

KITCHEN

Light and open with windows on both sides, this kitchen is exceedingly functional. It features a built-in breakfast nook. DESIGNED BY RKD ARCHITECTS

PHOTO BY GREER PHOTO

EVOLUTION



Today's kitchens
are multi-functional
gathering spaces

by KIMBERLY NICOLETTI

Kitchens are such integral gathering places in our homes these days that it's hard to imagine small kitchens hidden in the backs of 1950s and 1960s homes, where secluded wives, who wore apron-wrapped dresses, toiled for hours to deliver square meals to their families every day.

The evolution of kitchens not only chronicles architecture and interior design, but also illustrates societal changes in attitudes and lifestyles.

WOMEN EMERGE INTO OPEN SPACE

For most of the 20th century, kitchens remained compartmentalized, usually accessed through a door (or two) from a dining room or hallway.

"Kitchen activities were segregated from the balance of the home for various reasons, including reasons we would consider dated, if not offensive today: formality, aromas, even socio-political reasons and sexist reasons," says Doug DeChant, Principal of Shepherd Resources, Inc. AIA Architects.

Structured kitchens segregated primary cooks, usually women, from their families as they prepared dinner, and later cleaned up, while everyone else interacted in the family room.

"Somewhere, mom said she was tired of being left out of the party," says Jack Snow, owner of RKD Architects, in a lighthearted manner.

Meanwhile, architects like Frank Lloyd Wright began designing open floor plans, based on a centralized kitchen, which became more popular around the 1970s.

"It went from hidden to the social hub of the house," says Kyle Webb, owner of K.H. Webb Architects.

And as the space opened up, so, too, did the social structure; dress codes loosened, men's and women's roles expanded, and women no longer needed to prepare meals behind closed doors.

"Kitchens, like so many areas of our lives, have responded to the shifting nature of our formality," DeChant says. "As a culture, we have become more relaxed, more casual, which has become evident in the more relaxed plans and spaces we inhabit."

By the 1990s, open floor plans became the norm, especially in mountain houses, where entertainment plays key roles.



Traditional in layout but contemporary in feel, this kitchen is somewhat separated from the living area. It features a wall of windows above the counter surface and a breakfast nook. DESIGNED BY RKD ARCHITECTS

“It’s a social valley,” says Adam Harrison, a senior associate at Shepherd Resources. “I think people come here to be social, so they go hand in hand, but more over than that, I think we’re a society that has evolved to not segregate someone in the kitchen — seems kind of lonely.”

EVOLUTION OF OPEN SPACE

Within open floor plans, certain trends have emerged and morphed throughout the years.

An early element included a breakfast nook, located within or adjacent to the kitchen.

“(It) offers convenience by proximity, responding to the gradually accelerating pace of our lives,” DeChant says. “This concept has expanded to include even soft seating in the same vicinity.”

Much like a restaurant, some kitchens incorporate cozy, curved “booths” and adjoining hearth rooms.

Similarly, breakfast bars, lined with high chairs, offered friends

and families an area to grab a quick bite or linger with a drink as the chef prepared a meal. Now, the bar concept has transformed into multiple islands, where guests sit in comfortable, lower chairs.

“(Islands are) ubiquitous, wonderful, functional elements

have become larger, by 20 percent to 30 percent, Webb says.

The “efficient triangle” of refrigerator, dishwasher and cooktop has expanded to accommodate a couple faucets, dishwashers and ovens, and up to 6- to 10-foot ranges, in some cases.

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upon which we prepare or stage dinners, and around which we gather,” DeChant says. “By now, this trend has deep roots, and has caused the kitchen to gradually become a larger space, often more centrally located within the home.”

Since kitchens have evolved from galley layouts to those with three to four islands, kitchens

Wet bars also are becoming more popular, but gone are “old school,” basement bar designs. Webb recently completed a bar with a countertop fashioned from a tree sliced in half, positioned next to a sink made from a boulder. Now bars with artistic liquor cabinets and displays are playing prominent roles, in or

PHOTOS BY GIBSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Epitomizing functionality, a sleek Bulthaup kitchen from Germany complements the eclectic interior of this Vail home. DESIGNED BY KH WEBB ARCHITECTS





CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP: This working kitchen for a serious chef connects directly to a glass conservatory, added to the home by breaking through the existing exterior stone wall. DESIGNED BY SHEPHERD RESOURCES, INC/AIA.

'Rich materials and comfort prevail in this bachelor's kitchen, designed as his ski group's morning launch pad, and central element for evening dinners. DESIGNED BY SHEPHERD RESOURCES, INC/AIA.

This family kitchen is an expression of fresh Asian minimalism and an open plan, arranged next to the large community dining table and linked to primary exterior living spaces. DESIGNED BY SHEPHERD RESOURCES, INC/AIA.

adjacent to kitchens, Webb says.

With bars, breakfast nooks and multiple islands — some for prepping and others for socializing — kitchens are becoming “a series of little social hubs,” Webb says.

