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Kitchen Design Trends - or Not

On an emergency basis, I was enlisted to replace a speaker at the HomeBuilder & Renovator Expo in Toronto, a major show held in conjunction with Construct Canada 2002 last December. The topic was to be kitchen trends for renovation and new construction.

Ordinarily, I would shy away from this type of rescue effort, as I like to take a fair bit of time to prepare and practice my presentations to ensure that I get my message clearly across to my audience. In the end, I decided to structure my talk around the idea that there was no one identifiable trend, but more of an explosion of choices for designers and consumers in kitchen design. To illustrate my message, I used relevant slides from my own collection as well as slides obtained by Total Living Concepts of Barrie of exceptionally well designed kitchens.

While it is true that the trend to smaller spaces (in condominium and loft projects) has produced some innovative ideas, this trend was more of a reaction to a new built form than a true new kitchen design trend. For these tight spaces the solutions seem to centre on flexibility: cooking counters on lockable wheels that can double as dining tables when rotated to the view; and, creative use of usually forgotten spaces (think high and low) for extra storage. These solutions can easily be transposed to other small spaces, like cottages or basement apartments.

Given our aging society, one feature that we can think of as a future trend kitchens that move up and down to accommodate people with mobility disabilities. Furthermore, why not try these types of kitchens for couples of different heights?

I also talked about appliances. While there is a trend to the "industrial" looking appliance, even here older models are continually updated, and, if anything, old ideas like pastel colours are re-emerging. **Convenience seems to be guiding design. Increasingly, for example, separate refrigerator drawers for storage of cold cooking ingredients are being placed next to the stove.** Cooking is becoming an art these days, and stovetops and ovens are getting smart, stylish, and multi-faceted. Natural materials are very popular, but improvements in man-made materials offer designers unprecedented choice in flooring, countertops, cabinetry, and appliance finishes.

One trend that I notice in my practice is the emphasis on the design of the kitchen space itself. Natural light is very important, and the feeling of expanded space realized through cathedral ceilings goes over well with clients. An old trend still going strong is the kitchen designed for easy flow into adjoining entertainment spaces. **It's a fact that a lot of entertaining happens in the kitchen, and the connections to adjoining room are really important.** Careful placement of appliances and sinks, and strategic use of multi-level islands

can make cooking and cleanup easy to do, even within the visual arena of other entertainment spaces.

Consequently, forget inhibitions - anything and everything goes. The key is coordination and consistency in whatever style, colour, material, or finish you specify. Whether modest or extravagant, there are numerous design decisions to make to meet the homeowner's needs. I hope that my audience last December would agree.