

# Hot Topic 3: Great Kitchens - Continued

## Kitchen Remodeling Basics - Part IV:

### What Style Do I Want?

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Up until now I talked about cabinet construction. Think of the past articles being similar to how clothing is made. In the same way that style relates to clothing, I will relate cabinets to your kitchen and other rooms. Style really covers two general categories. One category being the way they're used and the other the way they look.

The way they look falls into two general areas and can be a combination of both. Fitted kitchens, as it relates to cabinets, is what I grew up with and is what is most familiar to most of us. Cabinets appear uniform in the way they look and are attached to each other to create counter top space, areas for appliances and sinks, and to provide storage for kitchen usages. Center islands and peninsulas have become popular to provide eating areas, food preparation, mail and additional storage. It is quite common to develop a family information area that includes telephone, desk, mail handling, message board and in today's world, a place for a computer. Recently cabinets of the same outward appearance may have various sections in a different finish or color to denote an area.

I have received requests that have included everything from a garden window, a green house with an indoor water feature, and a bird aviary with a water fountain to be integrated into kitchen areas. It all comes down to your imagination and budget as to what your kitchen will include.

Unfitted kitchens is something new that is really old. When we step back into the past, many of the furnishings that were used in a kitchen were detached from each other. Stoves with ovens,

refrigerators, and even the kitchen sink stood by themselves. Some of the furniture had names like pie safes, pewter cupboard, corner cupboard, break-front, hunt board, step-back cupboard, sideboard, and pantry. In addition, there were tables to cut on, serve food on, and to prepare or stage serving the meal. Some of the terms used were side tables and butcher block tables. Some of these terms applied to both the kitchen and dining room furnishings because both areas were part of one room and shared similar usage. It is not unusual to have homeowners use antique or reproduction furniture or shelf units to augment kitchen storage. I have also worked with clients to construct cabinets and shelving in place for the same purpose. Many of the constructions that can be added are within the skill level of a trim (finish) carpenter or an experienced DIYer that has the right tools.

There are homeowners who are opting for a return to the past, which had integrated functionally designed space into a center of family living. Very often the homeowners, with the help of a designer, combine fitted and unfitted kitchen components to meet their objectives, functionality, and the aesthetics that they desire. I see this most often in commercial or retro kitchens. In some cases, fitted kitchen cabinets are designed to imitate unfitted kitchens through the use of millwork accessories and a change in color for cabinets with a specific use. A good example of this would be the base cabinet under a stove top and a wooden hood cover over it of the same color, but different from the rest of the cabinets. This makes this area visually separate from the rest of the cabinetry. The same could hold true for a center island that combined dining and food preparation or a grouping of base cabinets and glass door wall units imitating the look of a dish hutch. Even the counter top could be a different color with a different edge treatment to further the visual separation.

Your choice of styles are many today and I'll probably miss more than one of them. Here's my list, starting with the most common: Colonial, Craftsman, Country, Contemporary, Classic (Traditional), Cocina (Mediterranean), Continental (European). Some of the less common are 1950's Retro, Art Deco



(1920's-1930's style), Asian (Oriental), and Commercial (Utility). I invite my blog visitors to send me the ones that I missed.

To determine the style that appeals to you, I suggest that you look at pictures from magazines, manufacturer's brochures, and books. One of the ways to obtain brochures is to request them directly from the manufacturer by phone (or internet) or visit the big box home improvement stores or local cabinet retailers. When you see things you like, cut them out and file them away so that you know where you found the picture and what you liked about it. These pictures should also contain any features that you may be interested in. There are many books about kitchen design and at the end of all of my kitchen articles I'll give you a partial list of ones that I recommend to my clients. Style is such a large topic that no one book can cover it, but I suggest you began by looking at a book titled "The Best of Today's Kitchens Design" by Tina Skinner (published by Schiffer Publishing). It is a photo album of kitchens and organized by style, making it a great place to start. You may find this in your library and I recently replaced a worn copy from a book store even though it was published in 2007. When you think you know what you like, then go out to look and touch the real thing.

