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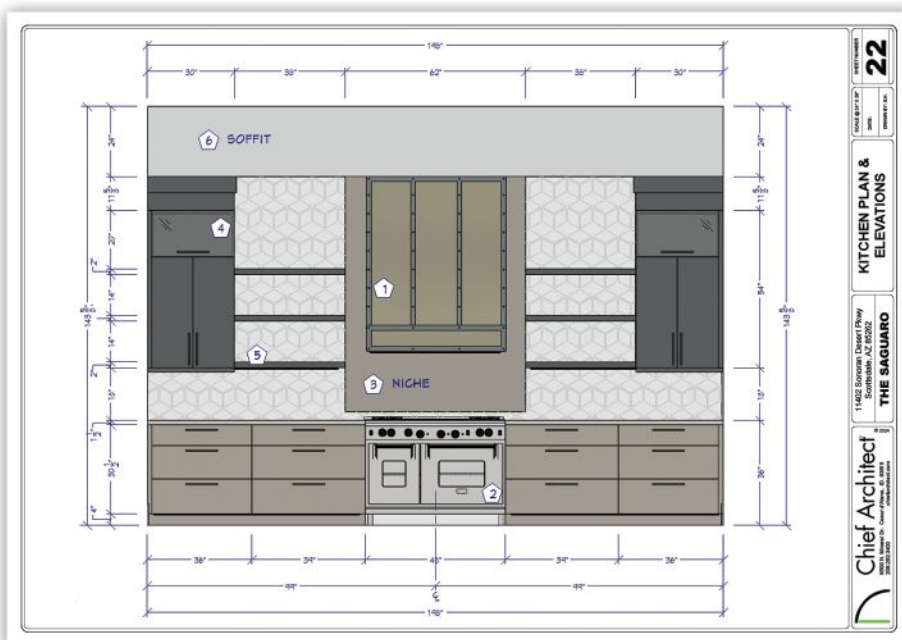


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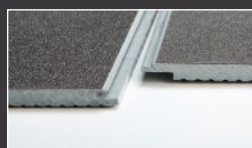
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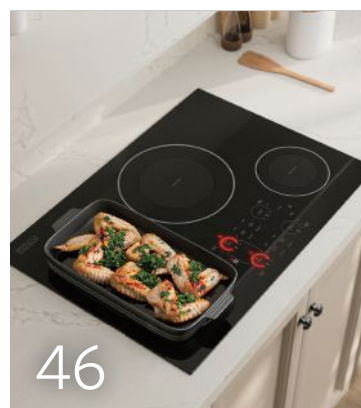
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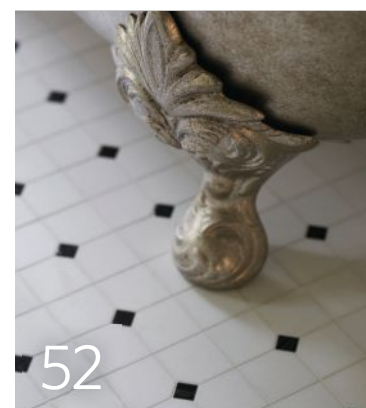
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ON THE COVER

This kitchen, designed by Ariel Apter of Studio AA Interiors in Toronto, ON, Canada, utilizes quartzite to achieve a dramatic yet timeless look, with a waterfall edge featured on the island to showcase the stone. For more information about some of the countertop material selections that are rising in popularity, turn to Talking Tops on page 36...

Photos: Niamh Barry

LUXURY WOOD INTEGRATION



Photography by Don Pearce Photographers, Inc.
Design by Claire Lacing of Bluebell Kitchens



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Clearing the Air on Gas Cooking

THERE'S A POLITICAL squabble that recently boiled to a head in California – an issue that should be on the radar screen of kitchen designers from coast to coast.

The hubbub centers around proposed legislation, known as AB2513, that would have required health-warning labels to be affixed to the ovens, ranges and other gas-powered cooking appliances that are currently staples in millions of American homes.

“Kitchen designers must educate their clients about the need for proper ventilation regardless of cooking type, while allaying fears that are grounded in misinformation and politics.”

Backers of the proposal – stoked by fears from a study linking gas-cooking emissions to childhood asthma and adult mortality – contend that a statutory requirement such as AB2513 would help appliance consumers reduce respiratory problems resulting from exposure to gas cooking. Critics have argued that the bill, since vetoed by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, is grounded in misinformation about the health risks tied to gas cooking and represents a misguided effort to protect consumer health and safety.

The Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (AHAM), the trade organization representing the nation's leading appliance suppliers, has also charged that the bill unfairly targets gas-cooking products. In reality, AHAM argues, *all* types of cooking – not simply natural gas – generate air pollutants, especially at high temperatures, and consumer-protection efforts should be aimed at indoor air quality and the need for proper ventilation *regardless* of fuel source. Furthermore, AHAM contends, locking health and safety warnings into a government statute fails to address the public's need for more accurate guidelines in the future, as updated safety information comes to light.

All of which, of course, makes perfect sense.

However, there's an overarching issue that's seemingly often in play when it comes to regulations aimed at public health and safety. It's the issue of overzealous, politically motivated and poorly informed – however

well-meaning – policymakers proposing guidelines that are ill-advised and often counterproductive.

To wit:

- The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) recently warned Congressional leaders that the current emphasis by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on repeatedly increasing building-code stringency to protect against natural disasters is overkill in light of modern-day building codes and would needlessly raise housing costs, which are already out of reach for a record number of Americans.
- In a similar vein, Plumbing Manufacturers International (PMI), the trade association representing most of the nation's leading plumbing product suppliers, has mounted a concerted effort aimed at helping federal, state and local policymakers better understand how their efforts at reducing flow and flush rates in residential plumbing systems can inadvertently prove counterproductive to the goal of water savings by having an injurious impact on key system components.
- Critics of natural gas bans for new construction in several local jurisdictions have filed lawsuits to halt the would-be bans, charging that the proposed restrictions would do more harm than good: exacerbating the current housing affordability crisis by increasing the cost of new homes and sharply limiting consumer choice.

In the case of cooking appliances, manufacturers, kitchen designers and industry trade associations, among others, should work in concert with public-health officials to educate consumers about the need for proper ventilation *regardless* of cooking type, while alerting consumers to the risks from hazards emanating from improper appliance use.

If public officials truly believe that cooking appliances require a health-related warning label, then the public deserves a label that's supported by accurate, up-to-date, science-based data – not by political bias, questionable studies, and fears that are grounded in misinformation and a relentless zeal for government overregulation.

Policymakers must fully understand the impact of the regulations they impose, and stop playing political football when it comes to the issue of public safety. Government regulations should be common-sense and well-conceived – not a knee-jerk reaction to a half-baked idea blowing about in the political winds. ■

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Industry Pros Talk Artificial Intelligence

Q: *Has your business used or benefited from AI-driven technology?*

"WE ARE SLOWLY learning how to best utilize AI technology for our business. We currently use AI with our sales and marketing effort to automate marketing campaigns, target specific customer segments with relevant promotions, and improve our marketing effectiveness.

We feel that AI will provide significant benefits, primarily by streamlining our processes and further enhancing the customer experience with next generation design and visualization tools."

*Johnanthony Fiorilli, president/owner
JA Kitchen & Bath
Broomall, PA*

"I HAVE STARTED to utilize AI technologies in various forms for my business, especially in simplifying tasks and in the process of reworking my marketing, as well as client forms. It has helped me to be more efficient with my most precious resource... time.

From simple organizational tasks that allow me to answer emails effectively and in a timely manner to organizing marketing details. It also can be used for tools like pulling examples and samples together, things that can eat up a lot of time just to get a glimpse of what's going on in my own brain. I see a lot of potential, especially for small one-person firms who wear a LOT of hats."

*Molly Switzer, owner/principal designer
Molly N Switzer Designs, LLC
Portland, OR*

"WE ARE ACTIVELY using Claude for research, content and reviewing documents. I have also used Claude to create an instant cost estimator."

*Gregg Cantor
Murray Lampert Design, Build, Remodel
San Diego, CA*

"NO, AND NEVER will. The world has already become too dependent on technology as far as jobs being replaced by machines and young adults not knowing what real work is. Our children have become lazy and don't want to do any kind of hard labor and only want the cushy office job.

I grew up on a farm doing all the hard work needed, but wanted to build things and I started my own business with remodeling when I was 19. That was 46 years ago, and I

have never had to advertise and now all of my work is repeat clients. All because I learned early on that hard work and dedication to doing the job right will always keep me busy. I can only hope that one day everyone will realize what AI will do to this world and shut it down before it takes over. AI and machines will never be able to do what the human hands can do."

*William Chase, owner/president
B & K Chase Construction, Inc.
Dallas, TX*

"I HAVE BEEN using AI to identify and source products and materials I see in photographs and in the world. I have also dabbled in AI renderings, which I think will amp up my presentations and help clients to visualize various vignettes. AI has been a game-changer for me."

*Cassia Wyner
CW Design, LLC
Brookline, MA*

"ABSOLUTELY - HR and marketing resources for sure! We get our social media schedules and suggestions for employee manuals from AI. It has reduced our expenses for HR resources greatly."

