

THE CUSTOM KITCHEN

For those with a taste for the finer things in life, there's no better showcase than a high-end custom kitchen

Story by Karen Millard

Marlene Miller has some words of advice for those planning a custom-designed kitchen. "Use the professionals, use the professionals!" she says, laughing. The kitchen in the home Miller shares with her husband and two sons has undergone a breathtaking reincarnation. Still, she cheerfully admits she had no idea what she wanted when she began the project.

Lynn Ekdahl, a designer at Redl World Class Kitchens, sympathizes. "Kitchens are something you don't shop for everyday, so people aren't as up to date on them. They're not aware of what's out there and what's available."

What's available is a dizzying diversity of options. Whether you are renovating your 25 year old original or creating a new installation for your dream house, the overall look of your custom kitchen will reflect one of two major styles: traditional or contemporary.

Traditionally styled cabinets often feature lacquered surfaces in white, cream or maple. The light tones tend to be more popular in renovations of mid-seventies homes since they fit that style better than either new constructions or character home renos. Wood finishes may be distressed or embellished with simulated worm holes or crackling for an antiques or heritage look.

"With traditional kitchens you can get quite elaborate with onlays and corbels, pilasters and rope mouldings," Ekdahl says. "You can also get elaborate hood canopies above the cooking surface."

Kerry Rendek, a Professional Kitchen and Bath Planner for Superior Millwork in Saskatoon, estimates that on the prairies, traditional designs account for approximately 75% of installations. Even in larger centres such as Vancouver the traditional look has held sway. The experts predict this may soon change. "All the design magazines have been showing a sleeker look for some time now," notes Ken Carter of Redl Kitchen Studios in Vancouver. "We're so far the other way, towards corbels and finials, we can't help but rebel."

The sleek look is the hallmark of contemporary cabinet designs. Flat panel doors gain richness and depth by the use of solid

colours, darker tones and high-gloss finishes. New, exotic wood veneers such as mottle makore or anigre lend visual interest. Cabinet designs often incorporate materials such as stainless steel or brushed chrome. Ekdahl points to a bank of stainless steel drawer fronts in a birch cabinet. The cool grey metal offers a refreshing counterpoint to the warmth of the wood. It attracts those who love the traditional look of wood but long for a trendier feel. "It's a popular look everywhere because it's a cross between the two," she says.

A contemporary look can also be softened by a design that incorporates sweeping curves. "You don't want to do too many," Ekdahl cautions, saying that a space-age appearance may result. Since curves are more expensive to manufacture, they're not likely to show up in the do-it-yourself market.

This built-in coffee brewing system not only brews the perfect cup of coffee, espresso or cappuccino, it also grinds the beans, froths the milk and dispenses exactly the right amount into your cup.

Modern designs need never look outdated. "The different wood tones are going to look good five years from now, ten years from now. A natural tone of a cherry or a natural tone of an oak is going to be timeless," Rendek explains.

New design features are showing up in both traditional and contemporary styles. Base cabinets, for example, are sprouting legs reminiscent of the freestanding furniture in European kitchens. Contemporary cabinets stand tall on long, slim legs; traditional ones rest on turned posts or bun feet. One nifty product is a series of stainless steel storage bins with ventilated lids integrated into the base cabinet behind the sink. Flush with the counter, the bins conceal pot scrubs and rubber gloves. A coordinating row of knife slots further frees up counter space.

Other features are helping maximize storage space. Pantries with rollout trays continue to gain in popularity, as do pot and pan drawers. "We do those pretty much on a daily basis," Rendek says.

"The large drawers are wonderful. When you pull them out you've got instant access to everything, as opposed to climbing on your hands and knees to the back of the cabinet."

With new hardware technology to support their weight, drawers have become larger and wider. Now, instead of having your utensils stored in separate drawers or, worse, cluttering up the counter, you can store and organize them all in a single space. Deeper cabinets above the refrigerator are also attracting interest. "If you go with a 24" deep upper cabinet, it's a great place for saving your bowls and your larger things," Rendek notes. A technique known as staggering can create a variety of dimensions in height and depth. "Another feature that's quite nice is under cabinet lighting. Having light coming in front of you where you're working, instead of over your shoulder, is wonderful."

For counters, solid surfacing remains the popular choice. So does granite, but quartz is an attractive and durable alternative. If you live in a character home, consider using marble for a softer look more in harmony with an older home.

Technology is doing its bit to transform the high-end kitchen. Larry Westby of Miele Bosch Kitchen Centre shows off a built-in coffee brewing system that not only brews the perfect cup of coffee, espresso or cappuccino, but also grinds the beans, froths the milk and dispenses exactly the right amount into your cup.

A state of the art refrigerator can be monitoring your family's habits, adjusting for the number of times the door opens and for how long each time, while a sophisticated new oven can make cooking a breeze. "This is an oven that knows how to cook. It has a fully electronic brain," Westby says.

In the end, Ekdahl cautions her clients not to be unduly influenced by popular design trends. "A high-end kitchen is something you'll have for 20 years," she notes. "It's a little bit about what's in style, but it's more about what you like and what you're comfortable with." 🍷

MARTINI RECIPE

THE BLIND DATE

1oz Smirnoff Orange twist vodka

1oz Peach Liqueur

1oz each of Cranberry and Pineapple juice

Shake well over ice.

Pour through a spectacular hand sculpted Ice block.

Serve in a chilled martini glass.

