

# KITCHENS:

*They're Not Just For*

*Mealtime Anymore*

BY DAN BAIN



Cabinetry by Alta Cabinets – Photography by Azul Photography

IF YOU'RE LIKE ME, YOU THINK OF YOUR KITCHEN AS THE ROOM THAT HOLDS THE SINK THAT YOU EAT OVER. THERE MIGHT ALSO BE A TABLE THERE, UNDER SOME UNPAID BILLS & THE KIDS' SCHOOL PROJECTS. FUNCTIONAL? BARELY. AESTHETIC? HARDLY. MY KITCHEN IS BETTER DESCRIBED AS...THERE.



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## WATCH OUT, RALEIGH – THE KITCHEN HAS ARRIVED.

SUCH LAISSEZ-FAIRE ATTITUDES ARE CHANGING, AS TODAY'S HOMEOWNERS DEMAND MORE FROM THEIR KITCHENS. THAT ONCE-ISOLATED ROOM HAS BECOME AN INTRINSIC PART OF THE HOME AND AN EXTENSION OF THE OCCUPANTS' PERSONALITIES.

### UPDATED LOOKS

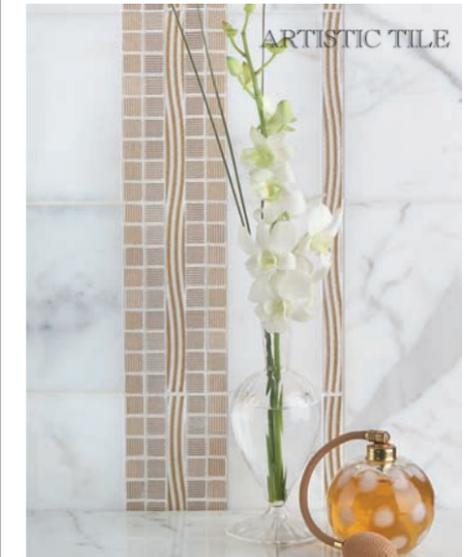
Triangle Design Kitchens President Bill Camp, certified kitchen designer, has witnessed the evolution of the kitchen for nearly three decades. "These days, how a kitchen looks is definitely a lot more important than when I started this business back in 1980," he says. "Back then, kitchens were a lot more closed off from the rest of the house. Today, they're an integral part of the living spaces of the house."

Regarding looks, Camp says they've noticed a strong trend toward one in particular: "We're definitely seeing a bigger interest in contemporary. We've always shown that style, and there's definitely a market for it here in Raleigh. That [look] includes sleek, high-gloss or dark brown doors combined with stainless steel or aluminum, and square pulls. A linear look, with strong horizontal elements. That's really popular. We're still doing traditional kitchens, too, but they aren't quite as ornate as they were back at the start of the decade, when we were seeing lots of hand-carved corbels and ornamentation. The look's a little bit simpler now."

But remodeling isn't always about looks. Camp says sometimes a remodel is spurred by a client's dead appliances. "It's hard to not see all the cool products with the new shows that are out, so clients come in more informed about what they want," he explains.



Triangle Design Kitchens has seen an increase in demand for contemporary design, featuring key elements such as the linear look and sleek cabinetry shown above.



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### "THE NEW LIVING ROOM"

Lynn Thomas, president of Carolina Kitchen Studios, says she is seeing clients remodel for several additional reasons. "Remodeling has really been on the increase over the last few years, especially now with new construction being a little slow," she explains. "People are choosing to stay in their homes, in their neighborhoods. Some of the more mature clientele prefer to 'age in place' and there are all sorts of remodeling efforts going on to help them do that. There are younger couples who are buying older homes and making an investment in their home, then gutting the kitchen and taking out walls to improve form and function. Also, we see families whose kids have grown up, and now it's time for them to get the kitchen of their dreams."

