



Designer Angela Victoria Rasmussen of House 2 Home Design & Build in San Jose, CA, works all the angles in this kitchen. White and gray trends in California as well as the rest of the country.

Clean & Simple

Cabinet styles are trending cleaner and simpler, with a focus on quality; grey and white painted finishes are trending, while custom touches are also back in vogue.

By Lis King

Cabinetry often commands the lion's share of a kitchen design's budget, so it makes sense for designers and their clients to make choices that can stand the test of time. One result of the quest for long-lasting cabinetry is the disappearance of specific styles. No longer do we see styles that scream French chalet, Tuscan villa or English cottage. Instead, we have endless variations of two styles: Shaker and Modern Slab. Amazingly, designers manage to use those two basics to create any look a client could ask for. Be it Texas Hill Country, Carolina Coastal, Silicon Valley Modern or anything in between, American kitchen and bath designers put them all out there, beautifully so.



Designed by H 2 H Design Build, in San Jose, CA, this man cave in a converted garage calls for strong, masculine elements, including cabinetry of natural wood and featuring cast iron hardware.

Whatever the look, there's less ornamentation than has been seen in decades. Cabinetry, like interiors, is simpler and cleaner.

The final quotient is quality. "That's definitely necessary," says Liz Lapan, a designer and showroom manager at In Detail, in Pensacola, FL. "Cabinets have to have staying power. It's expensive and messy to replace them, and it's a rare homeowner who'll want to do that before it's absolutely necessary. True, he or she may want a kitchen update somewhere along the line, but that can be done in smaller ways, say, a new backsplash or changing out the countertop on the island. And, for that matter, the cabinets can be updated and given a different look. We often take off the doors and give them and the built-in frames a makeover. Sometimes we have them faux-painted."

In Detail, a winner in the NKBA's 2016 design contest, employs still another cabinet strategy. Whenever a kitchen involves a complete demolition and the cabinets are still viable, In Detail designers try to use them elsewhere in the house, perhaps in the laundry area, perhaps in the basement or garage.

"This defrays some costs and helps win clients over," notes Lapan.

Style trends

The top cabinet finishes in the past year were white painted, gray, dark natural, painted glazed and medium natural, according to the National Kitchen & Bath Association, and dealers everywhere call mixed cabinet colors the hottest current trend. Sometimes wall cabinets are a different color than the base cabinets, they say, and, increasingly, islands go their own way entirely.

"We often do an island in natural wood and then go to



A contemporary, clean-lined kitchen, as seen in this design by Past Basket Design in Geneva, IL, combines natural wood base cabinets and painted, glass-fronted wall cabinets. Limiting wall cabinets to make room for more windows is trending, to favor views and let in more natural light.

painted wood for the perimeter cabinets," says Bart Lidsky of The Hammer & Nail, in Ridgewood, NJ. "Recently, we took the island idea one step further with a kitchen we installed at our showroom. The cabinets are blue-gray, and the island is natural white oak, but we treated the wood a bit differently. It's rift-cut, which produces very straight and even graining. For hardware, we went to a raw, unlacquered brass. The client reaction to this kitchen has been terrific. Straight forward styling with precise



detailing that's vastly different from yesteryear's ornamentation – that's what homeowners want now. Solid quality and design they can truly make their own."

You might call this a departure from the vanilla design ethic fostered by concerns for resale down the line, and Lidsky isn't alone when he senses that more homeowners now opt for looks that suit their own tastes and lifestyles, without worrying about market trends.

Interior designer Anastasia Laudermilch of Annville, PA, is currently working on a kitchen remodeling project that illustrates homeowners' new quest for design freedom. "My client had her heart set on black cabinetry, which, frankly, I considered ultra-contemporary and the wrong look for her rather traditional home. But she was adamant, so we tempered the cabinetry with an island of zebra wood and a leather finished granite counter. And we're currently scouring the Internet for a gorgeous old French armoire, which we'll incorporate in the design. It'll become the kitchen pantry. Altogether, this contemporary kitchen is taking on a vintage industrial vibe."

One of Laudermilch's favorite strategies for creating cabinet variety is using four different types of hardware. She will use rings, pulls, handles and knobs to open cabinets and drawers, and she favors aged brass. She likes two-toned cabinetry. "So much more interesting than using one color on everything,"

Open shelves are a kitchen trend favored by Jill Ellsworth of 30-A Kitchens of Santa Rosa Beach, FL. This designer also likes exotic wood for cabinetry, and she often specifies faux finishes to update existing cabinets.

she remarks.

Replacing upper cabinets with open shelves is also a growing trend, notes Jill Ellsworth of 30A Kitchens, in Santa Rosa Beach, FL. "This creates an airy look, makes a kitchen look larger and provides nice display and storage space," she says. "Here in Florida, we may even replace wall cabinets with windows. This lets in more natural light, and, of course, we want to take advantage of the gorgeous views we've got around here."

Still another trend is kitchens with double islands. "For today's lifestyles, two islands are better than one," says Jeff McDonald, APR Supply, in Lititz, PA. "Families live in their kitchens these days. That's where they entertain, where the kids do homework, where the Garden Club meets."