*Susie Poggemeyer, owner
Kitchens Inspired
Littleton, CO*

"YES, [I USE it to] help write longer descriptive emails in minutes that would have taken 30 minutes; proofread and edit contracts; create ad copy, and summarize information.

This year I will train an AI LLM to read cabinet plans and price cabinets for quick estimates (already completed proof of concept successfully), edit video for website blogs and create podcasts with my voice for media content to help introduce my company, sales processes and products to educate future customers."

*Matt Hegemier, owner
MidTown Cabinet & Designs
League City, TX*

"WE HAVE BEEN sampling ChatGPT for the past year or so, using it for inspiration with emails, checklists and managing expectations. It gets us 'unstuck' and can provide

some structure to our thoughts to get things down on paper or into forms. We're just starting to scratch the surface, yet it's inspiring to see what might be available and what it might be capable of accomplishing."

*Max Isley, CMKBD/CEO
Hampton Kitchens of Raleigh Inc
Raleigh, NC*

"I'M LEARNING! I'VE used ChatGPT for researching products, help with a presentation notes and social media prompts. Really interested in how it can enhance and streamline my solo design business."

*Kelly Dubyne, owner/founder
Distinctive Interior Designs
Lake Stevens, WA*

"WE ARE USING AI notetakers in all of our internal meetings. We are getting ready to roll it out to external meetings. The summaries of these meetings are invaluable for accountability, etc."

*Michael Jacobs, president
Marvista Design + Build
Pittsburgh, PA*

"NO. WE RUN a specialized design firm and have yet to find an AI technology that benefits our business."

*John Schmied
MBF Architects
New Bern, NC*

"YES, WE HAVE just started using it to record and transcribe meetings with clients, so we have clarity and follow up from design meetings. We are also using it for certain contract clauses and employee documents."

*Joseph Smith, partner
Owings Home Services
Eldersburg, MD*

"NOT AT ALL. Kitchen design is too personal, with too many options. People want a face-to-face human touch, not a generated opinion from a machine that never cooked or cleaned in a kitchen or would ever have the need or passion. As far a scheduling, we're not [using AI] there either."

*Charles Fowler, showroom coordinator/
operations manager
I-4 Kitchen Bath
Orlando, FL*

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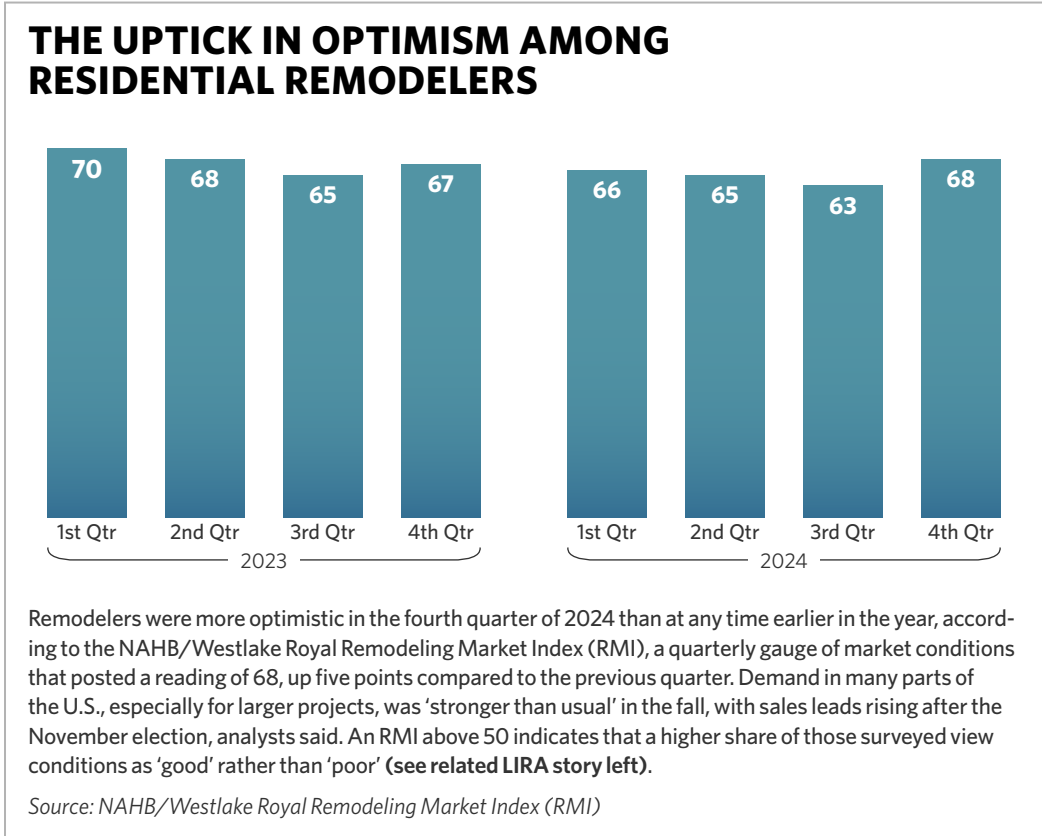
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Start to 2025 Sees Rise in Optimism

HOME BUILDERS, REMODELERS and kitchen/bath professionals are expressing optimism over their prospects in 2025, even as the market continues to face headwinds that blunted growth in 2024. Among the key statistics and forecasts released in recent weeks by government agencies, research firms and industry-related trade associations were the following:

HOUSING STARTS & NEW-HOME SALES Builder sentiment is holding steady as high home prices and elevated mortgage rates offset renewed hope about an improved regulatory business climate this year, the National Association of Home Builders reported. “While builders are expressing concerns that high interest rates, elevated construction costs and a lack of buildable lots continue to act as headwinds, they’re also anticipating future regulatory relief,” said NAHB Chairman Carl Harris. The NAHB is forecasting additional interest rate cuts from the Federal Reserve in 2025, but with inflation pressures still present, the association has reduced its forecast from 100 basis points to 75 basis points for the federal funds rate. “Concerns over inflation risks will keep long-term interest rates near current levels, with mortgage rates remaining above 6%,” noted NAHB Chief Economist Robert Dietz. The NAHB is forecasting single-family starts to post only a slight increase in 2025, Dietz added.

RESIDENTIAL REMODELING After two years of decline, annual expenditures for improvements and maintenance to owner-occupied homes are expected to grow at a mild pace throughout 2025, according to the Leading Indicator of Remodeling Activity (LIRA), released in January by the Remodeling Futures Program at the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. The LIRA projects that year-over-year spending for



home renovation and repair will increase by 1.2% in 2025. While remodeling expenditures are expected to grow only modestly in 2025, analysts have increased their projection for the market’s size by \$30 billion, or 6.4%, to \$509 billion. “A solid labor market, rising home values, and continued improvement in existing-home sales are supporting greater activity in home remodeling,” said Carlos Martín, director of the Remodeling Futures Program at the Joint Center.

MAJOR HOME APPLIANCE SHIPMENTS Domestic shipments of major home appliances gained ground in 2024 compared

to the same 12-month period a year earlier, the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers reported. According to the latest figures, released in January by the Washington, DC-based AHAM, major home appliance shipments totaled 76.2 million units from the time period of January through December of last year, up 2.6% from the 74.3 million units shipped in calendar year 2023. Shipment gains for 2024 were posted for refrigeration (+3.7%) and home laundry products (+2.2%). In contrast, shipments of kitchen cleanup (-2.1%) and cooking appliances (-2.1%) were both off from the previous year, AHAM said.

MARKET ANALYSIS

‘Worst’ of Housing Shortage Ending, Realtors Association Asserts

BOSTON — The worst of the housing inventory shortage is likely coming to an end, while mortgage rates have stabilized and job growth is continuing – all of which should result in steady increases in existing-home sales, according to a forecast by the chief economist for the National Association of Realtors. After two years of sluggish home sales, existing-home sales are forecasted to rise to 4.47 million in 2025, and more than 5 million in 2026, said Lawrence Yun of the Washington,

DC-based NAR, noting that household equity is also at record heights while job gains since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in record-high payroll employment. Yun said that he expects a slower growth rate in home prices during the next two years, because of additional housing supply reaching the market. He expects the Federal Reserve to maintain “a gradual approach” to easing monetary policy, offering relief to prospective

buyers, and forecasts that mortgage rates will stabilize near 6% in 2025, “likely establishing a new normal.” “Home buyers appear to have recalibrated expectations regarding mortgage rates and are taking advantage of more available inventory,” Yun said. “Buyers are no longer waiting for, or expecting, mortgage rates to fall substantially. Stable mortgage rates and continued income growth will pave the way for more Americans to achieve homeownership.” ■



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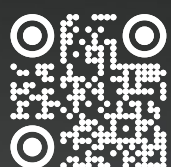
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Photo: Courtesy of MasterBrand/Decora Cabinets

Report Spotlights Key Design Trends

JASPER, IN — As minimalism and modern styles evolve, “bold trends featuring vintage elements and vibrant aesthetics” are emerging across the kitchen design landscape, allowing for unique, personalized spaces.

That is among the key conclusions of the *MasterBrand 2025 Kitchen Trend Survey*, an annual report released by MasterBrand Cabinets, including insights on the future of kitchen design. The report was based upon a survey of 755 dealers and designers selling MasterBrand cabinetry across the U.S. and Canada, according to the company.