### "TODAY, [KITCHENS ARE] AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE LIVING SPACES OF THE HOUSE."

– BILL CAMP, TRIANGLE DESIGN KITCHENS

Thomas says remodeling is also an investment, quoting the national average return on investment as 120 percent on a remodeled kitchen. With so much on the line, she likes to remind clients that it's important to work with a professional, degreed, certified kitchen designer: "The task requires a tremendous amount of technical knowledge, knowledge of safety and ergonomics, interior design expertise, as well as all the latest and greatest components, specifications and trends. It can get overwhelming to a homeowner. Even architects and interior designers will defer to a kitchen designer."

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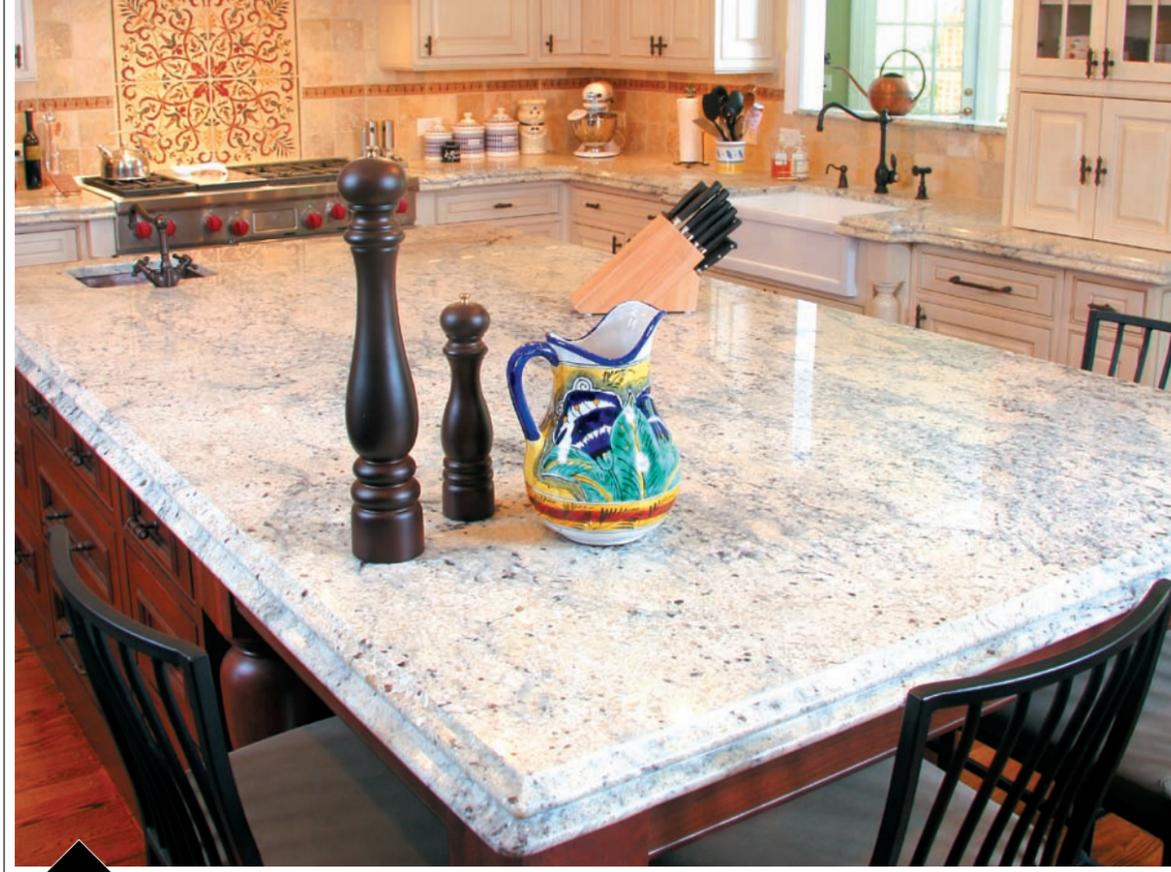
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Stone countertops such as the above, provided by Schneider Stone, are quickly becoming a staple of kitchen remodeling.

