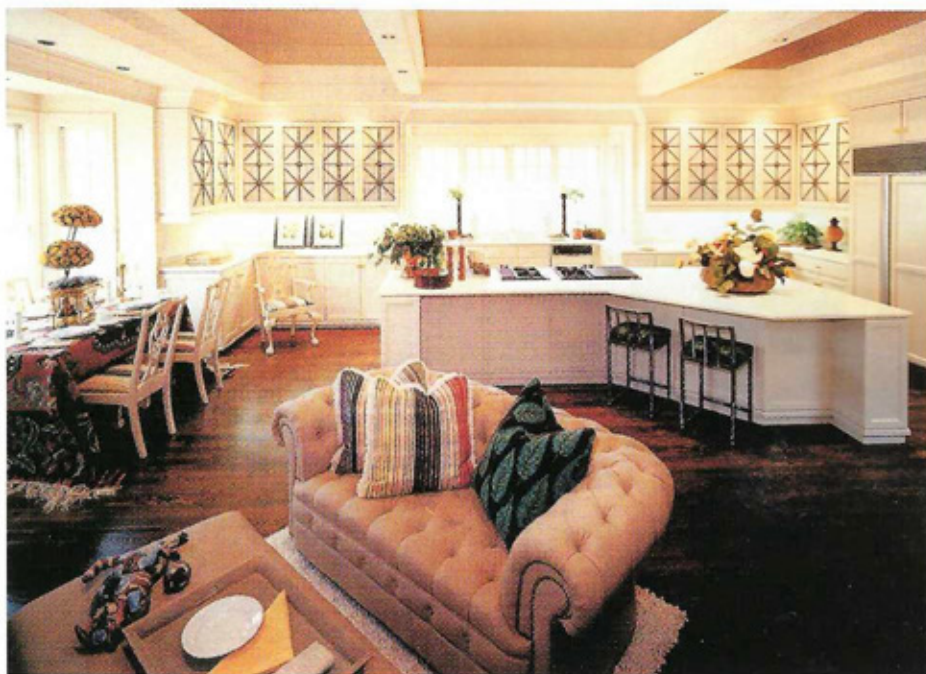


The Beat Goes On

Ever evolving with the latest technologies, the kitchen remains the heart of the home.

By Darcy Lehner



If anatomical terms were used to describe a house, the kitchen would undoubtedly be the heart.

With kitchen design as a high priority, many builders partner with professional firms to offer a complete array of interior design services to discriminating home buyers. "The kitchen is a top priority on our customer's list," states Chris Hebert, sales and marketing director for C.V. Perry Builders. "There are so many features they consider 'must-haves.'"

A partnership with Jae Company Kitchens and Baths gives Perry customers the option of working with a professional to personalize their new kitchen. Melissa Baker, design consultant for the company, sees a new style evolving that is making kitchens more utilitarian. "As the center of the home, owners want a kitchen to serve many purposes. It's not only a cooking center but also a place for family and guests to congregate," explains Baker.

An example of the multiple use mindset is reflected in the new-style kitchen island. The larger multi-tier island is a popular choice for its versatility. With a raised eating bar level, seating can be accommodated away from the food prep area. When stoves are incorporated into islands, the extra level helps keep children away from the heat while still keeping them handy for mom and dad.

The advent of multiple cooks in the kitchen is also affecting design. "We listen to the customer's wish list and ask a lot of questions," states Charlene Henderson, certified kitchen designer and cabinet product manager for Specialty Building Products. "If there is more than one cook in the household, we design

Soft furniture and a quality designed kitchen blend nicely to accommodate larger gatherings.

Photos courtesy Bob Webb Builders, Inc.

An island with seating for two and a dining table that seats six are both part of the kitchen. Photo courtesy Grand Design Group

wider walkways and larger prep areas to make dual cooking easier."

Henderson noted other kitchen design trends as well. "There is a move toward incorporating the kitchen into the great room or adding a hearth space into the design," she says. "This helps create a flow from one room to another."

