain popularity but eliminate under the counter storage space which is needed in some smaller bathrooms.

**Faucets and fittings.** Express your individuality through faucets and fittings. Design themes range from Colonial and rustic to contemporary and wide waterfall faucets. Chrome continues to dominate the faucet market with polished brass and stainless steel close behind. Two-toned metal finishes, 14-karat gold, and retractable or electronic (hands free) faucets are also available. Look for controls that are easy to grip and move, even with the push of a hand. (Many people prefer one control for adjusting water temperature rather than one each for cold and hot water.)

**Toilet and bidet.** Look for more artistic designs. Wall-hung fixtures make cleaning easier and look more contemporary, streamlined. Water conservation features are becoming more popular and are part of the trend toward green building and products.

## **A Touch of Luxury in Spa-Like Appointments**

**Heated tile floors.** The perfect bathroom needs a ceramic tile floor. Ceramic tiles provide the most artistic and beautiful improvement over any other type of bathroom floor, and they're easy to maintain, too. It's the best and most popular option on the market for residential bathroom and powder room flooring. Warm the look of cool tile flooring by selecting tile in warmer colors and adding rugs. Or select electric floor heating for a more luxurious bath.

For electric floor heating a thin electric floor heating system is installed under your bathroom tile. Costs vary from about \$600-to-\$800 for an average size bathroom. The system is controlled by a thermostat and will keep the floor at a comfortable 80 or 85 degrees. Thermostatically controlled, the heated floor will fill the room with soothing, floor-to-ceiling warmth a few hours before you get up, creating the feeling of a European spa.

**Heated towel racks.** After your bath, what's more comforting than a warm towel? The racks are easy to install. Towel warming drawers are another nice touch that are often installed in more luxurious bathrooms.

**Fog-free mirrors.** Why should you have to wait until the steam clears before you can see yourself in a mirror? These systems will slightly warm your mirror so that it remains clear throughout your shower or bath.

**Entertainment.** Stereo systems and television provide relaxing music and the latest news and weather reports. Wires are hidden in the wall. TV screens can be hidden from view only to be seen through a mirror when they are turned on. Exercise equipment in larger bathrooms helps keep you in shape and healthy.

**Other Accessories.** Medicine cabinets are mirrored inside and out and recessed. Instead of the old 14-inch x 18-inch size, they are now 24 inches by 40 inches. They can cover an entire wall and provide lots of storage space. Other personal touches include magnifying mirrors attached to the wall, layered lighting, built-in hairdryers, and even coffeemakers.

**Furniture.** With larger bathrooms, consider armoires for storage, chaise lounges for reading and relaxing, and vintage pieces as vanities. Cabinetry materials range from solid hardwood with a rich cherry finish to porcelain and stone.

## **Counter Tops and Finishing Materials**

Look for everything from stone, granite, matte textures, exotic woods, tumbled marble, limestone to glass, chrome and china in bathrooms. Combinations are popular and add interest. Countertops are being done in everything from solid surface and natural stone to glass and stainless steel. In fact designers are using stainless steel in everything from the sink to the medicine chest to the bathtub to shower walls and combining with natural stone to add warmth.

Glass tile is a favorite, often with combinations of glass and porcelain tiles for accents and borders. Glass block creates a space divider and adds privacy yet lets light through.

Check manufacturer instructions for installation and cleaning of these surfaces. Many of them require a special cleaner—no ammonia, citrus products, or harsh chemicals—to prevent the grout from being eaten away. It has to be a neutral cleaner, and grout must be resealed every 3-5 years. Stone surfaces must be sealed, too.

## Planning Changes

You can make many changes without major remodeling. However, if you decide to make some major changes in bathroom or kitchen space – changing or reinforcing walls, changing windows and doors, or improving/replacing wiring, plumbing and duct work – consult with professionals who can advise you on plans and costs. Before selecting professionals, check their business reputation with your mortgage officer, local housing authority, or the Better Business Bureau.

If consulting architects, contractors, certified kitchen and bathroom designers (CKD), kitchen planners, and interior designers, ask about their experience in remodeling kitchens or bathrooms before signing any contract. Select someone with whom you feel comfortable and who listens to your ideas. Have written agreements to indicate what will be done and how it will be done, what equipment and materials will be used, how materials will be finished, work schedule plans, compliance with any applicable codes, and the method of payment. In some cases, the agreement will say what won't be done or what the owner's responsibility is.

### Cautions:

- Don't over-improve for your neighborhood.
- Don't remodel with the only intent a quick dollar return through a home sale; remodel with what you actually need and will use.
- Plan for future needs, not just immediate needs.
- Plan carefully before starting. Thorough planning and following of remodeling progress will help to keep costs in line with your original budget.
- One place to cut costs—top of the line appliances are popular but they also have many features that you may not use. Buy good quality but not necessarily all the bells and whistles.
- If you have a limited budget for your kitchen or bathroom project, concentrate more on countertops, faucets, and sinks. Another lower-cost feature is layered lighting that gives lighting options. Moving plumbing and windows is more expensive than adding either new lighting fixtures and dimmer switches or upscale faucets and sinks.
- Use neutral colors for backgrounds and add color by way of accessories and surfaces that are easier and less expensive to change (painted walls, window treatments, etc.).

## For More Information on Kitchen and Bathroom Design

For more information about kitchen and bath design and products, contact your local county Extension office, read specialty kitchen and bathroom design books and magazines, talk to a certified kitchen and bathroom planner, or visit the following on-line Web sources.

- **National Kitchen and Bath Association.**  
This Web site has tips and how-to articles, specifications for kitchen and bathroom planning, product trends, and useful brochures to order or download.  
<http://www.nkba.org/>
- **The Kohler Company.**  
This Web site showcases products and design trends for kitchens and bathrooms. Includes videos, product specifications, and design tools.

<http://www.us.kohler.com/index.jsp>

- **Center for Real Life Kitchen Designs.**

This Web site was researched and developed by Virginia Tech design faculty to include not only trends and specifications for kitchen design but also to incorporate universal design features into different styles of kitchens. The Web site include links to industry, kitchen design guidelines and specifications, and photos of features of their model kitchens.

[http://www.ahrm.vt.edu/Dept/center\\_resources.html](http://www.ahrm.vt.edu/Dept/center_resources.html)

- **Home Appliance Information.**

Web site developed by University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service that provides lists of manufacturer Web sites, professional organizations, and information related to large and small home appliances.

<http://www.ca.uky.edu/hes/fcs/HomeAppliances/Index.html>

- **Kitchen and Bath Design News.**

A Web site giving the latest information on kitchen and bath design trends, products, videos, and technological developments.

<http://www.kbdn.net/>

- **Better Homes & Gardens.**

This Web site gives lots of decorating and home improvement ideas. Many photos and budget-wise tips for improving your kitchen and bathroom.

<http://www.bhg.com/>

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