

Luxury Kitchen Design

Atlanta's Junior League Shows Us the Latest and Greatest in Kitchen Innovations

[WRITTEN BY JULA JANE]

Ever notice that when friends or family visit, everyone gathers in the kitchen? Kitchens are the heart of a home, where families come together at the end of a day to reconnect and memories are made, whether you're an aspiring chef, a gourmet cook, or a microwave aficionado. It's no wonder that real estate professionals stress the importance of modern kitchen renovations, as the kitchen can make or break a new home purchase. Having a kitchen complete with all of the latest and greatest is not only a valued addition, it can also make the space more user-friendly. This month, as Atlanta's Junior League brings back its annual Tour of Kitchens and your mouth begins to salivate with dreams of an updated kitchen, we've taken a look at the latest and greatest innovations to wet your whistle.

A Modern Look

Today's modern kitchens are adopting clean lines, and darker stains and paint colors. Gone are the glazed and distressed finishes, heavy moldings, wide-plank hardwood floors or 18-by-18 limestone tiles. According to designer Rachael Patch of Buckhead's Artefacto, "Vibrant, warm colors continue to be fashionable in the kitchen creating atmospheres that are both comforting and high energy. Bold, ethnic colors such as red and gold are appearing in color trends for 2008 thanks to the upcoming Olympic Games in China. These colors can be juxtaposed with more environmentally inspired neutrals to give them that extra punch."

If you haven't upgraded countertops yet, natural stone is still on the rise — granite, marble, limestone or travertine — and is even adorning walls as a backsplash. Or, newer looks are incorporating stainless steel, butcher block or concrete, although the unequivocal choice is still granite.

Outfitting the kitchen today involves a multitude of choices, from Sub-Zero PRO 48 refrigerators or the new modular refrigerator and freezer columns by Gaggenau, which both come in the ever-popular stainless steel. Both Sub-Zero and Gaggenau offer luxury in their options — refrigerator drawers placed into cabinets, separate freezer and refrigerator doors, cabinet-faced doors, or even glass doors so contents are on view. Instead of double ovens, these days it's all about the warming drawers and steam ovens that turn your kitchen into a professional-level cooking space. Wine chillers, built-in espresso machines, microwave drawers, convection ovens — the sky is the limit in residential appliances.



Fusion Design Group designed the kitchen of Bryan and Robin Mermans, which will be included in the Tour of Kitchens this month.

To make sense of the plethora of choices available, the designers and homeowners participating in this year's Tour of Kitchens were willing to offer their expertise in creating the perfect performing kitchen that will wow the neighbors.

1. Nuke It

With only three major manufacturers in the market, microwaves have advanced as much as they possibly can. The most recent innovation is the Sharp Insight Pro Microwave Drawer. It's the world's first stand-alone Microwave Drawer that is built-in ready for easy installation without the need for an additional and, dare I say, not so attractive kit. It's the perfect choice if you want a microwave in the island or if you simply want it out of sight. It opens with a mere push of a button, is large enough to hold a 9-inch by 13-inch oblong dish, and provides easy access to check, stir or turn your food. Sharp's advanced sensor technology takes the guesswork out of microwave cooking. Designer Shadawn Zareh of Atlanta's Fusion Design Group said, "The microwave drawer is a dream come true. It fits fluidly into most any space plan and impresses my clients when I offer it to them."

2. Cook It

The verdict is in and the winner is Viking. This manufacturer hit a homerun when they launched the 48-inch Open Burner Commercial Depth Range – VGRC Professional Series. According to designer Emily Robbins of Roswell's Schuon Kitchens and Bath, "The 48-inch range is the 'it' product in kitchen design." If you've been on a model home tour, then you've seen this machine up close and personal. It comes in an array of designer finishes including Apple Red, Cobalt Blue, Cotton White, Lemonade, Chocolate, and of course, Black, but the finish you'll see the most is Stainless Steel. This freestanding range has an extremely large convection oven on the right and a smaller bake oven on the left, 10-inch by 11-inch heavy-duty, porcelainized, cast-iron, removable surface burner grates that mean business, and commercial-style bezels around control panel knobs designed to make you feel like an executive chef.



The Vario VK 411 in-counter steamer by Gaggenau

3. Steam It

If your idea of a steamer is that little metal basket you place vegetables in and set in the bottom of a pot, it is time to discover a better way to steam: the Vario VK 411 in-counter steamer by Gaggenau. This ingenious contraption allows you to steam and boil on two levels without pressure. You can cook at precise temperatures so sensitive your fish won't fall apart and your asparagus won't go limp. And the ingenious glass lid allows that watched pot to boil.