“People are breaking away from popular design trends and setting their own by merging personal preferences with hints of modern elements to create a lively but comfortable space,” said Stephanie Pierce, director of design and trends at the Jasper, IN-based MasterBrand, which manufactures 15+ cabinet brands, including Aristokraft, Decorá, Diamond, Schrock, Kemper, Homecrest, KitchenCraft, Omega, Mid Continent, UltraCraft and StarMark.

Among emerging design trends identified by MasterBrand were the following:

- **Blank Canvas for Personalization:** Shrinking home footprints combined with busy lifestyles means the kitchen needs to be more functional than ever, and designers are getting creative with how they tackle clutter and fulfill people’s everyday needs while also incorporating their personal styles. Homeowners are increasingly looking to blend unique, charming elements with modern touches, giving rise to design styles like Baroque Americana and eclectic kitchen décor, MasterBrand said.
- **Color Confidence:** Experimenting with vivid colors and hues in the kitchen continues to rise in popularity. The most common way people are incorporating color in kitchen cabinetry is through their islands, followed by using color only on the perimeter cabinetry. Blues and greens

are the leading choice for adding color, but unexpected colors are becoming popular as cabinetry finish options, MasterBrand said. For example, when paired with warm, neutral accents, the red family is starting to make waves, as vibrant hues of pink and rich hues of burgundy and plum allow homeowners to create an eye-catching, sophisticated space.

- **Warm Woods:** Warm woods create a sense of comfort by promoting a biophilic connection, MasterBrand observed. Light and mid-tone wood stains are the top choices, and when it comes to material, oak, walnut and maple species are often used for their organic grain texture and balanced tones that give the space dimension. Combining wood and painted cabinet finishes creates more depth and adds character, the company added.
- **Efficiency, Simplicity & Organized Chaos:** The biggest kitchen concern for many homeowners is “decluttering” their space, the biggest functional driver for today’s kitchen design choices, according to MasterBrand. The emerging trends of inconspicuous kitchens and back kitchens (or butler’s pantries) demonstrate the need for hidden workspaces and hardworking functional areas. Both concepts preserve the visual appeal of the kitchen by offering concealed spaces for kitchen appliances and gadgets or creating extra prep and cleanup spaces that ensure the kitchen remains well organized. Smaller kitchens can benefit from posh pantries – or floor-to-ceiling pantry cabinets – that keep household items organized and easily accessible, MasterBrand said. These storage solutions can also address sustainability and food waste concerns by promoting proper visibility and encouraging more conscientious consumption habits, which is particularly helpful as grocery bills rise for consumers, the company added. ■



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Looming Tariffs Spark NAHB Concern

WASHINGTON, DC — The potential for the U.S. to impose tariffs on steel and aluminum imports “runs totally counter” to the goal of reducing housing costs, increasing supply and ultimately easing the nation’s housing affordability crisis, the National Association of Home Builders has claimed.

The Washington, DC-based NAHB said recently that consumers will ultimately “pay for tariffs” in the form of higher home prices, and a slowdown in both new development and efforts to rebuild in the wake of natural disasters.

The Trump Administration’s now-delayed decision to impose 25% tariffs on all steel and aluminum products

imports into the U.S. is projected to raise the cost of imported steel and aluminum products by several billion dollars, “adding layered costs that could substantially impact builders’ ability to deliver new single-family and multifamily projects,” the Washington, DC-based NAHB said.

“NAHB continues to urge the administration to carefully consider the potential effects of placing additional tariffs on building materials, which could price even more families out of the American dream of homeownership,” said NAHB Chairman Carl Harris. “We will continue to work with the administration to remove regulatory and other barriers that raise housing costs and

hinder the production of new homes and apartments,” Harris added.

Home builder confidence has fallen sharply in recent weeks over concerns about tariffs, elevated mortgage rates and high housing costs, according to Harris.

“While builders hold out hope for pro-development policies, particularly for regulatory reform, policy uncertainty and cost factors (have) created a reset for 2025 expectations,” Harris said.

“With 32% of appliances and 30% of softwood lumber coming from international trade, uncertainty over the scale and scope of tariffs has builders further concerned about costs,” added NAHB Chief Economist Robert Dietz.

Kitchen, Bath Spending Projected To Rise Modestly in 2025

BETHLEHEM, PA — Following two consecutive years of modest contraction, U.S. residential kitchen and bath spending will increase to \$235 billion in 2025, a gain of 0.8% from the \$233 billion spent last year, according to a pair of reports issued by the National Kitchen & Bath Association.

Citing its 2025 Kitchen & Bath Market Outlook Report and the latest NKBA/John Burns Kitchen & Bath Market Index (KBMI), the Bethlehem, PA-based trade association projected that professionally led kitchen and bath remodels will rise 2.9% in 2025, continuing to outpace DIY activity (+0.6%). In a reversal from last year, spending on kitchen and bath remodeling is expected to outpace new-construction spending, the NKBA added.

“The big question for 2025 – one that will be key to a robust recovery in kitchen and bath remodels – is whether middle-income consumers will jump back into the renovation market after two years on the sidelines,” the NKBA said, noting that consumer uncertainty appears to finally be ticking down with the resolution of last November’s presidential election.

“Those homeowners living in mid-range homes are the most likely to tap into home equity, but they’ve also proven to be the most rate-sensitive,” the NKBA observed. “If short-term borrowing costs drop, this critical group could finally embark on renovations in increasing numbers.”

The possibility of increased tariffs and changes to immigration policy could elevate the cost of kitchen and bath materials and labor, and “present downside risk to the positive forecast for 2025, both directly through higher costs, and indirectly through the pace at which the Fed lowers interest rates if progress on inflation stalls in 2025,” the NKBA said.

“While our industry is poised to finally realize much-anticipated growth in 2025, we have to keep a close eye on some key uncertainties that could hinder this expansion,” said NKBA Global President & CEO Bill Darcy.

Reico Acquires NC Design Firm

CHARLOTTE, NC — Reico Kitchen & Bath, the major chain of retail kitchen and bath locations across five states, has completed the acquisition of Carolina Kitchens and its two locations in Greensboro and Winston-Salem, NC, the company announced.

The acquisition, whose terms were not disclosed, brings Reico’s total number of showrooms to 26 across the Mid- and South-Atlantic region, and increases Reico Kitchen & Bath’s presence in North Carolina to six showrooms, adding to existing locations in Charlotte, Raleigh, Southern Pines and Wilmington. Other showrooms are located in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Delaware.

“Carolina Kitchens has established an outstanding reputation since its inception in 1973,” said Reico Kitchen & Bath President Rich Maresco. “We are delighted for the opportunity to build on the high level of service in these growing markets.”

Fortune Brands Reorganizes, Consolidates Offices in Illinois

DEERFIELD, IL — Fortune Brands Innovations, the publicly traded parent company of Moen, House of Rohl, Aqualisa, SpringWell, Therma-Tru and other building/remodeling product suppliers, has announced a series of actions designed to “accelerate the company’s growth opportunities.”

Fortune Brands, headquartered in the Chicago suburb of Deerfield, IL, said it is consolidating its U.S. regional offices into one campus headquarters – a decision aimed at “delivering a world-class, collaborative office environment to fuel the company’s innovation, accelerate its digital solutions, and grow its core products.”

Fortune Brands’ headquarters will ultimately occupy two buildings on its campus in Deerfield, corporate officials said. Fortune Brands also announced it is simplifying its executive leadership structure by eliminating the role of group president and replacing it with direct reporting lines and closer working relationships between the CEO and Fortune Brands’ commercial leaders.

“We are confident that this new campus headquarters in Deerfield will enable us to best shape an environment where people can innovate together while delivering on our purpose, accelerating both the business and our associates’ careers, and building our reputation as an employer of choice in the Chicago area,” said Fortune Brands Chief Executive Officer Nicholas Fink.

“We have a huge opportunity ahead of us,” Fink added. “Bringing together associates from across all our brands into one state-of-the-art campus will help us bring innovations to life faster, while also making the organization more efficient and aligned.”

Remodeling Firm Announces Rebrand

BURLINGAME, CA — NorCal Remodeling Group, a bathroom remodeling company in the Greater Bay Area, has

announced its rebranding to True North Kitchen & Bath, an effort that “reflects the company’s continuous commitment to guiding homeowners toward their dream spaces with expanded service offerings and a broader geographic reach.”

Beginning this spring, True North Kitchen & Bath will broaden its offerings beyond bathroom remodeling to include custom kitchen renovation services, company officials said, adding that the company is also extending its reach beyond the Greater Bay Area, to serve customers in Sacramento and Southern California.

“The name ‘True North’ reflects the company’s commitment to authenticity, trust, and staying grounded in its mission to transform spaces with care and expertise,” said owners Jonathan Moore and Steven Molof.

“As we grow and expand, we’ve sought a name that will act as both a beacon for greatness and a constant reminder to stay true to the underlying core energy and purpose that enabled our growth and success.”

TRUE NORTH
KITCHEN & BATH



■ Pierre-Yves Gagnon, v.p. and Jean-Bernard Gagnon, president, Cuisine Idéale, celebrate the opening of its new plant and headquarters in Sherbrooke, Quebec with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

Cuisine Idéale Unveils \$41M Headquarters, Factory

SHERBROOKE, CANADA — Cuisine Idéale, a leading Canadian manufacturer of high-end kitchens, has opened a new, \$41-million headquarters and factory in Sherbrooke, the company announced.