"Ten or twelve years ago, it would have been easier," she adds. "You'd just go to your local building supply center and pick out what you wanted – there were maybe ten choices. Now there are literally thousands of choices in every aspect – cabinet styles, countertops, decorative light fixtures, sinks and faucets, hardware and tile. That's why we feel that if a homeowner is either updating or remodeling their kitchen, it would be a good move to start with a kitchen designer as opposed to trying to do it themselves or working with a construction company or a contractor who might not have actual design credentials."

According to Thomas, the kitchen is "the new living room," where people spend the most time with their family, doing multiple activities, so it should look and feel more comfortable and less utilitarian. Also, the kitchen tends to flow into other rooms of the house, so its style should integrate well with the rest of the home, as well as with the owner's personal taste.

**DESIGN TRENDS FROM INDIVIDUALITY TO IDEALISM**

In terms of design, Thomas has noticed a move toward individuality, although some elements appear to be constant. Stainless steel appliances and stone countertops are here to stay, she says, calling them "the new jeans and tee-shirts of the kitchen industry."

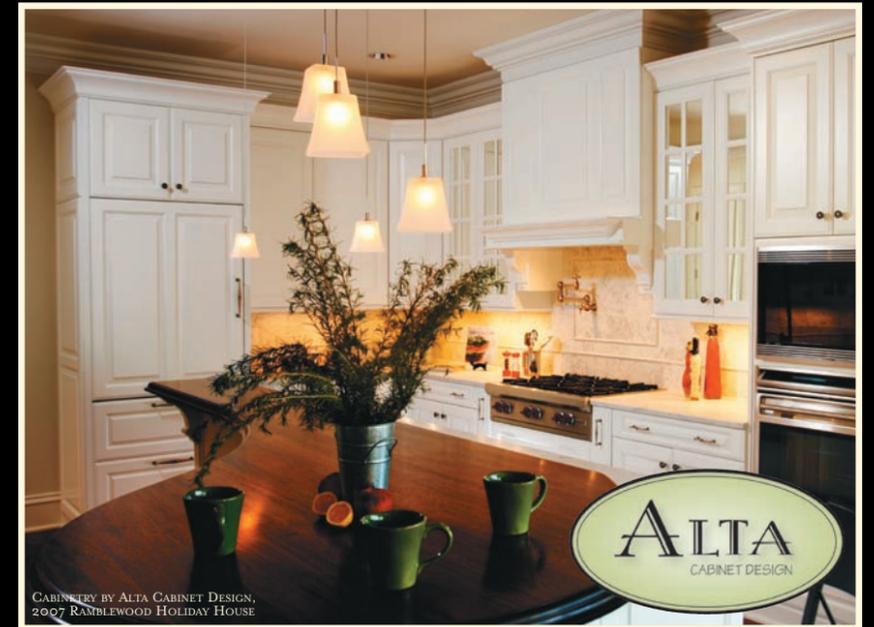
Thomas says another trend that's becoming more popular is to remodel with green products – and she's not talking about the avocado-colored appliances of the '70s. Rather, "green" refers loosely to the use of environmentally friendly products, a topic familiar to Alta Cabinet Design and Ruth Ann Taylor, Certified Kitchen and Bath Designer. Since 1996, Alta has specialized in

the design, sale and installation of kitchen cabinetry, countertops and hardware. Taylor says she has noticed several trends in those markets, including a move toward contemporary kitchens with shaker doors, modern pulls and glass tiles. Other popular features, she says, include white painted cabinets, accent colors on islands, cherry cabinets and granite or quartz countertops. And of course, there's been the recent surge toward the green philosophy.

"Our team at Alta has taken an interest, or tried to stay ahead of the curve on it, because people are starting to ask for it," says Taylor. "We started to look at what makes a product green, and the issue is more with what kind of green is it – is the process green, or is the product itself green? Usually it's one or the other; I haven't really seen that many products out there yet that are comprehensively green."