4. Warm It

We're a group of over-extended families and if you have kids who come and go with various extracurricular activities and a spouse who often works late, heating drawers are saviors in the kitchen. Homeowner and Kitchen Tour participant Cindy Wallace may get home and cook dinner hours before her husband does, so she makes a plate of food for him and places it in the warming drawer. Many warming drawers, such as the ICON Designer and Professional Series 30-inch Warmer Drawers by Electrolux, include a convenient humidity control function, allowing

them to keep moist foods moist and crisp foods crisp while waiting for those ever-late guests to arrive. They're a great asset when preparing a six-course meal and can also be used to heat up dishes and cups. If you want something warmed up, you know what to do.

5. Getting Organized

Running a household and throwing lavish parties is a big job, which is why so many homeowners have added command centers and butler's pantries to their wish lists. The command center is the replacement for the built-in kitchen desk with the ever-so tacky lattice wine rack above. Life is hectic and sometimes out of control, but with a command center in your home you always know where to look for the things you use every day. It's where you'll find your cell phone chargers, laptop and iPod docking stations, pens and paper, the stack of bills in need of attention, your keys and the dog's leash. Instead of an open space for a chair, you have at least one filing drawer, sometimes two — perfect for keeping up with warranty booklets and instruction manuals.

If you like to entertain, then the butler's pantry is an absolute necessity. A butler's pantry is a utility room just off the kitchen used to store food, dishes, serving platters and silver, paper products and basically anything to do with food and serving. The catering staff can set up and

TOUR OF KITCHENS

Discover 14 spectacular kitchens created by Atlanta's most renowned and celebrated designers at The Junior League of Atlanta, Inc.'s 2008 Tour of Kitchens. The event will be held Saturday, March 29, from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. and Sunday, March 30, from 11 a.m. until 5 p.m. This tour promises to be the most impressive to date with special appearances by several of Atlanta's most legendary chefs, as well as other entertaining special events and demonstrations. For tickets or additional information, visit www.jlatlanta.org/tok or call 678-916-3100.



Fusion Design Group assisted in the kitchen renovations of the Kloc home in East Atlanta.

SUR LA TABLE

Looking for high-quality tools for the kitchen? The Parisian-inspired Sur La Table has arrived in Georgia, opening its doors at Perimeter Mall last September. The worldly kitchen retailer carries a selection of authentic tools and serving pieces to prepare cuisines from different countries, with specialty equipment such as *cataplanas*, a style of Portuguese cookware, and *sashimi* knives, which are used to prepare sushi, as well as cooking utensils, gadgets, bakeware, cookware and appliances. Don't know how to use some of the pieces found in the store? No worries, cooking classes and demonstrations are also provided. Visit the store at Perimeter Mall, call 678-441-9120 or visit www.surlatable.com.



serve from there, keeping your kitchen clean and open for congregating. And even if you don't entertain, the butler's pantry is a nice addition. You can store larger quantities of food and other household products, which will save time and money and won't spill over into the garage. The greatest benefit of having these two innovations in your home is organization. Instead of turning your house upside down looking for your sunglasses, you can spend 15 extra minutes with your kids before going to work.

6. Eco-Friendly

"Going Green" no longer means avocado green as in the '70s or hunter green like the '90s or even olive green like the new millennium. Now it means using products that are environmentally friendly. As awareness increases, so will demand, which is why many manufacturers are developing new products that are safer for the environment. Shaw is producing hardwood floors made of recycled materials or fast-growing bamboo as well as cabinets from quick-growing trees such as Lyptus and Para wood. According to Julie Cartwright of Residential Construction Specialties (RCS), which has four Atlanta area locations, "The two hottest eco-friendly products on the market are cork floors and induction appliances." Cork is the environmentally sound choice for flooring as it is made from bark harvested from the tree. The

forest is undamaged and the tree re-grows new bark. That's a definite win-win. And with more than 20 sizes and shapes in glue-down cork, this product definitely makes an earth-friendly statement.

Cartwright also suggests finding ways to reduce energy through electricity and gas by switching to induction heating, a non-contact method of heating using magnets. Induction is 85 percent energy-efficient while conventional electric heating is 50 percent efficient and gas even less, at less than 40 percent efficient. The proof is in the power or gas bill. **PN**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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