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photos VALERIE WILCOX

If you are here to read about the latest kitchen trends from the experts, then you are either a foodie who aspires to have the perfect space in which to create delicious meals for family and friends to swoon over, or you are the family or that friend who is waiting to swoon...

With the cost-of-living climbing, and people in the last four years spending more time at home, a well-planned, clean, functional and sexy kitchen is a must. Plus, as residential suite sizes in new builds shrink, kitchen spaces are changing, too. In some condos, conventional ranges – a stove and oven combo – are not even included.

To help guide you on how to best design your kitchen space in 2024, we brought three of our experts in to share what they are advising their clients in kitchen design. Kitchen designer, Jimmy Zoras (Distinctive by Design) interior designer, Laura Thornton (Thornton Interiors) and builder Jim Cunningham (Eurodale Design + Build), answer five questions to help you re-think the most critical space in your home.



Beverage centres
and coffee bars

JIM CUNNINGHAM

1| What is the single most critical thing you try to design, or convince clients to include in their kitchens?

Laura Thornton (LT): When it comes to designing kitchens, our top priority is stressing the importance of the planning phase. Working with an interior designer who asks all the right questions ensures you won't have any regrets once your kitchen is complete. It's not just about fancy features, although those are lovely and welcomed; the key is creating a well-thought-out, high-functioning space that caters to all your needs. After all, a kitchen should be easy to use and have everything at your fingertips, all while looking fabulous.

Jim Cunningham (JC): Beverage centres and coffee bars. They are truly functional and keep your refrigerator allocated to food storage. It also makes entertaining a little classier, since your guests aren't reaching beside your leftover sardine sandwich to grab some prosecco!

Jimmy Zoras (JZ): I always recommend drawers, pull-out drawers, recycling and compost bins, accessible corner cabinet hardware and lighting as a few areas to consider in design.





LAURA THORNTON

Upper cabinetry is trending out

2| What do you feel is the out-going or passé trend (style or function-based element) – or that you want to see go by the wayside?

LT: The reliance on upper cabinetry is trending out. The current shift is toward more open spaces that do away with this traditional style of storage, primarily because of its limited capacity. Instead, we suggest redistributing the contents of these cabinets to alternative storage solutions, such as pantry cabinets, a butler's pantry, or, where space permits, a walk-in pantry. The elimination of upper cabinetry opens up opportunities to add more interior design elements, infusing more personality into the kitchen. Examples of this include the integration of wall sconces, oversized and decorative hood fan covers, and the inclusion of floating shelves to showcase beautiful items otherwise hidden behind cabinet doors. This departure from conventional upper cabinetry signifies a bold step toward a more modern, functional and visually appealing kitchen aesthetic.

JC: We don't see white cabinetry as much (but I feel like we always say this and yet it continues to dominate the spaces as a whole), nor brushed nickel hardware. More wood finishes and dark hardware are being introduced.

JZ: Traditional kitchens are not very popular these days as people are looking for more clean lines and functionality. Clean and modern is definitely dominating the design aesthetic of late.



3| What is the next 'hot' thing that will find its way into new kitchen designs for 2024 and beyond?

LT: The emerging kitchen trend for 2024 is in the painted kitchen, specifically shifting from shades of white into muted creams, beige and natural tones. This design choice creates a kitchen with a subdued, calm, and inviting ambience. The integration of various textures plays a pivotal role in achieving this, with the strategic use of stone, brick, white oak, and the inclusion of marble and other natural stone slabs. Blending these elements adds a touch of sophistication, but also balances tranquility with a timeless elegance. This trend aligns with a desire for an understated yet welcoming kitchen space that is attractive to both the trendsetter and the classicist.

JC: Black counters are coming back, and if you have tall ceilings, a library ladder to access those super-high uppers, while otherwise looking stylish on the sidelines. Lastly, bi-fold or swing-style pocket doors that conceal when closed and tuck out of the way when open. We use them to hide counter appliances, laundry facilities and generally anything you want out of sight, but have unimpeded access to at some point.