A product might be considered green if it is made from renewable resources, or if its components contain

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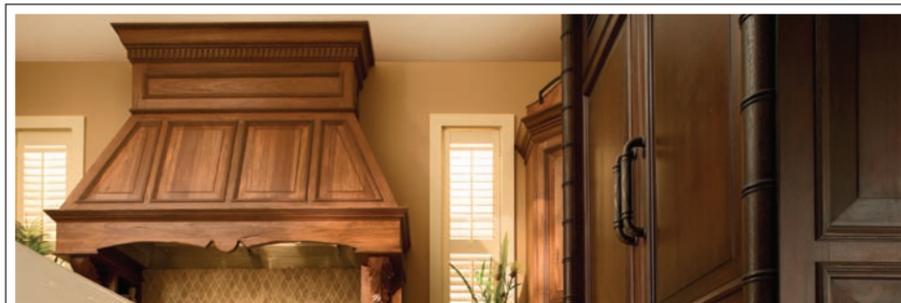
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Decorative hoods like the one above by Carolina Kitchen Studios and the one at right by Unique Fireplace Mantels are becoming a popular upgrade in remodeled kitchens.

fewer pollutants than others. A process, on the other hand, might be considered green if it involves the use of environmentally sound manufacturing principles. The two don't always jibe.

For example, bamboo is a popular material for flooring and cabinetry because it comes from an abundant, quickly renewed supply – green, right? But it must be shipped a long way, so its carbon footprint – the amount of carbon dioxide produced by its transportation – is undesirable on a green scale. Also, attempts to meet high demand have led to the clearing of other areas, leading to erosion and other environmental issues. The background of such a product “merits investigation,” says Taylor.

Other considerations include the level of hazardous air pollutants (HAPs) or volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions from a product. While some plywoods might be assembled with low-emitting glues, their varnish might have high emissions. Clearly, it's not easy being green, which is why Taylor recommends that a customer discuss the options with their designer before choosing a product.

When a customer expresses an interest in going green, Taylor likes to reply with, “What shade of green?” Once a homeowner has decided how green to go, they can pick from multiple trends, including: low-HAPs finishes; quickly renewable woods (Lyptus® hybrid eucalyptus, for example); medium density fiber plywood; low- or no-formaldehyde glues and finishes; laminates with recycled content; quartz countertops fabricated within the United States by Cambria; and concrete countertops.

#### STONE, STEAM AND STYLE

Think stone is an unusual kitchen adornment? Don't say that to Chris McCracken of Unique Fireplace Mantels, whose company creates and installs custom stone mantels and kitchen hoods. Although it's feasible that a mantel would fit into a kitchen scheme – some larger homes have a fireplace off the kitchen – the company's hotter commodity right now is their hoods. According to McCracken, “Kitchen hoods are really becoming a sought-after, updated look for the kitchen. They're very popular, especially around Midtown, where many homeowners are remodeling their kitchens.”

A kitchen hood is installed around the stainless steel ventilation system over a stove, providing a more aesthetic focal point for a kitchen. Many hoods include a shelf and corbels for a more ornate look, and add what McCracken calls “that wow factor” to a stove. This could be due to the casting process, which McCracken says gives hoods “a much more refined look, to emulate the look of hand-carved natural stone.”

That look could be the perfect complement to today's appliances. Camp has seen plenty of advancements in kitchen technology over the past 28 years, including: steam ovens; speed ovens; appliances with pre-programmed cooking modes; super quiet, more efficient, and/or more powerful dishwashers; and something called a magnetic induction cooktop, which cooks without getting hot – Camp says it reverses the polarity of the electrons in ferric cookware (cast iron or high carbon steel), causing the cookware to create heat. The pot or pan itself becomes the element, so there's no need for a radiant element beneath the glass.

So whether you're looking for cool new appliances or a cool new look, hoping to improve your home's value or its wow factor, be sure to do two things: retain a kitchen designer, and ask them about every option available. And remember, your new kitchen should be a direct reflection of your own personal style.

I just wonder how they would describe the personal style of a guy who eats over the sink...◆

# What's Your Focal Point?



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