INSPIRED BY RESTAURANTS

Fully stocked bars aren't the only trendy elements finding their way into mountain kitchens. For some time now, homeowners have taken cues from the commercial world, filling their kitchens with professional-grade appliances, as well as huge storage pantries, multiple refrigerators, dishwashers, ovens, faucets, and even pizza ovens.

“Influenced by the restaurant, the kitchen always becomes original with the many ‘wants’ of their owners,” says Jeffrey Wright, architectural intern at Shepherd Resources Inc. “With these wants on display, the tailored kitchen in any mountain home is an invitation to dine in. After all, there is no better restaurant than at home.”

Wright sees homeowners tying in designs of their favorite valley restaurants, from the establishments' atmosphere and spatial layout, to the “fascination of watching our food being prepared,” he says.



“These, and other restaurant design considerations have all shaped how we use, admire and feature the kitchen in our homes.”

Vail Valley homeowners' love of the culinary arts also has shaped kitchen design over the years, DeChant says.

“Cooking as a team sport, especially among couples and multiple-generation gatherings (is popular),” he says. “We have placed greater value upon preparing meals as we visit together with family and friends. We tend to prefer companionship to isolation. We also don't think of cooking so much as labor, and more of enjoyment.”

WHAT'S HOT — NOW AND TO COME

Ryan Wolffe, senior associate at Shepherd Resources Inc., sees more and more homeowners placing “extreme attention to and priority put upon detail in the kitchen.”

Manufacturers continue to unveil innovative materials, like Bulthaup kitchens, which feature cabinetry and unique appliances to capitalize upon the maximum use of space in an efficient, minimalist manner. These kitchens take contemporary to a new level, installing only what is absolutely necessary, and achieving an overall artistic, sleek kitchen.

Many homeowners also have been omitting the upper cabinetry.

“There certainly is a functional price to pay, but if you have the room, the kitchens are so much lighter, nicer and more open,” Snow says.

The trend follows mountain homeowners' desire for contemporary kitchens.

“People just want to be efficient and super clean,” says Eddy Doumas, owner of Worth Interiors in Vail.

They also desire more stylistic kitchens, with features like waterfall edges in islands or countertops, and cabinet doors made of stone.

“More and more, people look at kitchens as a design



Custom walnut cabinets and commercial-grade appliances arm this transitional kitchen for entertaining. DESIGNED BY KH WEBB ARCHITECTS

element (rather) than as a functional piece,” Snow says.

Specifically, materials like concrete are replacing the granite that predominated for over a decade, and cabinetry has evolved from rustic, knotty pines to straight-grained wooden doors with touch latches for a cleaner, more European look, he says.

“Kitchens are certainly more contemporary, (but) in a warmer way,” Dumas says, explaining how European cabinet manufacturers offer “more of a practical, user-friendly, very well engineered design.”

“As it keeps evolving, it gets more technical,” he says, expounding about custom finishes like high-gloss lacquers, which have evolved in the last decade, to more high-tech appliances like steam ovens and induction cooktops. “It really is about the materials.”

“Kitchens are becoming much more of an art piece,” Webb says.

While the “art piece” has

evolved to often “hide” appliances within cabinetry, the one exception to that rule comes in the form of ranges and hoods.

“People are making them a design feature,” Webb says, “using steel, bronze and copper hoods as focal points.”

Another creative “invention” involves positioning the cooktop directly in front of a window with a view. For years, people stood in front of faucets, washing dishes and looking out a window, but

very few homeowners opted to place glass near potentially greasy cooking areas. So to mitigate some of the mess, architects like DeChant build a deeper countertop, to increase the distance between the cooktop and the glass.

“The view was greater than the

maintenance effort,” he says.

The appreciation of the outdoors also had spilled over to a fascination with outdoor kitchens.

In the past decade or so, extravagant kitchens have migrated beyond the indoor boundaries,

“and have occasionally become central outdoor living elements on our patios,” DeChant says.

“Outdoor kitchens are becoming more common due to Colorado climate, and I think

this is one of the most exciting things in kitchens,” Wolffe says.

Indoors or out, professionals see sleek, artistic kitchens with professional-grade, technical appliances continuing to trend in the future, and with this comes plenty of “bells and whistles,”

as well as expansion in size. But at some point, some predict a contraction in kitchen size, bringing it back to a more simple space — but not right away.

“The change will stay for a while because it is now expected, but I expect a small pullback in size and overdoing it in the years to come,” Wolffe says.

In fact, DeChant points to clients who request separate or semi-separate kitchens with deliberate staging and serving spaces.

As Harrison points out: “Everything changes, which keeps things fresh.”

And the beauty of change is the prospect it presents.

“People are noticing that this is an opportunity to do something special for design,” Snow says.

But however kitchens continue to evolve, it’s safe to say they will continue to be the heart of the home — a place where humans continue to foster love and camaraderie. **VVV**

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