



Daily Telegraph
Saturday 15/03/2014

Page: 7
Section: Home
Region: Sydney, AU
Circulation: 293512
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 1,974.00 sq.cms.



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CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

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KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL

The proof is in the pudding when designing a kitchen for function and family, writes

Robyn Willis

No room in the house causes more concern to homeowners than the kitchen. Whether you're a would-be My Kitchen Rules contestant or you're content with grilled cheese on toast for dinner, having a high functioning, beautiful kitchen has become a top shelf priority.

This is, in part, because of the continued popularity of open-plan design, so that the kitchen is in full view of the more style-led living and dining rooms.

Achieving the finish and function you want, however, always comes at a price.

Jeremy Foxe is director of Apollo Kitchens who work with Eden Brae Homes.

He says it's worth taking the time to get the design right the first time.

"Invest in getting your kitchen right from the start," he says. "Changing your kitchen down the track can be a high cost headache."

While there's a lot going on behind closed doors, Jeremy says the overall finish should blend in effortlessly with the rest of the space.

"Keep the lines simple and uniform," he says. "Conceal the rangehood, integrate the fridge or dishwasher to keep the kitchen simple and beautiful."

We've spoken to the experts about top trends and ways to invest your kitchen dollars for the best result now and into the future.

Let's cook.

STORAGE

It's not the sexiest part of kitchen design but it's the one that will punish you or pay you back most in the years to come.

Store planning and design manager at Freedom Kitchens, Jenny O'Connell, says this is an area worth investing in, even if it means sacrificing a super slick surface.

"Functionality is more important than the finish," she says.

"If you go with a laminate benchtop, you can put more money into having drawers rather than cupboards."

We're no longer prepared to put up with rummaging at the back of the cupboard either, with cupboard doors and drawers revealing dividers for cutlery drawers, baking trays and pot lids, carousels for pantry items and shallow shelves attached to doors for frequently used items.

"Internal features are huge now. Having drawers, dividers and pullout pantries are all

high on the list," she says. "It's really handy because you can see all the way to the back and you know exactly what you have."

What storage you choose should depend on the size of your kitchen and how you use it, she says, especially in small kitchens where it could compromise bench space.

"I would go for drawers over cupboards for ease of use, even in small spaces, and I'd opt for drawers over a pantry in small spaces because you keep the bench space," she says.

Thinking through relationships between where you prepare food, where you cook and where you eat will help determine the position of your pantry and utensils such as knives and cutting boards.

An undersink rubbish management system with pullout bins is a must. →



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FOCUS



Deep benchtops and marble surfaces from Sydney Kitchens create a luxe look.



Small appliances are easily accessed behind a bi-fold door.



Luxuries like wine storage have been integrated by Sydney Kitchens.



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Dividers maximise space in easy access drawers.

→ SURFACES

This is where kitchen design becomes fun, as long as you don't have champagne taste on a beer budget.

Engineered stone continues to reign supreme thanks to its natural good looks and practicality.

"It is the choice of the majority of people," says Freedom's Jenny O'Connell. "It's practical because it is blended with a resin rather than being pure stone so it's incredibly hard wearing."

It's also more affordable than stone, which Jenny says is the surface of choice at the upper end of the market.

"Marble is coming through again," says Jenny. "People either love it or hate it but there's nothing like it for natural beauty."

Instead of a mix of surfaces that was popular a few years ago, she says kitchen benchtops are now made from the same material throughout. Stainless steel has gone off the boil as the commercial look makes way for warehouse loft chic.

The waterfall look, where the benchtop material continues down the side of the bench, is still a strong theme.

"I don't think Australians will let go of the waterfall look anytime soon," says Jenny. "It's aspirational and makes the island benchtop a real feature in the space."

Benchtop widths are either 20mm or twice as thick for an exaggerated look, says Ikea sales leader, Tim Prevade, which works just as well in timber as it does in stone.

"That's part of a more industrial, rustic aesthetic that's coming through with exposed bricks and rough cut wood," he says.

While glass is still a popular choice for splashbacks, Tim says tiles are making a strong return with everything from the ubiquitous white subway tile to colourful mosaics coming through.

