

What's hot in the kitchen



With bold splashes of colour, bursts of shiny metals (think chrome), and design artistry, today's kitchens have become trend-wise tributes to all things culinary. By Adrienne Dyer

IS IT JUST ME or has kitchen design gone from “beautiful” to “wow” almost overnight? Gloss and colour are back in a big way. From glass upper-cabinet doors framed in chrome to Kohler sinks sporting splashy colours like Piccadilly Yellow and Palermo Blue, there's a whole lot of passionate personal expression going on in what was once simply a room where people made food. The kitchen evolution is a design revolution. Not bad for the hardest working room in the house.

This kitchen design fervour cannot be boxed in, so the walls have got to go, says Claire McKeachie, associate designer at Jason Good Custom Cabinets. Sure, it's nice to have a casual eating area right in the kitchen and a larger dining space for entertaining. But there's no need to put walls around everything.

By strategically knocking down a wall or two, says McKeachie, it's possible to double your kitchen size, yet still have room for a larger dining area. An open, airy kitchen invites everyone to come on in and revel in the bright, colourful space.

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In place of the eating nook, you can install a central island with seating, so people can slide up a barstool and use all that great counter space to dine, socialize, do crafts, or get some homework done. Many people install a food prep sink in the island, or tuck the dishwasher underneath, freeing up space elsewhere for a double wall oven or extra cupboard space.

A larger, open kitchen doesn't necessarily mean an organized one, however, so pay careful attention to the all-important work triangle — cook-top, sink, and refrigerator — to ensure the layout makes sense.

People forget how important the planning stages of a kitchen are, according to Maria Volk and Devon Anderson of Innovative Kitchens & Bath. “If you put the time and effort in before, it will be reflected in the end result.”

McKeachie agrees, adding that professionals are adept at spotting design possibilities the owner hadn't considered, especially when it comes to the best use of space. “Often, it is a first-time kitchen design renovation process for a person, so they have never made decisions like this before, and they're not totally sure about how the process goes. Once I get a sense of someone's style, I try to look at things from their perspective, and then guide them into discovering what they like.”

In this Jason Good Custom Cabinet kitchen designed by Claire McKeachie, drawer handles on all the cabinetry keep the look of the lower lacquer cabinetry cohesive, while the use of chrome and clear glass doors on the upper cabinets reduces visual weight. The perimeter countertop of Caesarstone quartz features an undermount sink and incorporates a 36" Bluestar gas range.



White subway tile adds to the light, airy feel in this Bruce Wilkin-designed kitchen with cabinets by Jason Good Custom Cabinets. Wilkin worked with the client to achieve a furniture-like feel to the cabinetry in this Shaker-style kitchen.

This kitchen by Urbana Kitchens features oak cabinets and Bianco Antico granite countertops. Large, high gloss subway tiles give lots of reflective light.



In this kitchen from Jason Good Custom Cabinets, designed by Claire McKeachie and Jenny Martin Design, bin pull-style handles on the Shaker-style cabinetry impart a charming country feel, complimented by upper cabinetry with oversized crown mouldings to emphasize the vertical space.

OUT OF THE WOODWORK

Ros Sheridan, who owns Splinters Millworks Inc. with her cabinet-maker husband David, says the minimalist look — flat slab doors, hidden hardware, and clean, linear layouts — is big right now in cabinetry. But minimalist hardly means plain.

The wow factor is in the wood. Wood-grain pattern play has gone wild in the kitchen, and dark espresso finishes have given way to lighter, more natural finishes that show off the waves, stripes, bubbles, and feathers that are making such a statement in kitchen design. From classic cherry, rift-cut oak, maple, and alder to exotic woods like rosewood, teak, and mahogany, there is an endless variety in grain pattern and colour, which, says Sheridan, “is very exciting to us as cabinet makers!”

or exotic tiger and zebra woods, pair particularly well with contemporary designs, especially when cabinet makers flip the grain horizontally, or mix vertical and horizontal patterns. For a recent makeover of a smaller kitchen, McKeachie and Jason Good finished minimalist cabinets with walnut in a horizontal wood grain, selecting stainless steel appliances, an aqua-coloured glass backsplash, and a quartz countertop reminiscent of white milk glass. Every element, including the tightly packed wood grain, is proportionate to the size of the room. The overall effect is clean, sophisticated and uplifting.

“Don’t forget,” says McKeachie, “that each tree can be cut in a different direction to give a specific type of grain pattern.” And although environmental costs are always a concern with exotic wood species, she says, “standard woods like poplar are being made to resemble exotic species in the form of a

vener. We’re always exploring new cabinet materials, and are eager to use more of the eco-friendly options that are flowing into the market.”

Traditional styles are still popular too, says Sheridan. “Victoria has some pretty grand houses!” Again, the wood makes all the difference. Houses steeped in old-world charm call for more traditional cabinets crafted from rich woods like cherry, rosewood, or oak. For all-out luxury, crotch-mahogany door panels on a marble-topped island make a show-stopping centrepiece in a stately kitchen.