Other subtle changes include interest in a "Tuscany" look featuring heavy molding, wall glazing and light, painted colors. Countertops have taken on new life with the mixing of a surface such as Dupont Corian with granite or other natural stone.

Scott Shively, principal of Truberry Group, believes his company's partnership with Specialty Building Products is a great advantage for their customers. "Specialty provides an enormous array of choices and expertise. Since most designs start with the kitchen, it makes sense to use resources like this." Shively says kitchens are more important to the home buyer than ever before. "The kitchen has become a living area for many families. We know if the kitchen makes the buyer happy, the rest of the house will as well."

Does the adage of "bigger is better" apply when describing today's kitchen? Becky Webb, treasurer of Bob Webb Builders, Inc., would agree, but with a slight modification. "Bigger and better describe our buyers," she explains. Webb cites upgraded cabinetry, top-of-the-line appliances, multiple ovens and decorative lighting as some of the most commonly requested features. She notes that detail is key for many buyers. Higher ceilings with crown molding, soffits and irregular cabinet heights all add to a custom look.

"Many of our kitchens incorporate furniture and built-ins," says Robert A. Webb, president of Bob Webb Builders. "Many of our customers have a family computer or a small television in a kitchen desk area, but stored in beautiful cabinetry that has a furniture style."

Grand DesignGroup owner Pam Yost acknowledges the importance of kitchen design for the home buyer. "The kitchen is truly the heartbeat of the house," she says. She agrees that the addition of hearth rooms is a trend that has added new dimensions to kitchen use. "Hearth rooms contain interesting architectural features that add to the overall ambiance," Yost explains. "They tend to soften the kitchen area and serve as a nook to read the paper or unwind. A fireplace combined with a

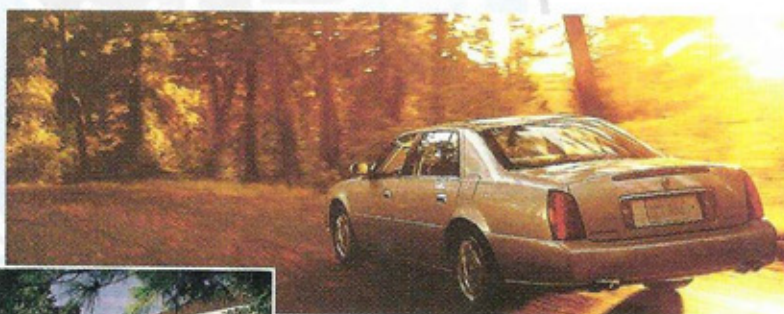


few comfortable chairs creates a cozy atmosphere."

Yost has a laundry list of new and interesting changes she sees in kitchen design. At the top is the evolution of appliances. As part of the demand for gourmet features within the kitchen, appliances

have become versatile workhorses. Built in refrigerators with cabinet fronts have become common with separate freezers elsewhere in the kitchen. Refrigerator drawers and warming drawers can be strategically located next to food prep areas for the ultimate in convenience.

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A window wall helps brighten the kitchen enlarged with a gathering area.

Photo courtesy Duffy Homes, Inc.



Dishwashers have become whisper quiet and are available in different configurations. Buyers can even take advantage of a stackable dishwasher model, cleverly disguised as a drawer, if so desired.

Finishes are varied with the "distressed" look currently popular. A liberal mix of stained and painted cabinetry is also used frequently along with interesting glaze painted finishes.

Hardware options on cabinetry are another area where the buyer's personality can be reflected. "The wide use of knobs or pulls adds personality and whimsy to the room," says Yost. "People sometimes choose a theme like utensils or sports or even faux animal skins. The added details make the room fun."

Grand DesignGroup has been successful at employing innovative ideas, as reflected by eight gold and three silver awards it won through the Duffy Homes entry at this year's BIA Parade of Homes.

As kitchen designs continue to evolve, so do ingenious ideas. But even the most futuristic of designs will continue to rely on the heart of the house to make everyone feel at home. ❖

Darcy Lehner, a Gahanna resident, is a freelance writer.

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