Not surprisingly, design in the Silicon Valley is heavily tech-oriented. "Smart technology is built into everything, from custom cabinetry to countertops," says Angela Victoria Rasmussen of House 2 Home Design & Build of San Jose, CA.

Recently, Dan McFadden of Past Basket Design of Geneva, IL, got a chance to experience how design has changed over the years. "We were hired to remodel a kitchen we installed 20 years ago," he states. "The homeowners' lifestyles and tastes changed so much over those years and redoing the kitchen became a necessity. Now it's a much cleaner, transitional style with a vastly improved layout."

Interestingly, green design didn't register at all on the trends meter, according to those interviewed for this story, with some saying homeowners simply won't pay extra for eco-friendly products. They feel that they're already paying more for greener paints, finishes, appliances and other elements, and green is increasingly being expected as the norm, rather than being sought out as an extra.

Color counts

Gray is the overall national color winner, but there are variations regionally. Blue-grays are particular favorites in coastal areas, for example. "We're right on the coast and these shades are big winners around here," tells Bryan Reiss of Distinctive Design, Mt. Pleasant, SC. "That makes a lot of sense, actually. These are colors that are laid back and casual, reflective of life on the beach. Other popular colors around here are earth tones and off-whites. In two-tone cabinetry, we often work in a lot of natural walnut, sometimes for an island, sometimes for either lower or upper perimeter cabinets."

Gray and white are big colors in two-toned maple cabinetry at Peter Salerno, Inc, in Wyckoff, NJ. Luxurious hand-buffed zebra wood or lacewood are also winners, tells Gabrielle Salerno.



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CABINERY TRENDS

In Northern California, white is still going strong, notes Rasmussen. But gray is sneaking in, too. Sometimes when a client is in love with a strong color, such as purple or lime green, she tries to talk him out of it. “I suggest it for a wall instead,” she says. “There, repainting isn’t such a problem.” Her clients love dark-stained natural woods, but California laws make such cabinetry an expensive project. “Because of the state’s environmental legislation, we have to ship them out of state for staining,” she notes.

White cabinets and white marble dominate in Illinois, but gray and natural walnut are popular as well. “We like calm looks,” says McFadden, “and we don’t see interest in two-colored cabinetry.”

McDonald sees charcoal and sand still coming into the cabinet world and says that mixed chocolate and terracotta create a rich, deep tone with low-grain woods like maple. “It shows off a kitchen so well,” he says. However, fellow Pennsylvanian, David White of Kitchen Encounters, Lititz, PA, sees grays inching in on creams and browns.

Texan Shea Pumarejo is fearless when it comes to color, and her clients love her for it, as does the National Kitchen & Bath Association, which picked a bath design of hers as a contest winner.

Recently her firm, Younique Designs in Helates, TX, designed a kitchen with a bright orange island with a white marble top and acrylic hardware, white perimeter cabinetry and a floor-to-ceiling wine cooler with glass racks.



Brass hardware on rip-cut natural white oak is showcased in this design by the Ridgewood, NJ-based Hammer & Nail.

The design process

The approach to cabinet design has become a lot easier thanks to the Internet sites like Houzz and Pinterest.

“Asking the clients to open a Houzz account is always a good first step,” says Rasmussen.

“Then we ask them to look through the pictures and collect them in an inspiration book and we sit down with them to find out what exactly appealed to them in each photo. Was it the color? The counters? The island? After that come the samples and the discussions. Eventually we arrive at a design that makes sense, and yes, it makes a difference whether this is their forever home or if they’ll be reselling down the road. I feel that a kitchen should be designed to look up-to-date for at least 10 years.”

At Peter Salerno, Inc., the typical first step in kitchen and bath design is a visit to the firm’s showroom. “Homeowners will see a wide range of design options there, plus they will bring in

KCMA Members Offer Tips for Managing Consumer Expectations

With cabinetry an essential part of the kitchen design, choosing the cabinets is perhaps the biggest decision that consumers make when investing in a new kitchen. Yet homeowners often end up selecting their cabinets based on door samples or software, neither of which fully allow them to visualize exactly what their finished kitchen will look like.

As Wellborn Cabinet, Director of Marketing Angela O’Neill explains, while her company’s products are displayed in vignettes and samples throughout kitchen and bath showrooms, “There are thousands of choices today in door styles, stains and paints, and no one showroom can display the entire selection.” This is why it’s so important for design professionals to help shape and man-

age their clients’ expectations to maximize overall satisfaction.

It’s one of the reasons Showplace Wood Products Director of Marketing Scott Korsten believes it’s critical for showrooms to include a variety of displays and kitchen vignettes. He notes, “Displays are just easier to visualize from. Current day design software goes a long way toward helping clients visualize [their project], but it still isn’t the same.”

When using door samples, Korsten believes, “The key is communication and realistically setting expectations. Be very deliberate about pointing out the beauty of the variations that naturally occur in real wood, so if the client is offended by variations they are likely to receive, they can be directed

to cabinetry made from other materials. Or, at the very least, it provides an opportunity to explain how certain subtle variations will blend in the final project.”