Whether contemporary or traditional, Sheridan says a simple Shaker door profile suits most properties and never goes out of fashion. That means you can vary the look by switching out accessories whenever a new mood strikes, without a huge investment. And all our experts agree: the white kitchen is timeless. A fresh coat

of gloss paint may be all you need to bring your kitchen up to date.

COUNTERTOP COUTURE

I could stare at a milky, white quartz countertop all day long. Polished concrete pleases my aesthetic sensibilities in ways I just can’t explain. But when I imagine my kitchen bejewelled in azure countertops made from crushed Bombay Sapphire Gin bottles ... swoon.

Did you know such a thing existed? It’s called Environite, and it’s made in Victoria by Vittrium Building Products, using smashed-up, recycled glass bottles from all your favourite beverages, including beer bottles from Phillips Brewing Company. This eco-friendly product comes in all sorts of speckled colours, including amber, deep blue, bottle-green, and crisp black and white; the colours vary according to the regional palette of recycled materials



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available. Plus, Environite is non-porous, so it never needs to be sealed or otherwise fiddled with to maintain its durability. How smashing! You can find Environite at Slegg Lumber, Urbana Kitchens, or Ceanesse Kitchens.

“There is another great new product called Neolith being carried at Stone Age Marble & Granite,” says Volk. The high-tech new porcelain product with scratch and stain resistant durability can be used as a countertop, backsplash, wall feature and more, and there are many different textures and colours. It’s 100-per-cent recyclable, too.

Granite, recently the market hottie, turns out to be less durable than people thought, and carries an environmental price tag that has sent consumers in search of something better. Quartz gets high marks; it doesn’t off-gas and is non-porous, so doesn’t harbour bacteria or need to be sealed. Quartz comes in a wide variety of colours, and you can opt for eco-friendly products like engineered quartz made by Caesarstone (available at Stone Age Marble & Granite), partly made of recycled materials.

“Concrete and glass countertops are definitely alternatives to granite,” says McKeachie. “Concrete tends to have a specific style, which lends itself best to modern designs.” Marble — especially

from local quarries — is popular this year, too. “Its natural beauty is impossible to replicate, although it is a softer material.”

If durability is an issue, she suggests mixing in a little marble here and there on surfaces that aren’t high use. “Marble slabs have become a hot backsplash material. Especially going up the wall behind a stainless hood fan. It’s stunning!”

THE DETAILS ADD POLISH

Once upon a time, a faucet was just a faucet. Microwaves and dishwashers had little visual flair. And sinks? They pretty much came in stainless steel or, well, stainless steel.

Now, everything in the kitchen is totally haute, right down to the pot scrubber (yes, I’m talking about those ridiculously pretty fabric-look ones from Waverly). That gleaming piece of metal poised above the sink isn’t just a faucet — it’s a work of art.

Touch sensor faucets like the Arbour with MotionSense by Moen are indispensable in a busy kitchen, while the articulating, jointed Karbon faucet by Kohler offers sleek function for contemporary styles.

“I love the new colour finishes available for hardware, like antique nickel, polished, and oil rubbed bronze,” says McKeachie. “Chrome is back with all of its shine,” she adds. McKeachie and Good recently used it to frame upper glass cabinet doors and

An island, done in walnut with a black walnut stain, adds visual weight to the center of this kitchen by Ceanesse Kitchens Ltd. The brackets were custom made to match the posts on the outside deck. The lighter cabinets are teak with a natural finish.

add a little kick to the feet of the kitchen island. Paired with high-impact black lower cabinets, white quartz and marble countertops, and a couple of hits of red, the room’s energy and bold style knocks your socks off.

Even if you prefer a more neutral, classic look, don’t be afraid to add a punch of colour somewhere unexpected. Kohler’s new sink collection (including four special edition



Jonathan Adler’s Annapolis Navy sink designed for Kohler.



The Karbon Kohler faucet’s multiple, movable joints allow you to position and lock water flow exactly where you need it.

colours created by Jonathan Adler) comes in colours that go with every design scheme. Imagine a bold, yellow apron-front sink in an all-white kitchen! Or a brilliant turquoise double sink paired with retro appliances and a black-and-white floor.

If your dishes are a little nervous about jumping in with zany colours like Greenwich Green, Roussillon Red or Annapolis Navy, the softer tones of Vapour Pink, Tea Green, and Sea Salt still offer plenty of scope for your imagination.

APPLIANCE APPEAL

Appliances, too, have gone high design and high tech (think refrigerators that keep track of their own contents!). “More and more of our clients are using dishwasher drawers which can be turned on individually or both at the same time in order to reduce water and electricity usage,” says Volk.