The last two subjects I want to touch on is compact kitchen design and universal kitchen design. Compact kitchens are very rarely discussed, but should be. These kitchens can be the main kitchen in a small house, condominium, town house, or apartment. They can also



serve as a second kitchen in a finished basement, including one that in only partially underground and exits at ground level to the back yard. They may be part of the facilities dedicated for live-in help or orthodox religious laws. In some cases, we are seeing a return to times when grandparents, parents, and children live in the same home. The causes of this may be cultural, the necessity of child care for two working parents, to facilitate the care of aging parents, economics, or for a rather simple reason that these people love each other and enjoy this life style. However the need for privacy within these multi-generational families of an aged or younger generation couple and adults could necessitate having a separate food preparation and eating area. Because you are dealing with a small kitchen in limited space, don't drop the ball by not spending enough time to develop your objectives through the understanding of its use and purpose. Take additional consideration to its present and future use by your family. If increasing value to your home is important, factor in the marketability of the design to the future buyer as it relates to the cost of the project. Don't accept people telling you that all of the above cannot be part of your objectives when facing a compact kitchen project. Builders, real estate investors, and my clients with coaching make money on these projects or add more value to their homes than they spend and still get what they want.

Universal Design is becoming more and more a recognized term. I've understood the basics of this since I became involved in building furniture and cabinets. My very first project that began my education was building a bar for a basement refreshment area in my first house. It had to seat adults, children, my parents, and guests. I needed to determine counter height, under the counter sink height, seating height, and much more. These are also some of the things that are taken into consideration in Universal Design. Before it was called Universal Design, I use to call it Accommodating Design. I still think my term is more descriptive. Perhaps a good term is one I coined about ten or fifteen years ago for specific homes: "Ergonomically Designed for All Ages and Human Conditions".

The physical and mental capabilities of all people are different, change, and sometimes are challenged for some more than others. Because people are different, kitchens and other areas of the home can be designed to meet their needs as well as people who have few if any challenges. The impediment of

a resident's abilities may be caused by birth, illness, aging, an accident, or simply the differences in people statue and size. Universal Design's imperative is to consider the entire needs of the occupants in the designing of all aspects of the home. By facilitating the removal of present and future obstacles that could interfere with day to day activities, all the occupants have a more fulfilled life.

In many kitchens that I have seen in production and custom houses, I have found very stylish kitchens that failed to conform to a common sense approach to meeting the physical needs of the users. This made it more difficult for food preparation, cooking, and reaching stored items. These kitchens were places just waiting for the accidents that were built in to happen. There are many facets of Universal Design that can be incorporated into every kitchen at very little cost and others at a moderate cost. The public's recognition of the need for Universal Design comes primarily from the implementation of handicap regulations in our building codes and an increasing larger and older aging population. I am pointing this out because I believe that remodeled or new homes that were designed with Universal features built into them will have greater value now and in the future.

What are important Universal Design elements that should be incorporated into a kitchen? Homes change ownership many times, but there are more things that multi-generational families and the individuals that make them up have in common than they have different. Retain this statement as the measuring stick as I go through part of my list. Countertops should be installed at vary-

ing heights dependent on tasks. Some tasks should be allowed to be preformed while seated, others without being bent over while standing. If there are no convenient countertops near a cook top or wall oven, a pull out heat resistant surface makes sense. Work areas should be designed to eliminate extra steps. Consideration to the placement and height of electrical switches as well as appliances are important for physical comfort as well as safety. The universal reach range of 15 to 48 inches from the floor should be dedicated to such tasks as storing often used dishes, dinnerware, pots, and heavy items so that they're easily within reach. Accessible design elements that allow a wheel chair to move around will also allow others to move around and work in the kitchen safely.

I haven't gone into the depth of detail that the subject of Universal Design deserves, but I hope you will. There is much written on the subject and I think you may want to implement some of the design elements into your kitchen to make its use more enjoyable for you. One of the elements that I try to incorporate in every project is to use doors and archways with wider widths throughout a project to make passage easier. This little cost concern during construction can save a lot of money in case a occupant becomes physically challenged or even temporarily ill. Sometimes a little What If planning can be a wonderful thing.

May the Coach be with you,  
Coach Jerry

Our next article will be by a guest author about: "How a kitchen cabinet design is created"

