

# DELAWARE TODAY

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## Kitchen Capers

by Pam George



Stainless appliances, marble counters, custom tile and high-end cabinets are hallmarks of a stylish kitchen. (Kitchen by Design Solutions of Newark.)

When it comes to kitchen design, Delawareans are becoming downright trendy. Homeowners increasingly are embracing modern looks and concepts, including sleek cabinets, unusual countertop materials and eco-friendly materials.

"We're definitely seeing a move toward the contemporary, not only in trendier developments on the Wilmington Riverfront, but also in North Wilmington, which is usually traditional," says Joseph Giorgi Jr., president of Giorgi Kitchens & Designs in the Penny Hill section of North Wilmington.



Banish the thought of cold black countertops, metal trim and antiseptic white cabinets. The local approach to contemporary is softer, more subtle.

Consider seamless cabinets sans visible hinges and fancy embellishments. "They have clean lines. It eliminates the appearance of a wall of cabinet doors," says Bill Bell, vice president of Gotcha Covered, a full-service remodeling and construction firm in Ellendale. Picture the efficient, neat look of a European kitchen.



Frameless cabinets with invisible hinges create a clean look in this space by AmeriCraft Kitchen & Design.

As for cabinet materials, oak is out, Bell says. Hot woods include maple, hickory and birch. Cherry is especially popular, adds Paul Rummel, president of Innovative Kitchens Design Center in Newark.

Eco-minded homeowners are opting for bamboo cabinets, which come in a variety of grains. (Bamboo, which grows quickly, is considered a sustainable material.) Unfinished bamboo cabinets are a natural or amber color, says Mike Moore, vice president of Moore's Cabinet Refinishing in Middletown. Some of his customers elect to keep the original hue. Others request a stain.



Unlike some wood products, bamboo cupboards are solid wood all the way through. Because bamboo does not lend itself to flashy dental moldings or details, it complements a more modern kitchen.

You can mix bamboo cabinets with cabinets made from other woods. Put a walnut panel on a bamboo cupboard, for instance.



White is enjoying a resurgence in popularity, as seen in this room by The Kitchen Gallery.

Indeed, blending cabinet woods and colors is becoming more common. Painted sections define an area, such as a breakfast nook or

coffee bar, both of which are making appearances in updated kitchens.

Giorgi has seen an increase in requests for “statement storage,” a section of cabinetry that is utilitarian, yet delivers a visual impact. You might use it to showcase fancy dishes. “We call it show-and-tell storage,” he says.



Speaking of storage, more cooks are seeing the advantage of drawers over doors, no matter whether they're storing spices, pans or fruit, says **Paul Sheridan, owner of Sheridan Construction**, a remodeling firm in Wilmington.



Drawers are replacing doored cupboards as the storage of choice, as in this kitchen by Moore's Cabinet Refinishing.

The focal point of a fashionable kitchen remains the island. Some homeowners want the island to resemble furniture. A painted or distressed finish helps achieve that effect, as does a different countertop surface or countertop edging.

Painted or plain, islands are no longer limited to squares and rectangles. “People don't want to sit in straight across fashion,” says Cathi Hodgins, president of Kitchens by Design in Brandywine Hundred. Curves and angled islands improve visibility. Because Hodgins doesn't want a cook to face a wall, she's in favor of tucking most appliances on the island. Use the countertops lining the walls to hold toasters, coffeemakers and the like.



If one island is good, two might be better. Hodgins has created different islands for different tasks. "They take on their own identity," she says. Designate one island for prep and cooking; another for entertainment. And, if you have room for a third, create a clean-up island, home to the dishwasher and sink.



Hoods are becoming more decorative, as in this kitchen by AmeriCraft Kitchen & Design.

Many kitchens can't handle two islands, Rummel says, but even with only one, you can capitalize on the trend toward multiple levels. Step up for a work area, then step down for the eating area. Giorgi crafted an island that dropped into table height and led to a banquette.

Banquettes have made a resurgence, but today's models hardly resemble the restaurant-style seating of the past. Only a portion of the seating is built in. The rest might include freestanding chairs. The table itself offers another opportunity for innovation. For a beach house, Hodgins designed banquette seating around a sailboat wheel.



