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THE ELEVATED KITCHEN: TIPS AND TRENDS FOR A MODERN KITCHEN

Story by Danielle Porter

Alba Stone

The heart of the home deserves a touch of brilliance, and if you're planning a kitchen refresh, you won't want to miss these tips and trends for 2024. Design + Decor met with local leading experts and asked about the latest and greatest in appliances, flooring, countertops and more to help elevate your culinary experience.

Appliances

D+D: What are the latest, most popular trends in kitchen design and gadgets?

Fred Albano | Albano Appliance

From a design perspective, contemporary is back. Sleek cooktops, wall ovens—they're making a comeback. Kitchen workstations are also big, with cutting boards and colanders. They go from prep to serving space to sink with ease.

Tony Aitoro | Aitoro Appliance

We're seeing a lot of interest in the monogram pizza oven and hearth ovens. They bring a new atmosphere to kitchens and an element of interest.

D+D: What is the latest in beverage stations?

Fred Albano | Albano Appliance

We've been doing a lot with Zip Water—it's out of Australia, and it does hot water, chilled water and even sparkling. It's an independent faucet next to your primary sink faucet, with those integral solutions.

Tony Aitoro | Aitoro Appliance

Zip Water has a lot of traction. It provides our client with instant, filtered boiling, chilled or sparkling water. It has finishes that work with every-

thing, and offers an elevated experience for our clients.

D+D: Who are the leading manufacturers for appliances with app connectivity? What features do you look for?

Fred Albano | Albano Appliance

We're seeing app-enabled appliances grow in popularity. Anything, including wall ovens and cooktops, can be Wi-Fi enabled and monitored. No one manufacturer truly stands out yet, but we really like the models that keep safety in mind—like the wall ovens and stoves with integral cameras, so you can keep an eye on things when you're not present.

D+D: Is the microwave a thing of the past? What does the future hold?

Fred Albano | Albano Appliance

In our humble opinion, if you aren't putting a steam oven in your kitchen, you're doing yourself a disservice. We're seeing a movement away from microwaves; they dehydrate your food. A steam oven puts the moisture back in. Some models also operate as convection ovens—it's a really brilliant solution. If we do see microwaves, the drawer or drop-down door models have taken over a bulk of the market.

Tony Aitoro | Aitoro Appliance

While steam ovens have increased in popularity because many of them have a broiler function, we're still seeing microwaves in most kitchens.

D+D: Where else do clients use multifunction tap faucets besides the kitchen?

Fred Albano | Albano Appliance

We're installing these in master bedrooms and family rooms quite often.



Hydotap Arc Plus

They eliminate plastic bottles and even the glass Perrier bottles because of the sparkling option.

Tony Aitoro | Aitoro Appliance

We're seeing these everywhere—home offices, theater and bonus rooms, and even master bedrooms. There's really no place it can't be incorporated. While it requires plumbing to get to it, it takes up minimal space, which gives it the ultimate versatility in terms of where you put it.

D+D: We're hearing a lot about wood-fired cooktops and stoves. Are you seeing these rise in popularity?

Alyce Wittus | Wittus

These stoves are quite popular. We see them requested a lot for older demographics, but also in younger families who want to experiment with them. Clients often say they not only make cooking feel like a more natural experience compared to a traditional cooktop, but the food tastes better. They're great in the kitchen, but also work really well in a kitchen-and-dining combo space. They become the center point of gathering—people can't help but gravitate to the warmth (and food) of the cookstoves.

D+D: Are you seeing any trends within this niche product category?

Alyce Wittus | Wittus

A contemporary aesthetic is in. In fact, we don't carry some of the more traditional or old-fashioned styles because people want something that fits with the aesthetic of their kitchen, which right now is trending contemporary.



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D+D: If someone wants a wood-fired cooktop or stove in their kitchen, what should they know about maintenance?

Alyce Wittus | Wittus

It's certainly easier to handle than a traditional wood fireplace, and it has relatively smooth surfaces, making the cookstove easily cleanable. In fact, there is a trick for cleaning the ceramic glass that we like to share. Take a paper towel with a little warm water on it, dip it in the soot, then rub that on the glass. It cleans it immediately! We recommend doing that once a week to keep things looking crisp. We also tell people, though it might seem counterintuitive, to leave a couple inches of ash on the floor of the fireplace to keep the fire brick from getting too hot—this also makes it easier to start the fire.

D+D: Is it easy to get the hang of using a wood-fired cooktop or stove, operationally?

