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by manya kaczkowski

Whether you're building a home from scratch or remodeling, no one is better qualified to determine the features you need in your kitchen than you. You, after all, have to live with the decisions, all the way from the size and footprint of the room down to the knobs on the cabinets. "The kitchen is the center of the universe in the home," says Mike Wahlen, showroom manager at CabinetWerks Design Studio in Milwaukee. The kitchen, then, should reflect your taste and work with your lifestyle.

But, with so many choices in such an important room, how do you begin to sort



Kitchens have grown, both in importance and in size. Cabinets stretch to the ceiling once again (above), and peripheral features such as beverage centers (opp., top) and mudrooms (opp., bottom) are part of today's overall design.

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it all out? Tony Enea, owner of Ruvin Bros. Artisans & Trades in Brown Deer, suggests that you try to consider all of the elements upfront. "First of all, we talk about your lifestyle," he says. "Do you have children? Do you like to cook? How will you use the space? If you're remodeling, what doesn't work with the kitchen you have now? We put a wish list together."

The layout of the kitchen and adjoining spaces deserves a great deal of consideration. You'll want to make sure that traffic flows well and that the furniture provides the functionality you need. The two-island concept has become popular in recent years, providing more storage space, eating surfaces and room for an additional cooking or cleaning station. Plus, says Enea, "If you have one big island, you have to go a long way to get around it. Two smaller islands, on the other hand, can improve traffic flow from one end of the kitchen to the other."

Useful spaces just off the kitchen, such as mudrooms, laundry rooms, pantries and

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Sleek and functional: Robust work centers (opp.) are popular, while storage is both cleverly hidden and abundant (right).

beverage centers, also help to utilize square footage wisely; they're close enough to provide functionality where you need it, but outside of the normal traffic pattern.

When considering how your kitchen will be used, certain factors are more important than others. Take cooking, for example — while it's true that everyone has a kitchen, only some of us really enjoy cooking enough to spend several hours on our feet in the kitchen each week. For chef types, flooring is a critical decision. "If you like to cook," says Enea, "you'll want to stay away from stone floors." You'll want something that has a little more give, like wood.

Can't stand clutter? You can help reduce it with the design of your cabinets and other storage spaces. Clean countertops are in: "The two biggest things," says Wahlen, "are the rollout (cabinet) tray and double pull-

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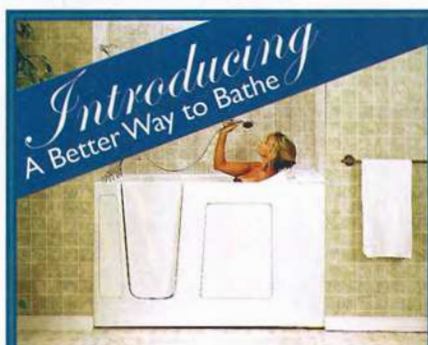
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out garbage cans." Appliance garages are still going strong, to hide toasters, mixers and the like. And remember the space that used to be above your cabinets? It's vanishing. "They're going taller, and we're using stacking cabinets," says Wahlen.

Enea agrees that the trend of cabinets stretching to the ceiling has returned. "It's more traditional, like you'd see in an older home," he says. "It's a more complete look."

With more time spent in the kitchen, it makes sense that amenities formerly found elsewhere have now been relocated to — or duplicated in — today's kitchens. Televisions, computer centers, and electronic "drop" stations for cell phones, laptops and Blackberries have all found their way to command central — the kitchen. "As a result, they've gotten a bit larger," says Enea. "Kitchens are now this big space — for example, there used to be a little planning desk — now there are robust work centers with computers."

Fitting the functionality of the kitchen to your needs is important, but what about aesthetics — how can you design the kitchen to complement the rest of the house, as well as your own personal style? "There's no one specific formula," says Wahlen. "Some of the questions are: Where is it located? What type of house is it? How old is the house?"

Says Enea, "Obviously, we want to match the style of the house, if the couple does, but sometimes they don't." The challenge then is to complement, rather than match. You can tie together elements such as window patterns, moldings or light fixtures. "As long as it's done with a consistent level of quality, it can work," says Enea.

When it comes down to choices about materials, color, artwork, lighting, etc., talk to experts, and then explore choices until you're satisfied. There are plenty of options: "In hardware alone," says Wahlen, "you used to have three choices; now there are tens of thousands of them!" Just like your kitchen's functionality, the décor should fit with your lifestyle and preferences. After all, chances are you'll be spending a lot of time there.

See "Resources," page 81.



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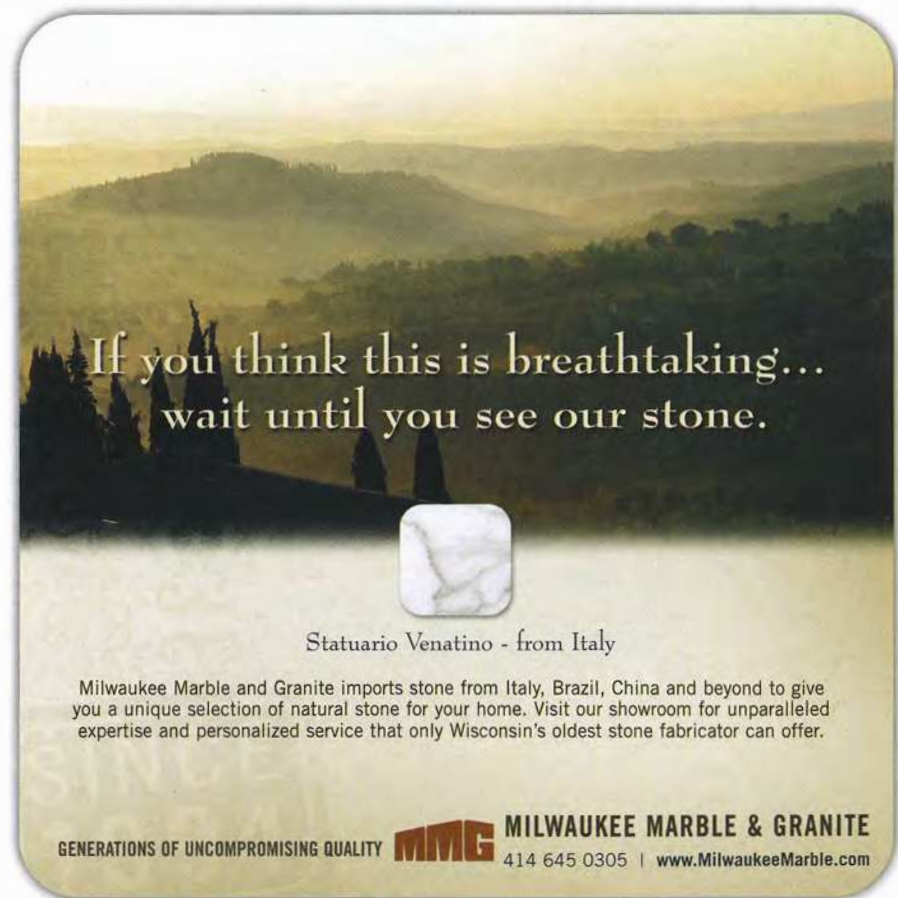


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