In countertops, granite remains the big seller. If you want to buck the glossy norm, investigate brushed or honed granite. Not all designers, however, are fans. "It shows everything," says Gary Munch of Boss Enterprises. "Condensation from a cup will leave a dark ring."



Design Solutions kept the island as the heart of the kitchen in this remodel.

Daring customers are dabbling in other materials, including concrete and glass. Hodgins used a milky white glass for a baking area instead of the usual marble, which is vulnerable to heat and stains. "It looked sensational," she says. "People think it's marble."

Wood, she says, is another product that is "really happening." She's not talking butcher block, but gorgeous woods from Scandinavia and Pennsylvania, with a protective finish. They're ideal for an island, especially if you want that furniture look. Bamboo is another option.



Most designers tout quartz composites, such as Zodiaq, made by the DuPont Co. "I say it's the Formica of the future," Hodgins says. Also known as "engineered stone," the product originally had a uniform appearance. Newer versions are showing the same movement as granite. Pricing compares with most granites, but Hodgins says the price should come down as more factories get on board. Already there are manufacturers in Spain, Minnesota, Montreal and Italy.

Solid-surface materials like Corian have fallen from favor (they're still recommended for bathrooms), but that could change. "Even designers who've worked with it for years don't recognize it," Giorgi says. "It's much better looking now. It looks like stone."



The client picked popular marble for the counters on this island by Moore's Cabinet Refinishing.

Backsplashes are all over the board. Some designers say tumbled marble is still in. Others say it is on the wane. The same is true of granite backsplashes. Though still popular in some areas, Hodgins has not installed one in some time. She says more customers are

looking into unique tiles.

Giorgi is getting requests for handcrafted tiles. Munch says glass mosaic tiles have maintained their appeal. Brushed stainless steel is another option. In the end, it depends on the look you're after, Giorgi says. "Contemporary will be different than the traditional."



Designers and renovators agree when it comes to appliances. Stainless steel still rules, despite the high maintenance. "Everybody is looking for that commercial look," says Nab Abdul-Aal, owner of Design Solutions in Newark. And many want the top of the line: Viking, Sub-Zero and Wolf. "You can easily spend \$16,000 to \$22,000 in appliances."



Every corner is used for storage in this work by Innovative Kitchens Design Center.

Viking and Sub-Zero have long been to kitchen appliances what Rolex is to watches. But high-end customers want the next best thing. "It's like, 'Everybody has a Viking or Wolf.' They're great products, but the cachet is gone," Munch says. More of his customers want ranges by Aga and La Cornue.

Hoods are becoming more decorative, Rummel says. Yet hoods should be more than a pretty face. Good ventilation is the secret to keeping grease from collecting on your walls and cabinets, Giorgi says. The best systems are above-the-range hoods that cover a slightly larger area than the stove. Make sure the power of the ventilation system can handle the range's output, and use it even when you're using just a tablespoon of oil.



Whether cooking, chopping or entertaining, you spend a lot of time on your feet in the kitchen. Rummel says ceramic tile flooring continues to hold up in high traffic areas. People might shy away from the cold factor, but you can install radiated heat, Abdul-Aal says. Rummel, however, is not quite convinced of the longevity of electric radiated heat. He's more confident when the heat is generated geothermally.



Innovative used bright white to create a clean, uncluttered feeling in small space.

**Sheridan's** customers often choose wood flooring. Bell, in his own kitchen, installed a floor re-milled from an old barn's siding. The right choice of wood is imperative. If your selection is too soft, it will scratch easily—something to consider if you have children and animals.

Ever-versatile bamboo can also serve as flooring. Cork, too, is a green-friendly choice. But often these materials come in smaller pieces, so the look can be too busy in big kitchens, Hodgins says.



They are, however, durable, Moore says. And for him, an environmentally pleasing alternative is the right choice. "I strongly believe that we need to protect our environment," says the cabinet maker. "If we keep cutting trees down, I won't have any wood to work with."