The 135,000-sq.-ft. facility, according to company officials, enables Cuisine Idéale to double its manufacturing capacity while “optimizing efficiency, flexibility and product customization to meet the demands of a constantly evolving market.”

“This project marks a key step in our development and our commitment to offering ever more innovative, high-quality products,” said Cuisine Idéale President Jean-Bernard Gagnon. “With the opening of this new state-of-the-art plant, we’ll be able to strengthen our competitiveness on a national and international scale, while providing local jobs and contributing to Sherbrooke’s economic vitality.”

NKBA Adds Advisors to ‘Global Connect’ Program

BETHLEHEM, PA — The National Kitchen & Bath Association has named a series of advisors to the NKBA “Global Connect,” an international business development program aimed at helping international companies explore business opportunities in the North American market.

Membership in the Global Connect program, according to the NKBA, offers access to a wide range of strategic business advisors who consult on topics such as distribution strategies, regulations and compliance, finance and insurance, and product development.

Named as Global Connect advisors were:

- Dwayne Lusk, president and managing member of Kitchen Logistics LLC, an advisor specializing in the area of European Kitchen Furniture installation, sales and customer service.
- Eric Marshall, principal of the Closet Training Institute, a renowned closet and storage industry entrepreneur.
- Kate Bailey, v.p. of Category Management, Residential, at Ferguson Enterprises.
- Evan Cohen, president and owner of Quality Marble & Granite in Ontario, CA.
- Bruce Case, president and CEO of Case Architects and Remodelers.
- Andrew Savant, president of kitchen, outdoor and plumbing products distributor Pinnacle Sales Group.
- Craig Webb, founder and president of Webb Analytics, a Washington, DC-based consulting firm for the construction supply industry.
- Michael Wright, CKBD, principal designer of Cleveland Tile and Cabinet.
- Cheryl Clendenon, an award-winning interior designer and business coach from In Detail Design Collective.

In addition, Sindmóveis, the Furniture Industry Association of Bento Gonçalves, representing 300 companies in the main furniture cluster in Brazil, has joined the Global Connect business development initiative as a Strategic Alliance Partner, the NKBA said.

Appliance Energy Mandates Postponed by Dept. of Energy

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Dept. of Energy (DOE) has will postpone the implementation of the latest round of energy efficiency mandates on key home energy appliances, including for gas powered instantaneous (tankless) water heaters, the federal agency announced.

The postponements, according to the DOE, represent “a key step in undoing the previous administration’s burdensome policies that have driven up costs, reduced choice and diminished the quality of Americans’ home appliances.”

In addition to the tankless water heaters, the DOE has postponed the “overreaching” efficiency standards for clothes washers and dryers, as well as for commercial refrigeration equipment and other products.

Additionally, the DOE is creating a new energy efficiency category for natural gas tankless water heaters that would exempt these products from “onerous efficiency rules and allow for fair standards that balance efficiency with availability of product features desired by consumers,” the agency said.

The DOE actions were announced alongside action taken by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to overhaul all “WaterSense” specifications that “have encouraged the sale of bathroom and kitchen faucets, residential toilets and sprinkler nozzles that just don’t work well.”

Groups Support Plan to Boost Housing Affordability

WASHINGTON, DC — A consortium of trade associations tied to the housing market has backed a Congressional plan aimed at tackling the current housing affordability crisis, the groups announced.

The National Association of Realtors and National Association of Home Builders are among about a dozen industry-related trade associations that have announced their support for the recent reintroduction of the Bipartisan Congressional Real Estate Caucus. “The desire for homeownership and housing development is strong nationwide, yet the shortage of affordable housing units and limited supply continues to hinder countless Americans from realizing this dream,” the organizations said. “It is crucial for Congress to back policies that drive growth in the real estate sector, a mission central to the goals of the reintroduced caucus.

According to the consortium, the U.S. is short more than 4.5 million housing units, “reflecting a severe underinvestment in housing infrastructure, and driving home costs way beyond an affordable threshold for many Americans.

“U.S. tax policy must play a greater role in fostering homeownership, strengthening communities, expanding rental housing across all price points, and driving economic growth,” the group added. “We commend this caucus for initiating vital discussions on overcoming the barriers to building affordable housing and easing the challenges first-time buyers face in entering the market.”

Franchise Platform to House Multiple Brands

AUGUSTA, GA — Premium Service Brands (PSB), the leading franchisor in the North American home-services industry, has announced the launch of Nesto, a new platform designed to house multiple PSB brands under one roof.

The consolidated model, which includes a kitchen and bath remodeling operation, is being piloted by Augusta, GA-based multi-brand franchisee Mark Boyd, who has integrated six of PSB’s home-services brands – 360 Painting, House Doctors, The Grout Medic, Kitchen Wise | Closet Wise, ProLift Garage Doors and Window Gang – in a centralized showroom, PSB officials said.

“This innovative setup is a milestone in our mission to make quality home services accessible and convenient across the nation,” added, noting that envisions Nesto as “a springboard for franchisees interested in multi-brand ownership.”

“Nesto is paving the way for franchisees to scale their businesses by leveraging multiple brands under one roof, demonstrating our commitment to innovative solutions that benefit both franchisees and customers,” the company stated.

Home Products Increasingly Leveraging AI, Report Finds

WASHINGTON, DC— Home products, including those for the kitchen and bath, are increasingly leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to adapt to modern-day home-

owners' habits and daily routines, according to a report issued by the American Institute of Architects.

"Despite concerns about data privacy and costs, widespread adoption of smart-home technology continues...offering a level of personalization and assistance that makes the products indispensable," the Washington DC-based AIA observed. "Smart-home technology can create a multi-sensory space by considering how

temperature, lighting, airflow, texture, sound, scents and more can engage the senses and evoke emotion," the AIA added.

Among other key findings of the AIA report:

- From a renovation perspective, design considerations going forward will place a premium on creating homes that are "havens of tranquility."

"While this emerging way of living isn't 'new' per se, it continues to gain steam across physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions," the AIA observed. "This is a result of compelling bodies of research validating the profound impact our spaces can have on the mind - and ultimately on happiness and personal satisfaction."

- Beyond the "intricate dance" between mental wellbeing and working from home, homeowners continue to crave spaces that not only accommodate their physical health but also become sanctuaries in an increasingly chaotic world, the AIA observed.

Citing Mintel, a global market intelligence and research agency, the association predicted a return to a "me mentality," reflecting a collective desire among homeowners to refocus inwardly on personal wellbeing.



Decorative Plumbing + Hardware Association



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Designery Opens FL Site

ORLANDO, FL — The Designery, a full-service kitchen, bath and closet design center, has opened its newest location in Lake Mary, FL, the company announced.

The Designery Lake Mary will serve residents in Altamonte Springs, Casselberry, Fern Park, Heathrow, Lake Mary, Longwood, Maitland and Oviedo, FL, said the company, which was founded in 2007 as A1 Kitchen and Bath, a wholesale outlet serving the Chattanooga, TN market. The company rebranded as The Designery in 2019, establishing a franchise model to expand its concept to multiple markets.



📍 This kitchen, designed by Amber Paulk of The Kitchen Source in Southlake, TX, is the Grand Prize winner of Wood-Mode's annual Design Awards program.

Wood-Mode Honors Design Contest Winners

KREAMER, PA — Wood-Mode, the Kreamer, PA-based custom cabinet manufacturer, has announced the winners of the company's annual Design Awards program, launched in 2024 for its network of independent dealers across North America.

Wood-Mode named a Grand Prize winner, along with first-, second- and third-place winners in three categories: Kitchens, Baths and Other Spaces. In addition, 21 entries received Honorable Mentions.

The Grand Prize in the competition was awarded to Amber Paulk, of The Kitchen Source, Southlake, TX. Other award-winners were as follows:

- Kitchen Category:
1st Place: Steve Abruzzo, Abruzzo Kitchen & Bath; 2nd Place: Rachel Logue, Rachel Eve Design; 3rd Place: Elizabeth Tranberg, The Kitchen Source.
 - Bath Category:
1st Place: Elizabeth Tranberg, The Kitchen Source; 2nd Place: Andi Stephens, Kitchen Distributors; 3rd Place: Mark Haddad, Interiology Design.
 - Other Spaces Category:
1st Place: Elizabeth Tranberg, The Kitchen Source; 2nd Place: Jay Takach, Evolo Design; 3rd Place: Julie Lyons, The Design Studio.
- Honorable Mentions were as follows:
- Kitchen Category: Elizabeth Tranberg, The Kitchen Source; Virginia Birdsall, Peterman Kitchens; Amber Paulk, The Kitchen Source; Kris Bilty and Jody Ryg, Renaissance Design; Bob Blanco, Shore & Country; Pamela Nesbitt, Denise Quade Design; Mark Haddad, Interiology Design; Bob Blanco, Shore & Country; Jennifer Hissa, Greater Chicago Kitchens & Baths, and Roy Finley, Kitchen & Bath Showcase.
 - Bath Category: Julia Kleyman, Ulrich, Inc.; Jennifer Hissa, Greater Chicago Kitchens & Baths, and Virginia Birdsall, Peterman Kitchens.
 - Other Spaces Category: Julia Kleyman, Ulrich, Inc.; Kris Bilty and Jody Ryg, Renaissance Design; Virginia Birdsall, Peterman Kitchens; Jennifer Hissa, Greater Chicago Kitchens & Baths; Elizabeth Tranberg, The Kitchen Source, and Roy Finley, Kitchen & Bath Showcase

Re-Bath Expands Reach Into Maine

PORTLAND, ME — Re-Bath, the Phoenix, AZ-based bathroom remodeling bathroom franchise, has expanded into Maine, growing to more than 100 locations across the U.S., the company announced.

