



■ Stainless steel gives a very contemporary look to this kitchen by Randall Mars Architects of McLean. Some designers are surprised at how Washingtonians have embraced modern kitchens.

Going Modern

Contemporary kitchens are increasingly popular. Here's how designers are making them look great. **BY MARILYN DICKEY**

In Washington, where traditional homes are so popular, some architects and designers are surprised at the number of people who have been asking for more contemporary kitchens.

"Kitchen trends seem to move slowly," says designer Jerry Weed, owner of Kitchen and Bath Studios in Bethesda. "But I was amazed at the end of last year, when I reviewed what we sold, and I sold more contemporary than traditional."

"Contemporary has come a long way just in the past year," agrees Bethesda designer Jennifer Gilmer of Jennifer Gilmer

Kitchen & Bath.

Not that classic kitchens are history, says Larry Dobbs of Creative Kitchens in Rockville: "The Georgian-style home with a traditional white kitchen is never going out of style in this area."

Contemporary style includes cabinets with slab doors and dark, exotic veneers. The single item that sold the most at Kitchen and Bath Studios last year was very dark mocha-brown cabinetry.

Kitchens are taking on a more masculine appearance, says Weed. There's a move toward thicker countertops, and he's starting



View of Washington City, Sachse, 1867

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■ The availability of multiple appliances—such as the two ovens in this design by Rockville's Creative Kitchens—allows a new kind of kitchen workflow.

to see cabinet doors, usually three-quarters of an inch thick, bumped up to an inch. Shaker-style cabinets have wider stiles and rails—the raised horizontal and vertical boards that form a rectangle at the outer edge of a cabinet door.

Weed attributes the trend to the fact

that men are spending more time in the kitchen—and not necessarily as cooks. The kitchen is the hub for the family, and it's where guests gravitate during parties.

Many kitchens are designed with entertaining in mind. "We try to make them look

less like kitchens," says DC architect Robert Cole of Cole Prévost. "We see them as social rooms. You don't have all of these hanging pots and pans. People want less clutter."

Appliance "garages" hide toasters and coffeemakers, and large refrigerators are camouflaged to look like furniture.

Even TVs and sound systems are being incorporated into the kitchen. "People spend so much time there," says Steve Lawlor of Lawlor Architects in the District. "We do a lot with bookshelves and entertainment systems." Flat-screen TVs may be exposed or hidden behind a cabinet door. Lawlor recently did a kitchen with five speakers, a subwoofer, and a remote control all integrated with the cable TV.

GO WITH THE WORKFLOW

Drawers are no longer just for silverware and plastic wrap. Pull one open and you may find a refrigerator, freezer, dishwasher, wine chiller, or pots and pans. Drawers can conceal microwaves—though they usually aren't as tall as traditional microwaves, and some homeowners complain that it's hard to heat a baby bottle in them.

The availability of multiple sinks and appliances has made it possible to design a different kind of workflow in the kitchen. The traditional work triangle—refrigerator, sink, and range—has given way to vari-



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ous small appliances placed strategically in different work or entertainment areas.

"Rather than someone getting a 48-inch refrigerator/freezer, they may get a 36-inch 'all refrigerator' and then go with freezer drawers," says Weed. "The drawers look like a base cabinet, 27 inches wide. You can put wood panels on them, and you can't even tell they're a freezer."

That can be a good way to tailor the refrigerator and freezer space to suit your needs. "Most people are looking for more fresh-food storage," says Weed. "People are tending away from frozen foods."

Refrigerator drawers can be put in places they're most likely to be needed, with sodas or juice where kids hang out and fresh produce near prep areas.

Similarly, having several sinks can save steps in a very large kitchen. In addition to the main sink, the kitchen may have a small one on the island, which can double as a place for chilling wine during a party, and a narrow sink in the prep area, which sends food scraps down to the garbage disposal.

"We're not trying to incorporate everything into one space," says Cole. Dry storage may be in one part of the kitchen and cold storage in another; in a space primarily for cooking, pots and pans would be kept nearby in drawers. "If you're cooking and want another pan, you don't want to step away from the stove."

But even with the space organized into logical work areas, very large kitchens can be inefficient when just one or two people are cooking.

James J. Lynch of F.A. McGonegal created a 20-by-21-foot kitchen for a couple who had just retired. They wanted a space large enough to accommodate their children, grandchildren, and in-laws, but most of the time it would be just the two of them.

"It's almost a smaller kitchen within the larger kitchen that allows one person to work comfortably in the space," Lynch says. The basic appliances—cooktop, microwave, dishwasher, sink, refrigerator—are in one small area. Across the peninsula are a large sink, second dishwasher, and double convection oven for when a larger group is there.

"As the population ages, you'll see people not wanting to run all over the room," he says. "And it's only two, three, four, five times a year when all the relatives come over."

TWO-TONE KITCHENS

To add interest to a large kitchen, some designers are using different finishes or materials on cabinets in different parts of the room, says DC designer Annie Elliott of Bossy Color.

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wood enables you to insert some color into your kitchen," Elliott says. "This isn't as risky as it sounds if you choose mellow colors that you've used elsewhere in your house—blue or green, for example. A combination of white cabinets and natural wood can also be lovely."

Architect Chris Snowber says some clients have wanted their island countertops to be a different material than the other counters in the kitchen. In a recent renovation he used a volcanic stone called Pyrolave in most of the kitchen but wood on the island.

HOW GREEN IS IT?

Environmentally friendly products continue to draw attention. For Larry Dobbs at Creative Kitchens, "green" products have become a big part of business, and for interested customers, he can recommend cabinet and countertop lines that use sustainable production techniques. Wood-Mode makes top-of-the-line cabinetry and follows a variety of environmentally protective practices, such as recycling sawdust and wood scrap to make fuel that heats and cools its factory.

Architect Steve Lawlor also has found a lot of interest in earth-friendly products, including bamboo floors, paints with low levels of volatile compounds, and countertops made of recycled materials such as glass. For home additions, he tries to situ-



■ A recent trend is to combine more than one countertop material in a kitchen. This one was designed by Hamilton Snowber Architects of DC.

ate the room to take greatest advantage of natural light, then uses low-voltage and fluorescent lights for nighttime.

Going green can be expensive—but not always. Prices on some products have dropped while others have risen, he says.

Bamboo floors are much less expensive than they used to be, but prices on Energy Star appliances—which are rated by the Department of Energy as being particularly efficient—have gone up because they're in demand. However, over the life of the appliance, they still save the homeowner money, says Lawlor.

He cautions that some claims of green products are questionable: "Right now people are slapping 'green' on everything because it sells—but a lot of it is branding and marketing."

Erin H. Siarey, sales manager at Custom Crafters in Kensington, says a lot of people ask about green materials, but "they aren't necessarily buying green yet because they can't afford it."

In this economy, homeowners are trying to save money in a variety of ways, says Falls Church designer Dee David: "I'm finding that people still want to do projects, but they're cutting back—the same as in the early '90s. They're using less-expensive cabinets, fewer accessories, and less-expensive appliances.

"They may want cabinets that go to the ceiling, but that's something that is several thousand dollars more—not just the cabinetry costs but the extra molding and extra installation of molding." So, she says, they're making do with less: "fewer frills."



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