Thanks to new timber-look styles, Jenny says laminate is back on the menu because of its ability to blend in with timber joinery in the rest of the house without the high maintenance of some other surfaces.

Timber finishes, recessed lighting and white surfaces make a functional Freedom kitchen.

FUNCTIONAL AND SIMPLE FOR ZUMBO

Adriano Zumbo's kitchen has all the toys you'd expect to find in a professional kitchen. There are two commercial, self-cleaning ovens, an industrial strength tap and deep sinks to make washing up easier.

Even though the builder had to turn part of the original bathroom into the kitchen, Adriano didn't use an architect because he knew what he wanted.

"A kitchen should look simple, all white," he says. "I put in a red splashback because it's such a striking contrast against all the white. I wanted to open up the space, bring a bit of light in and a build a deck outside."

Although he used to experiment with new recipes at home, these days he's happy to leave his sweet tooth at the office.

"I like to cook savoury food as a way to wind down," he says.

"I'm still cooking and enjoying it but it's different to what I do at work and my brain can switch off. I'm not thinking about the next flavour combination or looking at what the industry is doing."

As with the MasterChef contestants, Adriano has his own version of the mystery box challenge.

"I cook a lot of Italian stuff that my mum cooked for me," he says. "I'm really good at finding what's in the fridge and coming up with something."

Words Renata Gortan



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ISLAND BENCH

This popular kitchen stalwart is working harder than ever, fitting storage, seating, entertaining and preparation areas into its remit.

The result is wider benchtops in jaw-dropping surfaces that make a statement about the kitchen.

Although it has been around for a while in architecturally designed homes, Tim says the integrated dining table has begun to go mainstream.

“There is a trend away from the separate dining table and more towards integrating dining into the kitchen,” he says.

“It means island benches are getting deeper with bigger overhangs.”

Because it is increasingly seen as part of a larger open-plan space, placing storage on the dining side of a deep island bench has gained popularity, especially if the children use it as a homework area. Where space allows, making room for school bags and study materials for a multifunctional space makes sense. →





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Adriano Zumbo's home kitchen is a place to "hang out and cook".

➔ APPLIANCES

These are big ticket items that will ultimately provide the structure for your kitchen.

In recent years there has been a big shift towards specialised ovens and built-in coffee machines.

However, Freedom Kitchen's Jenny O'Connell says it has gone back to basics with focus returning to high performing ovens and fridges.

"The french door fridge or the side-by-side fridge is what most people want now," she says. "It's the top of their list and often it's the first thing they design around. With ovens,

people aspire to the 90cm models but most choose 60cm ovens to save on space."

Whether you choose an upright stove or a separate oven and stove top will depend on the style of your kitchen as well as functionality.

Ikea's Tim Prevade says his company's top two selling kitchens could not be more different from each other.

"Number one is high gloss and very slick, but right behind it is a traditional white timber kitchen with solid timber benchtops," he says.

Whether contemporary or retro, no one wants to see the microwave oven.

Where space allows, it's being hidden in the walk-in pantry or blended into the joinery.

However, while built-in coffee machines were all the rage a few years ago they are freestanding once again, says Jenny.

At the upper end, serious foodies are embracing high-end brands such as De Dietrich from Eurolinx, which not only offer zoneless induction cooking but almost completely blend into the benchtop.

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More De Dietrich, dedietrich.com.au;

Freedom, freedom.com.au; Ikea, ikea.com.au;

Smeg, smeg.com.au



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SINKS AND TAPS

Simplicity is the catch cry here with clean lines combined with high performance.

Mixer taps are the queens of the kitchen, with brands like Kohler taking it to a whole new level with their Karbon taps offering manoeuvrable heads for optimum water delivery.

Undermount stainless steel sinks are still the frontrunners, preferably with draining boards integrated into the engineered stone benchtop for a seamless look.

The ceramic butler's sink is also making a welcome return to traditional and retro kitchens, creating a focal point.

More Kohler, kohler.com.au

Karbon mixer tap with joystick control.



FOCUS

Smeg appliances, including fridge, oven and rangehood work with the industrial chic.