While technology may not replicate the touch and feel experience, it certainly offers some advantages for helping clients to get a sense of what their finished project will look like. According to Kristi Hodson, Director of Design and Training for R.D. Henry & Company (formerly Custom Cupboards), “The marketplace is filled with examples of technology that help consumers visualize a product before purchasing. Everything from ordering a pizza online and seeing an image of it built with your customized toppings, to making interior and exterior car finish se-



White cabinetry contrasts with the natural wood island in this elegant kitchen designed by Peter Salerno Kitchens in Wyckoff, NJ.

photos of designs they like,” tells Salerno. “At that point, we will be able to come up with a ballpoint budget figure. The next step is a home visit and then comes the design.”

At Past Basket Design, the design process usually starts with Houzz input. “It’s such a good way to learn what the client likes. We had a meeting with prospective clients on Saturday

and thanks to the homework they did creating a Houzz idea book, we already have a cabinet decision.”

Pumarejo likes to “get into people’s heads,” when she does a design project for them. “I understand that trends are important, in the sense that you don’t want spaces to look outdated, but I’m really interested in design that expresses the client’s personality. I want his or her taste to prevail. So, basically, when I start a project, the client and I have a very deep conversation. I also have clients do some homework, looking at images and pictures, and I go to their homes to see how they live, how they cook, I want to meet the kids, etc. I want my design to work for everybody in the house.”

Cabinet secrets

How far do designers go to address a client’s wishes and concerns? Quite far, it seems. Pumarejo, for example, has been known to use cabinetry and closets to solve serious problems like gun safety and family protection in case of home invasion.

“I design cabinets with removable back panels that can hide guns, for example,” she tells. “And I have been known to come up with closet designs, which are fronts for safe rooms.”

Bart Lidsky caters to clients who are looking for ways to hide valuables. “I often design cabinets with secret compartments,” he says. “I confess I enjoy such design challenges. I’d better not say any more about this. Secrets are only effective if they’re kept secret.” ■

lections on an interactive display at a Tesla showroom, has elevated the expectations of a visual experience when making a buying decision.”

She continues, “It’s no different in our industry. Most homeowners...have been spending hours watching design shows on HGTV where animated drawings are the norm in the renovation process. Presenting accurate renderings, using software like 2020, ProKitchen or SketchUp, combined with finish samples, helps the consumer and the designer come to a mutual understanding of what the space will be when completed.”

O’Neill agrees that the right software can be an enormously helpful tool in managing consumers’ expectations. She notes, “These software solutions also offer panoramic room views that place the consumer right in the room.”

While software can help homeowners get a visual preview of what their final

project will look like, it’s equally important to educate them to what the remodeling process will entail in order to ensure that everyone is on the same page in terms of expectations.

To that end, Korsten says, “It’s great to provide a bullet-point listing of things that will happen during the project and the order in which they will happen, again clearly setting the stage for expectations.”

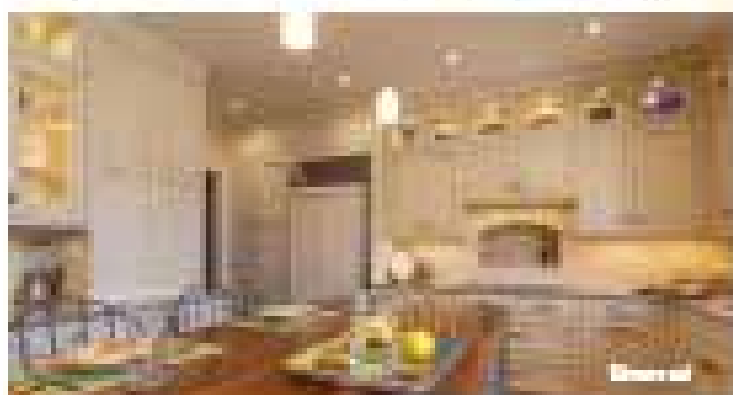
He continues, “If certain parts of the process start to get off track, be proactive and take the initiative to talk with the homeowners before they start to ask. And for heaven’s sake, be honest and realistic. The installation process is stressful enough on homeowners; if things aren’t going as planned and you wait until the homeowner starts to ask, they are already disappointed and the likelihood of you getting a much desired referral has diminished.”

O’Neill stresses the importance of “choosing an experienced designer, qualified

kitchen dealer and dependable product brands” to ensure satisfaction with the finished product. And, she notes, it’s important to keep all the pieces of the project organized and on schedule, explaining that the designer who makes sure all the additional products like appliances, sinks, faucets, tiles and lighting are selected in a timely manner “will help to insure a smooth installation process and timeline.”

Korsten concludes, “After installation, dealers should also make time to demonstrate in a hands-on manner how to change the position of a shelf, how to adjust door hinges or how to remove and re-install a drawer. These are things that homeowners often don’t know they’ll want to do until they’ve had the cabinets installed for some time. Having the homeowner walk through those processes themselves with the dealer’s help will give them the confidence to do it themselves at a later date, and it’s a nice personal touch they’ll appreciate.” ■

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