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APRIL 2019 \$4.95



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Hot Stuff

10 TRENDS TO CONSIDER FOR TODAY'S KITCHEN

BY MICHELLE BODAK ACRI

Here's the way we see it: the kitchen is the center of the home. It's where recipes are shared, meals are cooked, confidences are whispered, impromptu dance contests are staged, schedules are coordinated ... and that's just counting the hours before 9 a.m. Shouldn't this epicenter of our homes where everyone (save the teenager sulking in his/her room) spends many of their waking hours thus shine in terms of both form and function for the good of all concerned? Of course it should — and that's where we come in. Here we share insights from kitchen experts around the state on what's hot for kitchens right now, *and* how to incorporate these looks into your own. We're pretty excited about what they have to share (long live the "layered look!"), and think you will be, too. One question: Does this score us an invitation to dinner?

NEED COUNTERS?

Get quartz. "Quartz is everyone's darling right now," says Mary Jo Peterson of Mary Jo Peterson Inc. in Brookfield. The rock-solid engineered surface, a blend of between 90 and 95 percent natural quartz aggregate with pigments and polymer resins, has come a long way in the past five years," says Kyong Agapiou, a kitchen designer at Bender in New Haven. Though long celebrated for being nonporous, scratch- and stain-resistant and thus virtually maintenance-free, quartz countertops "didn't used to have much character," Agapiou says. In fact, they looked a bit "plastic," she admits — but not anymore. "So many colors, so many textures," says Agapiou, who recommends American-made Cambria for its "sparkle and depth," (gorgeous Skara Brae in the Marble Collection features translucent olive-green veins against a bone-white marbled backdrop) as well as new offerings in Caesarstone's Metropolitan Collection (check out the auburn, chestnut and copper in Excava) that combine the "industrial-chic" look of concrete with the easy-peasy maintenance of quartz.



THE PERFECT LITTLE BLACK ...

... cabinet? That's right! Black is arguably the "it" color for 2019, according to our friends at HGTV, and that includes sultry matte-black cabinetry making its mark on our kitchens. Different? Of course, but "stunning," says Agapiou, who calls matte black a "neutral you can do anything with." That being said, "This is the 'Land of Steady Habits,'" says Christine Donner of Christine Donner Kitchen Design in Norwalk, and if Nutmeggers are going to look beyond the white cabinetry we hold so dear, "it's much more likely to be a gray or perhaps blue." You don't necessarily have to go "all in" with black. "Do matte black in a more conservative way — like on an island," suggests Pamela Ciccarello of Covenant Kitchens & Baths in Westbrook. After all, mixing woods and cabinet finishes, resulting in two and three-color kitchens, also happens to be quite 2019. Baby steps, people, baby steps.



LET'S KEEP IT CLEAN, FOLKS

"Less is more in the kitchen business today," says Steve Langley, owner of Connecticut Kitchen Design in Milford. Indeed, "clean lines" and a "streamlined look," Peterson says, are "part of the lifestyle trend toward simplifying." It's not about "banking up as many cabinets as you can," Langley says. "It's about negative space," he adds — and a soulful place to retreat to when life threatens to overwhelm. Think in terms of integrated hardware, appliances both big and small hidden carefully away, pared-back cabinetry, sleek yet subtle range hoods, a curated and very personal approach to the chosen few collectibles on display, finely crafted quality over quantity and no muss, no fuss. In many ways, Langley says, "a kitchen doesn't look so much like a kitchen anymore."

MIXED METALS

Who says the metals in your kitchen need to match? "Hardware, lighting and faucets can all be different," says Ciccarello, and, in fact, they should be, otherwise it all becomes what Ciccarello calls "a little too cookie cutter." Need options? Karen Warner, designer of Dean Cabinetry in Bolton and president of the Southern New England chapter of the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA), witnessed the return of polished brass (surprise!) and "all kinds of brushed golds" to the 2019 Kitchen & Bath Industry Show (KBIS) held in Las Vegas in February. Both iron and matte black, which Peterson calls "the new hero," are also "going strong," Ciccarello adds, and then there's weathered bronze, burnished brass, polished nickel ... and can't you just picture the gleam of chrome hardware contrasted with copper lighting? Indeed, "It looks warmer when your metals aren't the same," Ciccarello says. "Everything harmonizes, but is different, and gives the impression that it's all been carefully collected over time. It's almost a curated look."



STORAGE WARS

Donner calls it the "open-floor plan effect." Everyone (and we do mean everyone) wants a "free and open feel to the kitchen," Donner says. So much so that it's become "cliché" to line our walls with cabinets. There's just one problem: Where, oh where, are we going to put all our stuff? Time to get creative. "Kitchen cabinetry used to be fairly standard, with the occasional add-on to fit specific needs," says Gail Bolling of The Kitchen Company in North Haven. In the past few years, however, Bolling says, "innovative storage solutions have been building momentum, and in 2019 we see built-in trash pullouts, roll-out drawers, spice pull-outs, 'smart' drawers, cutlery dividers and other organizational tools becoming kitchen-renovation staples." Indeed, "We're asking our base cabinets to do much more than they ever have before," Donner says. Just "make sure you don't overlook the corners," reminds Warner — and we're not talkin' 'bout your momma's lazy Susan. "There are some fantastic base corner cabinet systems out there," Warner says. A favorite: the Rev-A-Shelf "Cloud" pullout, which floats on a bottom-mount, smooth-glide track system and is available in both single and two-tier systems.



