

Fine Living: Designers Serve Up Kitchen Trends

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UPDATING YOUR kitchen? If so, check out what three top Marin kitchen design experts - Sandra Bird of Sandra Bird Designs in Larkspur, Rosemarie Halajian of Kitchens & More and Greg Nelson of Lamperti Contracting & Design, both in San Rafael - have to say about current trends.

Classic white is a perennial favorite, but ...

Nelson: "The whites create a great palette to build the rest of the design and finishes from." Still, there's a trend in painted finishes toward "organic" colors, especially greens. "Heavy distressing has fallen out of favor but a light 'lived-in' distressing is still popular." So are the eco-friendly exotic veneers in a contemporary style.

Bird: Classic white never goes out of style. You can replace a countertop or change pulls and it looks fresh again. We are designing a number of green-painted cabinets in sage, jute, seedling, pod and citrus creams. Very friendly, fresh garden colors."

Halajian: "I love classic white. There's another look now - the 'natural' or 'organic' kitchen: the lines are clean, the colors are from nature, and it looks 'green,' even if it's not a completely 'green' kitchen."

Beyond the basics, what are favorite kitchen conveniences?

Bird: "A number of clients are including Miele built-in espresso makers and Miele speed ovens (a convection oven, microwave and broiler combination), wine coolers and steam ovens."

Halajian: It's not really new but a small baking/toaster oven plugged into a base cabinet on a rollout shelf saves energy and warms up things quickly."

Nelson: "An air switch for your disposal. A simple and inexpensive item that sits along side the faucet and controls your disposal. No more worry about operating an electrical switch around water or turning on the disposal instead of the overhead light."

What about surfaces and flooring?

Halajian: "I love glass in all its forms - sheets of glass and glass tiles. Flooring materials that are so crazy beautiful are the large format (24 by 24 and 24 by 36) porcelain tiles with a metallic kind of glaze. They almost look like concrete. Wood is a great flooring material, but find the FSC-certified wood, and, for indoor environmental quality, I prefer low or no-VOC water-based sealers."

Nelson: "Porcelain tile is my favorite. It's classic, durable and beautiful. With modern sealing materials the grout problems of the past are almost non-existent."

"There are all sorts of good pre-finished wood floors available these days, but I prefer an old-fashioned finish in place type. The costs are the same, but you have the ability to adjust the color to your exact preference as opposed to selecting from the manufacturer's options."

Bird: "We use a lot of stone. There is a great deal of variety at the moment and a number of new finishes such as antiquing which gives the stone an older look. Caesar stone is a green product that is becoming more popular and we're also specifying some lava based stones."

How is the economy affecting kitchen remodeling projects?

Nelson: "People are taking a longer view these days. In the past, with hot markets, there was a desire for flashy details that put a high value on resale. Today, people seem more focused on what they want rather than what might sell in the near future. They want to make sure they will still enjoy their new space five, 10 or even 20 years from now."

Bird: "Clients are trying to work within the building envelope, which definitely keeps the cost down although clients are not cutting on appliances, stone and cabinetry."

Halajian: "Some clients perceive that it's a good time to move ahead with their projects while keeping a close watch on their budget; others are waiting and others are doing small projects. Theoretically, if one waits until the economy is solid, others will too, which leads to increased demand and costs for remodeling goods and service. So, remodel now and continually. It's the wise thing to do."

What's your best advice for clients concerned about the economy?

Bird: "Clients are almost more concerned about green and sustainability than about budget."

Halajian: "Start the planning and design phase, create it on paper, get clear about what you really want, and soon you'll be creating it in your home. We don't recommend compromising on areas in the design that will affect how well the kitchen functions or how well the space works for your family."

Nelson: "People are more willing to reduce the scope of their project than to sacrifice anything when it comes to the quality of the products or work. It helps to look at this as an investment not an expense. It's similar to an old car that you may love that is showing it's age. There comes a time when you need to replace it, and you have to decide, do I really need the GPS and leather seats or will I be happy with the base model?"

What green choices are you recommending?

Halajian: "As an economist, designer, and LEED AP, I'd like to see consumer demand for "green without compromise" soar. Your health is the most important thing, so I like the materials that go into a space to contribute to clean, breathable air. Paints, finishes, cabinet materials are easily available in low or no-VOC versions. I love operable windows, lots of ventilation, and lights that operate on different switches."

Nelson: "All of our cabinet lines use materials and processes that marry the latest green technologies without sacrificing quality. Bamboo products have become a big part the green movement. Recycled products such as glass composite counters and recycled timbers can add to the aesthetic and have an extremely low environmental impact."

Bird: "We specify a lot of formaldehyde-free cabinetry and are seeing more bamboo. Caesar stone and Vetrazzo make great countertops. We also specify Blue Slide Tile; it's made in Point Reyes with very earth-friendly materials and comes in great colors."

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