Re-Bath said its new agreement will bring its services to Portland, ME and surrounding communities. Co-owners Bill Trombly Jr. and Cristina Velez, who have successfully operated Re-Bath in New Hampshire, will oversee the location, corporate officials said.

Nemo Tile + Stone Opens NJ Slab Gallery

NEW YORK — Nemo Tile + Stone, the New York City-based provider of surface materials, has opened the company's newest location, the Nemo Slab Collection Gallery in Lyndhurst, NJ.

The 30,000-sq.-ft. gallery showcases an extensive selection of premium porcelain and natural stone curated to meet the needs of architects, designers, fabricators and contractors, the company said.

"The facility underscores the brand's rich legacy and mission to provide the finest materials and services to the architecture, design and construction communities, with flexibility and proximity in mind," Nemo Tile + Stone officials added.

"We have seamlessly integrated the rich heritage of Nemo Tile + Stone with artisanal craftsmanship to create a meticulously curated collection of porcelain slabs," said Matt Karlin, CEO of Nemo Tile + Stone. "This fusion of tradition and modern innovation is designed to meet the dynamic demands of today's industry."

Aside from displaying a wide range of premium porcelain and stone products, the gallery will host hands-on workshops offering valuable insights into slab installation and fabrication techniques, Karlin noted.

Dura Supreme Marks Annual 'Kids Switch Day'

HOWARD LAKE, MN — Dura Supreme Cabinetry recently celebrated its 32nd annual "Kid's Switch Day," with a record class of 30 students who participated in educational games and a tour of the Dura Supreme factory, where they learned about cabinet manufacturing and related topics.

Each year since the early 1990s, the Howard Lake, MN-based Dura Supreme has hosted fifth-graders who are children or grandchildren of a Dura Supreme employee. The day includes a series of hands-on activities, including an opportunity for each child to build his or her own cabinet to take home as a keepsake.

"This is an awesome experience for the children," said Maria Dupont, professional Expediter for Dura Supreme Cabinetry. "My children are in their 30s, and they still have the sweet little cabinet they built."

"The kids appeared to thoroughly enjoy the day, while learning about Dura Supreme and getting to see where their parents and grandparents work," said Karen Wistrom, v.p./marketing for Dura Supreme, which recently opened an additional manufacturing facility in Statesville, NC and joined the MasterBrand family of product brands.

WAC Lighting Forms Collective of Companies

PORT WASHINGTON, NY — WAC Lighting, the Port Washington, NY-based supplier of lighting products, has announced the formation of the WAC Group, a collective of companies that produces lighting and smart fans for residential and commercial applications.

The new parent brand, to be known as WAC Group, will market its products under the tagline "Technology Illuminated," corporate officials said. The group includes WAC Lighting, Modern Forms, Schonbek, AiSPIRE, WAC Limited, and WAC Landscape.

The new entity will maintain its individual brands' names, websites and teams "while offering a streamlined approach to servicing lighting professionals and end users," corporate officials noted.

The unified portfolio, said WAC Lighting President Becki Li, provides lighting showrooms, homeowners, architects, interior designers, lighting designers and other professionals with a diverse range of products spanning various styles, price points, and advanced lighting and fan technologies.

"WAC Group combines our heritage of design with the latest technology," Li said. "By bringing our brands together, we're enhancing our ability to provide innovative solutions that not only illuminate spaces but improve how people use light, making environments smarter and more energy efficient."



Rev-A-Shelf hosted a group of Jefferson County Public Schools students, offering them a look at opportunities in advance manufacturing and skilled trades.

Public School Students Hosted by Rev-A-Shelf

LOUISVILLE, KY — Rev-A-Shelf, the Louisville, KY-based supplier of home storage and organization products, recently hosted a group of Jefferson County Public Schools students at the company's manufacturing facility.

The tour, part of a partnership with local schools to promote career pathways in trade and manufacturing, offered students a look at opportunities in advanced manufacturing and skilled trades, the company said. Participants observed the operation of Rev-A-Shelf's production lines and engaged with team members, corporate officials said. Students also had the chance to explore career paths in engineering, logistics, and operations within the growing field of advanced manufacturing, Rev-A-Shelf added.

"Rev-A-Shelf is passionate about inspiring the next generation of skilled professionals," said Creighton Jones, v.p./operations. "Our goal is to show students that careers in trade and manufacturing are not only viable but also highly rewarding."

"Rev-A-Shelf remains committed to fostering education and career development through initiatives like facility tours, internships, and apprenticeship programs," Jones said.

Ann Sacks Reopens in Miami

PORTLAND, OR — Ann Sacks, the Portland, OR-based supplier of luxury tile and stone, has announced the reopening of its Miami showroom, located in the heart of the city's Design District.

The redesigned Ann Sacks Miami showroom, according to the Kohler-owned company, is based upon a merchandising and sales model "created to heighten the customer experience across all showrooms." On display is a wide range of products from Ann Sacks, along with sister luxury brands Roborn, Kallista and Kohler.

Among the showroom's features is a one-stop design studio and sample shop. Worktables with seating are surrounded by wall racks and built-in cabinetry that house a range of tile and stone, said the company.

Atlanta Design Firm Cited by HGTV

ATLANTA — Copper Sky Design + Remodel, an Atlanta-based home renovation company whose work encompasses kitchens and baths, has won top honors from HGTV in the network's annual "Designer of the Year" competition.

Copper Sky was named the Overall Winner in the competition for a granny-chic East Atlanta Tudor project that boasted pink kitchen cabinets and appliances, a blue built-in dining hutch with scalloped details and a vintage-inspired bathroom with custom mosaic floor tile.

In addition, two other Copper Sky projects were selected as finalists in the HGTV "Designer of the Year" categories of Dramatic Before + After and Outdoor Oasis, the company said.



Lightovation Boasts Successful Four-Day Run

DALLAS — Lightovation, the largest residential lighting trade event in North America, showcased new lighting designs, trends and innovations to retailers, interior designers and other industry professionals during its run here in January, organizers of the four-day event announced.

The trade show, said Lightovation officials, welcomed a record-number of first-time attendees, as well as the highest number of international attendees in more than four years. "Interior Designer Preview Day," which took place in conjunction with the show, welcomed more than 200 interior designers to see new lighting from top manufacturers, as well as to attend exclusive design panel discussions and networking opportunities.

Educational programs were conducted in collaboration with the National Kitchen & Bathroom Association and the American Society of Interior Designers, show sponsors noted.

"January Lightovation started the year with great energy from exhibitors and buyers," said Cindy Morris, president and CEO of Dallas Market Center. "We welcomed a record number of new attendees, as well as the highest number of international buyers for a celebration of new products, innovations and education for everyone in the lighting industry."

The next edition of Lightovation will take place June 18-21. Information is available by visiting the trade show's page on the Dallas Market Center website, www.dallasmarketcenter.com.

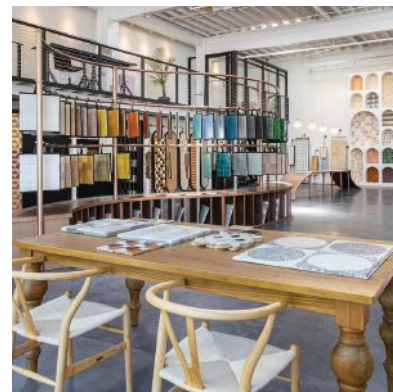
Otto Tiles Opens Miami Flagship Showroom

MIAMI — Otto Tiles & Design, a supplier of artisan tiles and related products, has announced the grand opening of its flagship showroom in Miami.

Situated in Miami Iroside mixed-use urban center, the 3,500-sq.-ft. warehouse-style showroom spans two floors and spotlights Otto's collection of encaustic cement, Italian marble, artisanal terrazzo and Moroccan Zellige tiles in myriad colors, shapes and sizes, company officials said. Featuring interactive displays, dedicated work zones and breakout spaces, Otto Tiles & Design Miami "is set to emerge as a premier industry destination and a vibrant creative hub," the company added.

"Our first U.S. showroom in Miami has been a real journey, but I'm so excited to officially open its doors," said company founder Damla Turgut. "I wanted the space to be...more than just a showroom, and more than just a retail space, and I hope it will be a haven of creativity where every visitor will embark on a unique journey of discovery."

The new showroom is located at 7612 NE 4th Court in Miami.





■ This kitchen, designed by Dean Boerigter of Seattle, WA, took home top honors in Huntwood Cabinets' 2024 Design Contest.

Huntwood Announces 2024 Design Contest Winners

LIBERTY LAKE, WA — Huntwood Cabinets has announced the winners of its 2024 Design Contest. Open to all Huntwood kitchen designers and direct reps, participants were asked to submit a short project bio, project photos, floor plan and overall cost breakdown.