HIGHER AND HIGHER

When is a backsplash not just a backsplash? “When it becomes a focal point of the room,” Peterson says. Backsplashes that go from counter height straight to the ceiling make “a statement,” Peterson says, and are a great way to “add drama to the kitchen.” The “latest and greatest,” says Ana Sirota, a kitchen designer at Kitchens by Gedney in Madison, are “modern and sleek,” whether utilizing a full slab of back-painted glass or geometric tiles in shapes as diverse as hexagon or diamond, herringbone or fish scale (“everything but subway tile,” Sirota says). There’s also a big interest in what Sirota calls the “handcrafted look,” pointing to the beauties designed by Connecticut’s own Bantam Tileworks, each made by hand in the studio using stoneware clay and multiple layers of color to add a sense of depth and texture. Yes, “it’s all about texture,” says Ciccarello (more on that later), who’s also a fan of the wood-look porcelain tiles at the Porcelanosa Greenwich showroom. Forest Acero is part of the Spanish tile manufacturer’s new Forest Parker eco-friendly collection. Bonus: It’s created using more than 95 percent recycled content.



OPEN-SHELF POLICY

Remember we talked about the “mile-high” backsplashes? Open shelves are *the* thing being put on them. Whether metal, glass or textured wood in kitchens that are industrial, traditional, transitional or contemporary, open shelves (in lieu of upper cabinets) “create a strong horizontal line that helps turn a wall into a focal point,” Peterson says. What goes on these shelves for the world to see, she says, “speaks to our desire to simplify living.” In other words, unless those mismatched coffee cups “spark joy” (thank you, Marie Kondo) they’re not going to make the cut. Yes, “some do use open shelving for more ‘utilitarian’ purposes,” Bender’s Agapiou says, but for most it’s more about displaying collections — especially handmade pieces that echo the current preference for all things artisan. (No need to tell anyone where you hid the coffee cups.)

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Barn board to line an island, barn beams for a ceiling or for those open shelves, a barn door reimagined as a sliding panel for a pantry, rough-hewn shiplap for an accent wall ... working reclaimed wood into your kitchen design is one trend that’s “still going strong,” Agapiou says. Why? Well, for starters, “it’s very Connecticut,” Agapiou says — and where do you think said wood salvaged from centuries-old barns and outbuildings, vintage farmhouses and factories came from? It brings history to a home and ties authenticity into a design, Agapiou says, not to mention the stories using reclaimed wood allows a homeowner to tell! “Wood is something we’re always going to love,” Ciccarello says. The fact that it’s reclaimed wood “adds additional warmth.” (Insider shopping tip: Mongers Market, a 70,000-plus-square-foot wonderland of industrial, architectural, salvaged and reclaimed objects set in a former Bridgeport factory, has miles of reclaimed lumber to consider, much of it from Connecticut.)



THE LAYERED LOOK

It’s not just about color and shape when it comes to designing a kitchen,” Donner says. “It’s about texture.” Contrasting textures, in fact. “Don’t fall into the trap of wanting everything ‘hard and shiny,’” Donner says. Today’s kitchens are about mixing materials and sheens (remember those matte black cabinets?), hues and dimensions. Think in terms of “layers,” Peterson suggests. Layers of texture in what Peterson calls “earthy, leafy, nature-inspired tones of green, rust and coral [echoing the fact that the Pantone Color of the Year for 2019 is warm and nurturing ‘Living Coral’] and mindful, calming blues, suit the need we have to connect with nature,” Peterson says. At the same time, they help us “disconnect” from a world dominated by screens. Even layering lighting, which Warner reports has “taken off” in recent years, adds to the feel, whether accent, ambient, decorative or task. (And, yes, we would like the latest LED strips inside *all* our cabinets!)



FASHION STATEMENT

Would you believe us if we told you that one of Sirota’s favorite recently completed kitchens features avocado-green appliances? ‘Tis true! “And they’re stunning!” Sirota says. “Consumers welcome a ‘pop’ of color in the kitchen,” she says (and, yes, that includes retro colors), and are “becoming more open” to the idea of using appliances to accomplish this goal. Pro-style appliance brand BlueStar, for example, offers more than 750 colors and finishes, can customize colors (heck, they can match the hue of your favorite nail polish!), and, as evidenced at KBIS 2019, can even take an image or design of your choosing and print it on a range, hood or refrigerator. And then there’s Smeg. The Italian appliance manufacturer known for its way-cool retro appliance styles kicked it up a notch or 12 at KBIS this year with the U.S. introduction of its bold Dolce & Gabbana-designed Carretto range, hood and fridge. How to put this? There’s color and then there’s COLOR. These appliances are “like nothing you’ve ever seen before,” Warner says. We’re talkin’ “tremendous, vibrant, ‘Day of the Dead’ kind of color” that serves as a “counterbalance” to all that’s “sleek and smooth, clean and simple” in the kitchen, Warner says. We may be in love. 🗨️