JZ: Newer items are servo-drive cabinets doors and drawers that you just touch to open or close, do not need hardware and typically are used with contemporary kitchen designs.

4| Did the pandemic change the kitchen in any meaningful way?

LT: In the wake of the pandemic, the kitchen landscape has undergone a notable transformation, taking on a more versatile and communal role. There is a heightened emphasis on the concept of comfort. As such, the importance of comfort and functionality emerge as defining elements in contemporary kitchen design.

The move toward more comfort extends to the choice of everything from counter stools to dining chairs, as clients increasingly prioritize seating options that offer ease and relaxation. The evolution reflects a departure from the rushed, minute-long meals of the past, to a new-found appreciation for extended periods spent in the company of family and guests.

The importance of the traditional formal dining room has waned, with kitchens now becoming the central meeting place within a home. The key consideration becomes a question of how long one can comfortably occupy a chair or stool in these new roles. This shift underscores the growing necessity for kitchen furniture to rival the comfort found in the broader living spaces of the home.

The kitchen island, once primarily used as a culinary workspace, has evolved into a multi-functional hub for gathering, conversation, homework, and remote work on laptops or iPads. As well, the role of lighting in the kitchen has gained significance, with the integration of dimmable fixtures and strategically placed pot lighting to create varying moods, moving beyond the traditional glare of high-task kitchen functions.

As kitchens assume a more versatile and communal role, the importance of comfort and functionality emerge as a defining elements in contemporary kitchen design.

JC: Sure, these spaces do get more use than before the pandemic. In my own home, ours doubles for a desk for homework/office and kitchen at the same time. Sometimes, some peanut butter and jam gets submitted with the assignment!

JZ: The pandemic didn't change the kitchen in any way other than people suddenly found themselves using their kitchen more and discovered that their space was either functional or not functional for their needs.



Change counters,
backsplash and *handles*

JIMMY ZORAS

5| Best budget bang for your buck to update a kitchen without a full reno?

LT: The straightforward answer lies in prioritizing quality. While quality products often carry a higher price tag, the investment pays dividends over time through the extended lifespan of the product. Despite the initial allure of budget-friendly alternatives during a kitchen renovation, the long-term difference is palpable in a space as heavily frequented as the kitchen. Opting for quality plumbing, cabinet hardware and millwork ensures the durability required to withstand the rigours of daily use, making it a sound investment that stands the test of time. Over the course of 10 years, a high-quality product will endure and also provides adaptability with changing lighting, cabinet hardware, and plumbing elements, breathing new life into your kitchen. In contrast, opting for lower-quality alternatives may yield short-term savings, but will often prove insufficient in longevity and fail to stand up to the demands of a well-utilized kitchen space.

JC: Referred to as a "swap-the-top" – resurfacing your cabinets with new counters and updating the backsplash with a new slab really changes the look and feel of the entire space, without completely remodelling it.

JZ: Best bang for your money is changing counters, backsplash and handles.



The last word

While kitchens are always changing, they are now more multi-faceted spaces than ever. With housing sizes changing for a large majority of people living in urban centres, the kitchen has become more open and visible, and not tucked away from the rest of the home. Built-in banquettes, eat-in kitchens, desk spaces and multi-use elements are allowing families the ability to congregate in

one main room to remain connected to each other, versus ducking away into private rooms with their personal devices. Housing affordability is also shaping these spaces. For example, in many bachelor condos, the kitchen is open to the combined family room and bedroom, so concealing storage, prep items and appliances come into play, which can make the suggestions from the design team key, including functional

storage, hardware selection, texture, colour and tone integration, as well as multi-use islands or millwork elements.

When planning your own kitchen in a new home or renovation, remember there is real value in working with a professional to design and build the space. Function is as important as form, and finding a professional renovator is a great place to start looking for help.



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