Refrigerators, microwaves, and freezers are also available in drawer form, saving space and your back — you can install them at a convenient height. “Speed ovens are becoming more common and are a really neat restaurant feature,” Volk adds. “We are seeing more people integrate their appliances into their cabinetry so you do not see them — seamless style.”

Appliances help personalize both the functionality and the look of your kitchen. Personally, I long for a Northstar retro-look



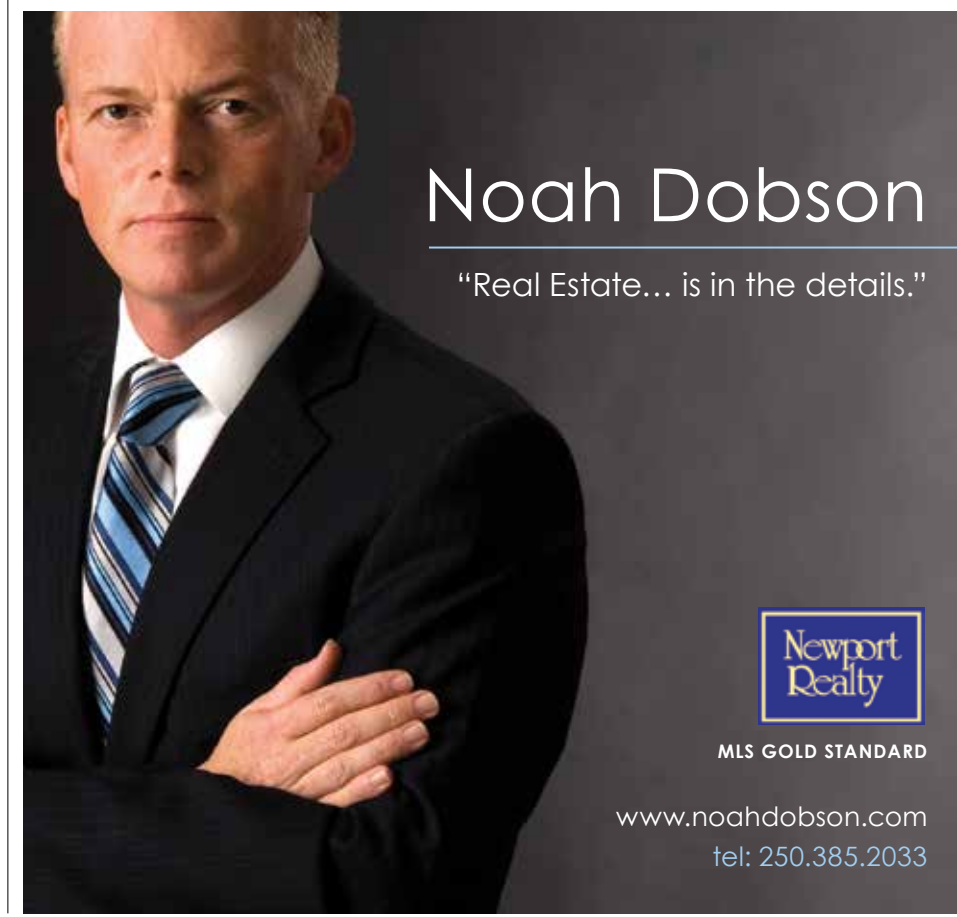
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Horizontal grain-matched teak seamlessly incorporates the fridge panels, which have continuous stainless steel handles, in this Jason Good Custom Cabinets kitchen by Claire McKeachie. The upper cabinetry uses lift-up hardware.



This bold, freestanding Bluestar Heritage Classic range features a pro-style gas range, raised griddle, convection oven, and ceramic infrared broiler. Available in 190 colours and three textures.

range in Robin's Egg bBlue, but stainless appliances remain a popular choice. Paired with high-gloss chrome accents in a clean-lined kitchen with cabinets faced with a horizontal wood grain — you've got a look that's totally now!

Even so, not everyone loves stainless steel. *Consumer Reports* says the supremacy of stainless steel is being challenged by a return to white. Maytag's Ice collection features the "white-ice" look with a glossy sheen that almost imitates the look of glass. And don't rule out colour either. "BlueStar gas ranges, wall ovens, and hoods are awesome because there are 190 colours available," says McKeachie, who adds that "amazing ranges" flaunt restaurant-quality features like large-capacity ovens, simmer burners, and precision heat controls.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Contemporary kitchen design is all about personal expression, so don't get so carried away thinking about resale value that you forget to add your own flair.

"Individual style is very important when you are planning a kitchen you are going to live in for a while, according to Volk and Anderson. "More and more people are concerned with resale value and forget to make it their own or add in their own flair."

So invest in "good bones" — quality cabinetry, a functional layout, and colours that work with changeable accents — and your kitchen will still look fabulous decades down the road. It's the centre of the house, really, and it should be as beautiful as it is functional. ::

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