

evolving kitchen design

BY KEN BEST



If modern kitchens were friends of yours, you would likely be intrigued, and perhaps a little jealous. Oh yes, they started out modestly enough, but just look at them now. Once uncelebrated and utilitarian domestic spaces, they have enjoyed a meteoric rise to fame. Their images tempt us on glossy covers at magazine stands; they are hot topics of conversation at dinner parties, and everyone is asking: “What will they do next?”

While the aim of good design is that it be timeless and functional, no space is static. As the hardest working room in the house its little wonder that the kitchen receives so much thought and attention. Always keeping pace with the needs of the homeowner, the kitchen is no longer content to remain within the typical four walls of the home. The most significant trend we’ve been seeing is kitchens that create a seamless transition between indoors and out.

We are moving past the idea of separate outdoor kitchens, and instead designing well thought out indoor kitchens, complete with all the desired accoutrements, that can adapt to serve both spaces in a cohesive way. These highly flexible indoor/outdoor “great rooms” are made possible by large openings that can be closed off in cool weather by good looking, folding concertina doors, or even indus-

trial looking glass and steel overhead garage doors. When roof overhangs are sufficient, and municipal standards provide for it, the floor level between indoor and outdoor spaces can be made virtually continuous, allowing for a variety of seating configurations, and further softening the distinction between interior and exterior space.

Another feature that seems to be gaining momentum is the reduction of the sill between countertops and windows. Just as the infinity edge on a pool opens the view to the horizon, these “infinity edge” windows, where the glass sits at approximately the same level as the countertop, add to the sense of connection to the surrounding landscape.

Kitchen islands are the hub of family and social life as the “go to” spot for food prep, appetizers, and homework alike. We often offer our clients an outdoor version of the same concept. Where interior countertops are located below windows that open to decks or patios we’ve been designing indoor / outdoor seating bars. Concertina windows that can fold away leave generous openings from the interior to the exterior space. The same countertop used indoors is also installed with an overhang outside, creating a second place for family and guests to sit comfortably (wine glass in hand) and visit with the chef during warm weather.

Continuity in materials has become increasingly important as indoor and outdoor spaces meld together. A recent project involved not only a kitchen addition, but an outdoor barbecue area, pool, and dining pavilion as well. A great deal of thought and research was required to ensure countertop materials were suitable for not only the interior kitchen counters and island, but to withstand the freeze/thaw and UV exposure of the outdoor barbecue area as well. Likewise the stain used on the tongue and groove kitchen ceiling had to perform equally well outdoors on the exterior soffits and stained columns of the adjacent dining pavilion.

Finishes that are easily cleaned, and more indoor/outdoor friendly are often selected for these kitchens. White cabinetry (although a perennial classic) is being passed over in favour of harder wearing stained wood doors, or painted doors in darker shades. The kitchen in the project described above was painted in earthy greyed tones that further emphasized its connection to the landscaping and stone patio just outside the large barn style doors. Backsplashes featuring light coloured grout are also out of place in these spaces with the trend being either the countertop carrying on up the wall to form the backsplash, or larger tiles completed with greyed or darker grouts to further ease the burden of cleaning.

What will kitchens do next? As their history is one of evolving in response to our ever-changing needs and lifestyles they will undoubtedly continue to do so. They offer the foundation from which we cook, eat, drink, welcome friends, and gather as family (indoors, outdoors, and sometimes both at once!) More than any other room in the house, the kitchen is a combination of what serves up personally, and what we want to share publicly with the community around us. So... would I be jealous of the attention kitchens received were they friends of mine? Nope, they deserve it. What room could possibly understand me better? ☐

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