First Place honors went to Dean Boerigter of Seattle, WA, who used the company's Athos frameless door style in VG White Oak engineered veneer. The black painted uppers contrasted with the lighter colors in the design. The island's built-in dining table is topped with 3"-thick solid wood in rift-cut white oak.

Also tapped were: Second Place – Julia Dirks of Seattle; Third Place – Andrea Liddell of Lakewood, WA and Honorable Mention – Trina Garcia of Kennewick, WA.

Safety Training Program Unveiled by ISFA

INGOMAR, PA — The International Surface Fabricators Association has unveiled a safety training program designed to empower ISFA members "with essential tools and resources to make workplace safety a top priority," the organization announced.

Created in collaboration with Ving, a leading source for safety training and compliance management, ISFA's program is tailored to the needs of safety managers, business owners and fabrication teams, according to the trade group. The program, said ISFA, offers members access to a selection of training modules, including a course on silica-dust exposure.

Information about the training program can be obtained by visiting www.ISFAnow.org.

Top Knobs Partners on Children's Initiative

BRANCHBURG, NJ — Top Knobs, the Branchburg, NJ-based manufacturer of decorative kitchen and bath hardware, is continuing its partnership with "Sunshine on a Ranney Day," a nonprofit dedicated to transforming spaces for children with special needs, the company announced.

Ranney Day, which was founded in 2012, creates accessible bathrooms, bedrooms, in-home therapy rooms and related spaces at no cost to families. Top Knobs has been involved with the charitable initiative since 2022, according to the company.

"Top Knobs is deeply honored to be involved in these life-changing projects," said Christine Zimmer, Top Knobs' senior director of decorative hardware. "Sunshine on a Ranney Day has the ability to change the lives of not just the children, but also the dedicated families who deserve all the support they can receive."

Design Firm Launches Luxury Cabinet Line

EMMAUS, PA — Jarrett Design, an Emmaus, PA-based design firm specializing in kitchens, baths and other-room projects, has launched a new luxury cabinet collection, the company announced.

The new collection, according to the company, focuses on inset cabinetry "designed to evoke a furniture-like aesthetic, with everything from zero sheen to high gloss finishing." Door styles and molding details fit contemporary, transitional and traditional spaces, said the company, which serves clients throughout the Lehigh Valley, Philadelphia's Main Line, Bucks County and nearby areas.

"With unmatched capabilities and seamless synergy between designers and craftsmen, our cabinet collection redefines the way our clients live," said company owner Jesse Jarrett, owner of Jarrett Design. The new cabinet line, he added, "emphasizes high-quality construction, finishing, integrated lighting, interior accessories and custom metalwork."



Sauna Supplier Adds MN Factory

WHEELING, IL — World Sauna Group, a Bathing Brands company, has acquired a 22,000-sq.-ft. production facility in Hutchinson, MN, the company announced.

The new facility, said corporate officials, will boast office and warehouse space, as well as state-of-the-art sauna construction lines aimed at enhancing the company's custom sauna production capabilities.

"As the value of sauna comes into focus in North America, the demand for custom-designed spaces will surge, and World Sauna Group Showrooms will lead this category," said Dave Sadowski, CEO and chief bathing enthusiast at Bathing Brands. "This facility and team exist to drive innovation and provide our dealers with products and programs that ensure their success in this growing segment."

"Our new facility based in the heart of sauna country is geared for shipping saunas to every corner of the U.S. and Canada," added Mark Raisanen, v.p./retail programs for World Sauna Group. "It will allow us to unite cutting-edge technology with passionate teammates who understand that building custom saunas is more than a process – it's a craft."

Kohler Co., Dallas Cowboys Unveil Partnership

KOHLER, WI — Kitchen/bath products manufacturer Kohler Co. has unveiled a multi-year alliance with the Dallas Cowboys, aimed at leveraging the Cowboys' brand and fan base to elevate Kohler brand visibility in the Dallas-Fort Worth market, the company announced.

The partnership, announced late last year, provides Kohler "with valuable opportunities to broaden brand affinity, drive traffic online and in retail outlets, engage with key customers, and continue to build relationships in the DFW market," the company said.

Under the terms of the alliance, Kohler will receive season tickets for all Cowboys home games, to host events, as well as digital in-stadium signage, radio spots, and use of the Cowboys trademark across Kohler-owned channels and platforms. The Cowboys organization, in turn, is installing Kohler products in new luxury suites inside AT&T Stadium, the alliance partners said.

"We are proud to partner with 'America's team' – among the most valuable and popular sports and entertainment organizations in the world," said Scott Edmunds, senior v.p./marketing, Kitchen & Bath North America at Kohler. "Our investment with the Cowboys, as well as our brick-and-mortar Kohler Signature Stores in Dallas and Plano, further reinforces our commitment to the local market."



DAN LUCK
SEN DESIGN GROUP

Tips for Improving Team Productivity

DANIEL JAMES BROWN'S book *Boys in the Boat* and the movie of the same title tell the story of the University of Washington's eight-man crew team and their journey to the 1936 Berlin Olympics. At the story's heart is a young man, Joe Rantz, who embodies resilience and determination despite a problematic upbringing. Alongside his teammates, Joe works tirelessly to master the grueling sport of rowing. Their path to the Olympics is fraught with challenges, hardships and obstacles. Their victory in Berlin is a lesson in unity, teamwork, perseverance and the unyielding human spirit.

While not as intense as preparing for the Olympics, the kitchen and bath industry is dynamic and highly competitive. Success hinges not only on delivering exceptional design and craftsmanship but also on the performance and productivity of your team.

IMPROVING TEAM PERFORMANCE

Enhancing team efficiency is vital for meeting deadlines, exceeding client expectations and growing your business. Here are some practical strategies to improve team performance.

Implement Comprehensive Training

Programs: Continuous education ensures employees remain knowledgeable about products, technology, sales techniques and the latest design trends.

- **Onboarding and Skill Development:** Thoroughly onboard new hires, introducing them to company standards, workflows, and tools and resources the company provides. Follow up with skill development programs tailored to roles.
- **Cross-Training Opportunities:** Encourage employees to learn tasks outside their primary roles.
- **Certifications and Continuing Education:** Support staff in pursuing certifications like NKBA or NARI credentials or attending industry seminars and webinars. This investment enhances their skills and boosts morale and professionalism.

Foster a Collaborative Work Environment:

Collaboration is essential in the kitchen and bath industry, where projects require input from multiple stakeholders – designers, contractors, vendor partners and clients.

- **Regular Team Meetings:** Host weekly or bi-weekly meetings to discuss project updates, share insights and address challenges.
- **Collaborative Tools:** Invest in project management software like Asana or Trello and communication platforms like Slack or Teams to streamline collaboration.
- **Buddy System:** Pair experienced team

members with newer employees to share knowledge and best practices.

Utilize Technology to Streamline Operations:

Adopting the right tools and technology can reduce manual workload, minimize errors and save time for more creative and strategic tasks.

- **Design Software:** Tools like 2020 Design Live, SketchUp or Virtual Reality platforms allow designers to create detailed and accurate renderings.
- **CRM and Workflow Management:** A robust customer relationship management (CRM) system like ZoHo or Pipedrive can efficiently track leads, client communication and project timelines.
- **Construction Management Software:** Buildertrend, Jobtrend or similar software helps companies manage projects from planning to execution. It assists with ordering, ensuring materials arrive on time, and reducing project delays.

Enhanced Employee Skills: Offer personal and professional growth opportunities to keep your team motivated and engaged.

- **Feedback:** Feedback is needed to review the past, identify lessons learned and identify room for improvement. The most successful feedback is solicited from everyone within the organization.
- **Feedforward:** Feedforward is the secret sauce that propels success into the future. It's about asking anyone close to you for suggestions for the future that might help you achieve a positive behavior change.
- **Performance Reviews with Action Plans:** Conduct regular performance reviews to identify areas for improvement and develop personalized action plans. Provide follow-up and recognize achievements to build confidence and drive improvement.

Streamline Workflow and Processes:

Streamlining workflows and processes can eliminate bottlenecks and improve overall performance.

- **Standardized Procedures:** Develop standard operating procedures for everyday tasks. This ensures consistency and reduces confusion.
- **Time Management Techniques:** Train employees on time management strategies, such as prioritizing tasks or using time-blocking techniques. Analog and digital tools are readily available to help track time spent on various activities.
- **Delegate Effectively:** Assign tasks based on team members' strengths and expertise, and distribute the workload evenly.

Foster a Positive Company Culture: A positive work environment can significantly influence

team productivity and morale.

- **Recognition and Rewards:** Acknowledge hard work and *celebrate* successes.
- **Open-Door Policy:** Actively listening and addressing issues fosters trust and transparency.
- **Work-life balance:** Promote work-life balance by offering flexible schedules, wellness programs or additional benefits that improve balance. This approach can reduce burnout and improve overall productivity.

Leverage Data for Continuous Improvement:

Tracking and analyzing performance metrics can provide valuable insights into areas for improvement.