Alyce Wittus | Wittus

It takes a little getting used to because, instead of just selecting a temperature, you're controlling it with the fire. That being said, there is an integral thermometer that you use to help regulate everything.

Countertops

D+D: What are the best low-maintenance countertops for kitchens?

Agim Thaqi | Alba Stone

Quartz or porcelain are great options, especially for people with families and children. Both of these have great anti-staining properties, which makes for a long-lasting aesthetic finish!



The Hudson Company

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Interstate Lakeland + Lumber

D+D: What nature-inspired tones are you seeing in countertops?

Agim Thaqi | Alba Stone

We're seeing a lot of blues and greens in natural stones. The blues tie into the ocean vibe, and the green is earthy. Each client has his or her individual vision they are going for, but these two are popular.

D+D: What aesthetic styles and materials are popular?

Agim Thaqi | Alba Stone

Marble is timeless, particularly in a honed or matte finish. We're also seeing Belvedere quartzite, White Vermont leathered marble, Taj Mahal leathered quartzite, and Jet Mist leathered granite rise in popularity. These are great for both indoors and outdoors, giving a consistent aesthetic between the spaces.

Hardware

D+D: What finish is timeless for kitchen hardware?

Ben Kahan | Interstate Lakeland + Lumber

Brushed bronze finishes are forever timeless—they add warmth and elegance to any aesthetic. Polished nickel is another great finish, and we find that any bronze-based metal alloy with applied finishes looks authentically aged—which never goes out of style.

D+D: What are some trends in kitchen hardware that can elevate a kitchen?

Ben Kahan | Interstate Lakeland + Lumber

In terms of finish, mixed metals—like a warm brass with black—give a sophisticated and elegant look, with a touch of warmth. Polished nickel also mixes well with brasses or black to create some beautiful combinations; when you add in some unique textures, you can create a unique aesthetic that's still on-trend. We love backplates behind pulls and knobs for a dramatic effect, as well as vintage details and shapes. This brings an heirloom quality to cabinetry. As always, there is still a client base interested in a simple, clean and even minimalist aesthetic. It does not matter which direction people go—above all else, it's important to test it out and know how it functions and feels in your hand.

D+D: Would you suggest mixing pulls and knobs? Why?

Ben Kahan | Interstate Lakeland + Lumber

Mixing pulls and knobs is all about proportion and ratio of pull to drawer or cabinet size. Utilizing the same style and finish in both pulls and knobs creates a harmony and interest throughout, ultimately elevating the entire finished look of the cabinets.



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Flooring

D+D: How do you determine the shade of the floor, based on the cabinet?

Jamie Hammel | The Hudson Company

There is no hard-and-fast rule for this, but we like to consider the harmony and contrast in the kitchen as a whole. The cabinets and floor should complement one another—we try not to have them so close so it's a mismatch, but rather create visual interest through the combination. Whether that is through a light floor with richly-hued cabinets, or a warmer or cooler color in the floor with colorful cabinetry, that comes down to each individual design aesthetic.

D+D: What color tones or aesthetics are popular?

Jamie Hammel | The Hudson Company

In addition to seeing a close to the reign of minimalism, there seems to be a desire for offbeat or historic colors—think Farrow & Ball. For a long time, very dark or very light floors for bold, graphic statement were in vogue, but recently we're seeing clients opt for warmer-hued flooring in the middle range of colors.

D+D: What are your best cleaning and maintenance tips?

Jamie Hammel | The Hudson Company

Wood floors are easier to maintain than people realize—a dust mop, a soft bristle broom or a vacuum with bristle brush remove debris before damp mopping. When damp mopping, it's important to know how the floors were finished. For floors finished with polyurethane, we recommend the Bona Hardwood Floor Cleaner. For floors finished in oil, we recommend the WOCA Natural Soap Floor Cleaner.

D+D: Is there any real disadvantage to wood flooring in the kitchen?



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Jamie Hammel | The Hudson Company

Big-picture wood floors do require care, so it's a commitment. On the day-to-day use and overall aesthetics, there really aren't any disadvantages. They work well with a variety of aesthetics and can be repaired and refinished, too, giving them a long life.

D+D: Which is better for the kitchen: hardwood or engineered wood?

Jamie Hammel | The Hudson Company

Both options work well in a kitchen without major difference between the two. Surprisingly, it depends more on the conditions underneath the floor. Engineered flooring can be installed directly on a concrete slab, but a solid floor must be fastened to a plywood subfloor.

Resources:

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