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Today's savvy homeowner is interested in safety – and energy efficiency – first

Kitchens were once in the rear of the home and hidden away. Today, the kitchen takes center stage as the “hearth of the home” and earns a spot as the gathering place where everyone meets to celebrate holidays.

From classic to modern design, the kitchen is like a good outfit – the core pieces are the cabinetry and countertops – and the accessories, including tile, paint colors and lighting selections, can ensure you achieve the look your clients want to show everyone who will gather in their spaces for many special moments over the years.

The hottest trends focus on four areas: antimicrobial countertops, LED lighting, full-access cabinetry and Water Sense-certified plumbing fixtures.

Lower Utility Bills

Most homeowners know about Energy Star appliances, but they are less aware of the Water Sense certification for plumbing fixtures that use less water but require the same pressure and more filtering, which may actually improve water quality. When a homeowner uses this type of fixture, s/he will save 15 percent annually on water bills – and that is a great way to add to the entertainment budget when they have friends and family over for the holidays.

Lighting is a new area on which people are starting to focus. Our firm designs most projects with LED lighting, which generates less heat, uses less power and lasts longer (an average of 10 years) than halogen or incandescent bulbs. The hottest trend is dimmable LED lights, which have a warm hue and do not make consumers look like they are in an aquarium. The savings for consumers can be as high as 25 percent on electric bills, plus the bulbs typically last five to 10 years.

Full-Access Cabinetry

The hottest trend for families is full-access (also called European or frameless-style) cabinetry – cabinets without an inner lip – that allows ease of access for cleaning and uses 10 percent less wood in the manufacturing process. Typically used in perimeter cabinets, the full-access cabinetry design requires four key elements: your client's design specifications, good layout, quality cabinetry and an expert who can install the cabinets properly and who can assess the space rapidly and find the most cost-effective solutions for each linear foot of the kitchen.



Full-access cabinetry, including this bamboo veneer on a horizontal grain, is gaining in popularity in the U.S. Photo by Robin Wilson Home; Cabinetry by Holiday Kitchens; Design by Vinny Castiello, Royal Kitchen Corp., New York.

INDUSTRY VIEWPOINT



Energy Star-rated appliances can save 15-25 percent on energy bills, and healthy countertops are antimicrobial and easy to clean. Photo by Robin Wilson Home; Appliances by Sub-Zero; Cabinetry by Holiday Kitchens; Countertops by Cosentino; Design by Greg Stubbins, The Cabinet Guy, N.J.; Faucets by Kohler.

Healthy Countertops

Critical to any healthy home is a countertop that will not harbor bacteria during and after cooking. Imagine the lowered stress if a homeowner knows that when s/he handles raw poultry, there will not be cracks or fissures that allow bacteria to proliferate. Composite materials are often better for this purpose than natural stone, as they are less likely to have a porous surface.

Hearth of the Home

The kitchen is one of the key selling points for most homes, and making a few small improvements can improve the sales price of a home in the fu-

ture. Take the time to look around your clients' kitchens, and make revisions if you think they will improve the space.

Most importantly, some might say that the kitchen is the "heart" of the home, but we like to say it is the "hearth" of the home – it is the warm spot where many tastes are created, senses are stimulated (think of the smell of fresh-baked cookies wafting from the kitchen) and family gatherings create the memories of home. ■

— Robin Wilson is an eco-friendly interior designer and has her own line of custom kitchen and bath cabinetry. Learn more at www.robinwilsonhome.com.