- **Metrics for Performance:** Identify key performance indicators such as number of retainers received, closed sales and client satisfaction. Use these metrics to assess team performance and make better decisions.
- **Focus Groups:** Collect information from past clients about their experience with your firm. Use this information to refine processes, address issues and enhance services.
- **Monitor Trends:** Stay informed about internal and external trends and adapt your business strategies to ensure your team remains competitive and innovative.

Lead by Example: Demonstrating dedication, empathy and a willingness to change and adapt inspires your team to do the same.

- **Clear Vision and Goals:** Share your business vision and set clear, achievable goals for the team. This effort will align everyone's efforts and provide a sense of purpose.
- **Supportive Leadership:** Offer guidance and resources to help employees overcome challenges and achieve their objectives.
- **Continuous Learning:** Participate in training and networking events to stay updated on industry developments and lead by example.

Improving team performance and productivity requires a multifaceted approach. By investing in training, fostering collaboration, streamlining workflows and creating a positive work culture, your team will row in the right direction towards new heights of excellence. ■

Dan Luck owns Bella Domicile in Madison, WI. He has been an SEN member since 2002 and has led the SEN Leadership Team since 2018, conducting scores of the group's educational programs. Visit <http://sendesign-group/education> for more information. Dan welcomes questions and comments at dluck@sendesign.com.

■ Read past columns and features and send us your comments about this article and others at KitchenBathDesign.com



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PHIL HOTAREK

The Pitfalls of Planned Obsolescence

IN THE KITCHEN and bath industry, we've all seen it: the faucet that looks sleek in a showroom but starts to leak after a year, the "affordable" fixture with a finish that tarnishes before the warranty card even gets mailed. These issues aren't just isolated defects – they're symptoms of a bigger problem: planned obsolescence.

For years, planned obsolescence has quietly infiltrated our industry. Plumbing fixtures that once stood as symbols of craftsmanship are now engineered to fail. As professionals, this puts us in a tough spot: how do we help clients navigate a sea of short-lived products while staying true to the principles of quality and sustainability?

The good news? Showrooms, designers and manufacturers have the power to flip the script. By focusing on education, authenticity and superior products, we can guide customers toward choices that last a lifetime – and help our industry regain its reputation for excellence.

THE TRUE COST OF CHEAP FIXTURES

The allure of affordable plumbing fixtures is strong, but the hidden costs are staggering. Many mass-market products cut corners in ways the average consumer doesn't see:

- **Plastic Cartridges:** Unlike ceramic disc cartridges, plastic ones degrade quickly, leading to leaks and inevitable replacements.
- **Thin Coatings:** Cheaper finishes peel and tarnish within a few years.
- **Non-Replaceable Parts:** Built-in obsolescence means when one small part fails, the whole product ends up in a landfill.

This race to the bottom isn't limited to knockoff brands. Even legacy names have bowed to cost-cutting measures. Once-reliable companies now sacrifice quality for margins, leaving their products a shadow of their former glory.

As showroom professionals and designers, we're often the first to hear from clients when these shortcuts catch up with them. A faucet fails. A finish fades. Trust is broken – not just in the product, but in our guidance.

SHOWROOMS: FRONT LINE OF CHANGE

Here's where showrooms can make a real difference. We have something no algorithm or big-box aisle can offer: expertise. When we sell a product, we're not just offering a transaction – we're offering a partnership based on trust and knowledge.

Teach the Value of What Lasts: Consumers don't always know what makes one fixture better than another. It's our job to educate them, not overwhelm them. Some talking points to consider:

- **Ceramic Disc Cartridges:** Explain how they eliminate drips and outlast plastic by years.

- **Solid Brass Construction:** Let customers feel the weight of a solid brass fixture and compare it to a cheaper model. The difference is undeniable.
- **PVD Lifetime Finishes:** Show how PVD resists scratches and tarnish, maintaining its beauty far longer than painted or plated finishes.

And don't just tell – show. Invite customers to handle fixtures and feel the craftsmanship. A side-by-side comparison of a solid brass faucet and a hollow, plastic-based one is often all it takes to make the case for quality.

Build Trust with Certifications: Greenwashing is everywhere, but credible certifications can cut through the noise. Highlight labels that matter:

- **WaterSense:** Guarantees water efficiency without sacrificing performance.
- **Energy Star:** Ensures lighting and appliances meet high energy-saving standards.
- **FSC Certified Wood:** Indicates sustainably sourced materials for bath furniture.
- **Low-VOC Finishes:** Minimizes harmful emissions for healthier homes.

When a customer questions why a higher-priced product is worth it, certifications provide proof – not just promises. Keep information handy to back up these claims and make it easy for customers to understand the benefits.

Make the Sale Personal: Buying plumbing fixtures isn't just about functionality, it's about the experience. Your role is to help customers envision how their choices will improve their homes and lives.

- **For Designers:** Help them align their aesthetic vision with products that are built to last. Suggest timeless finishes and durable materials that won't leave their clients frustrated down the line.
- **For Homeowners:** Share how investing in a quality faucet now can save them the hassle and expense of replacing it every few years.
- **For Builders:** Highlight products with serviceable parts, so they can reassure clients about long-term maintenance.

The more you tailor your pitch to the person in front of you, the more they'll trust your expertise – and the product.

DESIGNERS: ADVOCATING FOR QUALITY

As a designer, your reputation hinges on the performance of the products you specify. If a bathroom renovation looks stunning on day one but starts falling apart by year two, that reflects poorly on you.

When specifying products, don't just rely on aesthetics or price. Dive deeper:

- Recommend faucets with ceramic disc cartridges and solid brass interiors for reliability.

- Choose bath furniture made from FSC-certified wood with low-VOC finishes.
- Use LED lighting with Energy Star ratings for energy efficiency.

Your clients trust you to make choices they can't fully evaluate themselves. By prioritizing products with proven durability, you build trust and enhance your reputation.

MANUFACTURERS: THE CALL TO INTEGRITY

Manufacturers play a pivotal role in reversing the trend of planned obsolescence. The most respected brands in the industry prioritize:

- **Repairable Components:** Products designed with serviceable parts instead of forcing replacements.
- **Lifetime Warranties:** A promise to stand behind their craftsmanship.
- **Transparency:** Sharing details about materials, processes and sustainability efforts builds trust with showrooms and consumers.

When manufacturers partner with showrooms, they create a powerful alliance rooted in shared values.

QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The kitchen and bath industry doesn't have to settle for planned obsolescence. Together, showrooms, designers and manufacturers can change the narrative – shifting the focus back to quality, longevity and sustainability.

By prioritizing products that last and guiding clients toward thoughtful choices, we can rebuild trust in our industry. It starts with educating consumers, celebrating craftsmanship and aligning with brands that share our values.

This isn't just about making a sale; it's about leaving a legacy. A legacy of homes filled with products that perform beautifully for decades. A legacy of sustainable choices that reduce waste and protect the planet. A legacy that proves quality is always worth it.

Let's get back to what matters.

J. Philip Hotarek is operations manager at Lutz Plumbing and currently serves as board secretary for the Decorative Plumbing & Hardware Association. A former NCAA and professional ice hockey player, he spent summers working in the family business as a plumbing apprentice and has been working full time for the company for the past 10 years as a design consultant and plumbing technician. He is currently stepping into a management and ownership role for Lutz Plumbing, whose decorative hardware showroom serves the San Francisco Bay Area.

Read past columns and features and send us your comments about this article and others at KitchenBathDesign.com



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Nominations are due August 8, 2025.



INNOVATORS

2025



ROOM-DEFINING ISLAND
Delineates the kitchen within the open floor plan

OAK CABINETRY
Offers a connection to nature and grounds the space

BLACK METAL ACCENTS
Minimize the abundance of 'cold' metals by adding warmth

Photos: Sean Litchfield

Highlighting the Healing Power of Design

BY KIM BERNDTSON

When personal tragedy befell his client, this designer gave her and her family new hope with a transformative renovation for starting anew.

NEW YORK — There are a lot of different reasons why people decide to renovate spaces within their home. For many, it's about making physical updates and improvements that relate to aesthetics and functionality.

When Antonio Matr s first connected with this client, he quickly realized that her reasons ran much deeper than anything purely physical. For her, changes were emotional as well as poignant.

"When we first met, she told me she had just lost her husband to suicide and she wanted to get new furniture to freshen up

the New York City apartment she shared with her daughters," says the owner/founder of Antonio Matr s Design who does design/build work throughout New York City and Madrid, Spain. "But as we talked, in one case for more than five hours over several cups of coffee, she realized she was ready to not only get new furniture but also explore a full renovation of her entire home so everything would be new."

Plans called for a complete demolition of the apartment, down to its bones. The kitchen would be opened up, yet downsized a bit so one of the bedrooms, which features a

configuration that is the only one of its kind in the entire apartment building, could be made larger. Two other bedrooms, including the primary bedroom and bathroom, a dining room, a living room, a foyer and two additional bathrooms were also slated for updates. Then the COVID pandemic hit.

"We got the final approval to start construction, only to be halted shortly after by the city for almost a year," he recalls. "She questioned her decision to renovate and briefly thought about putting everything back like it was. But we persevered through the challenges."

CREATING A VESSEL FOR HEALING

At the heart of the transformation is a neutral color palette that runs throughout the home.

It is complemented with custom cabinetry, furniture and one-of-a-kind accessories, such as radiators designed by Matrēs.

“The overall design is unique, harmonious and serves as a vessel for healing and change,” he relates.

In the kitchen, that design theme is supported by white oak floors and solid oak custom cabinetry, the latter of which features a white-wash stain and slab-style, handleless doors and drawers that promote a clean aesthetic. A panel for the Miele refrigerator conceals its existence along the perimeter wall. The Miele range’s ventilation hood is also tucked behind a panel that is flanked by matching wall cabinets to create a seamless aesthetic that extends the length of the wall. A perimetrical floating console, crafted from the same oak as the kitchen cabinetry, runs throughout the kitchen, dining room and living room and hides the HVAC system. It also provides the family with much-needed extra storage.

“Every millwork element was designed and custom made to perfectly fit her needs,” Matrēs explains. “Each one needed to be beautiful and functional, with the floor, cabinetry and furniture pieces stained to match to bring the space together.

“Using all-wood cabinetry, rather than including any painted pieces, grounds the space and gives it warmth,” he continues. “Also, being able to see the grain pattern in the wood offers a connection to nature, and a connection to something that is handmade by someone who took great care to make it. Even if you don’t know who that person is, when a piece is made with wood, it creates a special connection, which helps my client and her daughters feel better when they are in the space.”

Minimizing an abundance of any ‘cold’ metals also adds warmth to the space, so the designer opted for a black Kohler kitchen faucet, which matches the black Miele range and Blanco sink. A trio of black pendants hovers above the island and coordinates with a quartet of pendants from ferm LIVING, in an attractive mix of sizes, above the dining table. All are complemented with dark, chocolate-colored quartz countertops and backsplash.

Tearing down walls, including those that once divided the kitchen into two spaces as well as those that separated it from the living and dining rooms, opened up the kitchen and made it possible to include a room-defining island with seating.

“I kept all of the spaces open, rather than having individual rooms, so having one wall of cabinetry and an island is sufficient for the kitchen,” he remarks.

CUSTOM DESIGN FEATURES

Matrēs continued the neutral palette into the bathrooms, two of which feature floating white-washed oak vanities custom designed by Scarabeo Ceramiche. Shelves beneath



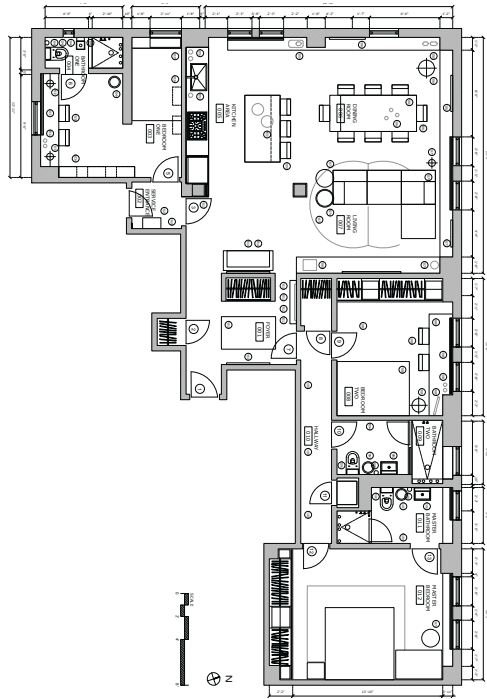
At the heart of this apartment’s transformation is a neutral color palette that runs throughout the home. In the kitchen, that design theme is supported by white oak floors and solid oak custom cabinetry, the latter of which features a white-wash stain and slab-style, handleless doors and drawers that promote a clean aesthetic.



Tearing down walls opened up the kitchen to the dining room to promote open-concept living. A perimetrical floating console, crafted from the same oak as the kitchen cabinetry, runs throughout the kitchen, dining room and living room and hides the HVAC system. It also provides the family with much-needed extra storage.



▣ The neutral color palette is extended into the primary bathroom where a floating oak vanity is complemented with neutral handmade tile on the walls and in the shower. The custom black radiator is designed to look like a sculptural wave along the wall.



▣ This small bathroom space, which at one time in the apartment's historical past was likely used by a maid, is just big enough for a toilet, shower and very small, yet functional, sink.



▣ This bathroom, designed for one of the daughters, includes a custom-designed radiator that complements the waves of the vanity light. An oversized vanity mirror helps make the room feel larger.

the sinks provide storage. Custom radiators, designed by Matrēs, are functional as well as beautiful. Their black finish matches other black accents, including shower and window trim and Cocoon wall-mount faucets.

“The previous radiators just didn’t fit with the new design, so we worked with a metal fabricator to create these custom radiators,” he explains. “They look like sculptural waves along the wall and they match the flowing, wave-shaped lights [custom designed by Hot Wire Extensions]. They are unique, beautiful and

functional.”

Neutral-colored handmade tile from Fireclay Tile sheaths the walls and showers while oversized mirrors above the vanities make the rooms feel larger.

The third bathroom is a small space that, at one time in the apartment’s historical past, was likely used by a maid. It is just big enough for a toilet, shower and very small, yet functional, sink. The latter is accented with a black, wall-mount faucet that matches the black window and shower trim.

“While this renovation was a delicate process with a sad but touching backstory, it shows how therapeutic and transformative interior design can be,” Matrēs relates. “There was a time when my client could barely get out of bed, and the daughters were reluctant to invite any friends to the apartment. But now everyone has their own new space designed specifically for them, which they can also share with family and friends. We took a home replete with painful memories and transformed it into a fresh canvas for a family starting anew.” ■

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Entries must be in digital format. Your entry can be created on the Chrysalis Awards website or you can import a file of an entry you create, or an entry you submitted in any previous remodeling competition.

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The first step is to register your company on the Chrysalis website. To register, go to www.chrysalisawards.com

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Registration does not require a fee. The entry fee of \$190 per entry is paid only when the entry is completed and submitted at any time prior to the deadline. If you don't wish to register now, email us and we'll keep you up to date on the 2025 program.

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You can see snapshots of the 2024 winning entries displayed on www.chrysalisawards.com as well as all winning projects since 2000.

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NEWS

K&B's Influence on High Point Market

BY JAMIE GOLD, CKD, CAPS, MCCWC

North Carolina's popular High Point Market is expanding beyond its coverage of interior furnishings and textiles to embrace elements of the kitchen and bath space.

I HAVE A small confession: I've long wanted to attend High Point Market in North Carolina, but with much of my professional focus being kitchens and bathrooms, I really couldn't justify the trip. *Until now!*

Late last year, at Fall Market, kitchen and bath became a focal point with programming and exhibitors! Some of that was generated by the National Kitchen & Bath Association coming in as a partner. Some of it was organically driven by cabinetry manufacturers expanding their offerings into vanities and lighting products serving these spaces.

Either way, there's more to see in the Tarheel State's bi-annual furn-fest for kitchen and bath specialists. So now I, too, am looking at a fall 2025 market adventure. Wondering what to expect, I reached out to seven industry professionals for their takes on the Fall 2024 Market.

- Moses Brach, marketing manager at Fabuwood Cabinetry Corporation
- Pensacola-based designer, retailer and interior design business coach Cheryl Kees Clendenon
- Cosentino spokesperson Patty Dominguez
- Ben Muller, v.p. of marketing/communications for High Point Market Authority
- Donille Perrone, senior brand manager with

appliance manufacturer Signature Kitchen Suite (SKS)

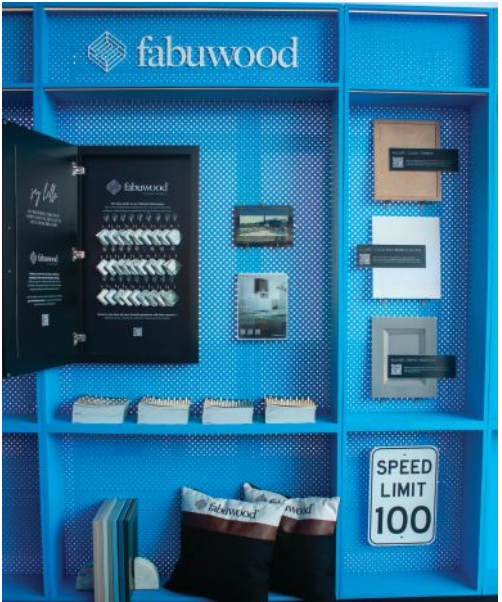
- Northern New Jersey-based designer, speaker and interior design business coach Sharon L. Sherman
- Crystal Watts, NKBA marketing director.

A NEW ROLE AT THE MARKET

This was NKBA's first significant presence at High Point Market, Watts notes, but it wasn't the first time the kitchen and bath organization had played a role at the event. "NKBA participated in a tour of High Point Market in 2018, specifically for kitchen and bath designers, so a partnership has been on the radar for quite some time." There was long-time admiration for HPMKT in her association, she added, "so it was incredibly rewarding to see a partnership come to fruition in 2024."

"The two organizations know each other and have had conversations for years," Muller recalls. "In terms of executing the activation at 2024 Fall Market, the work began about a year in advance."

Why the larger presence in 2024? "The role that a kitchen plays in a home is changing and expanding as houses adapt to modern needs," Watts observes. "Kitchens are also dining rooms, offices, coffee shops and cocktail bars. The bath, meanwhile, has evolved into a wellness retreat



↑ Fabuwood is eager to expand its High Point Market presence after a positive debut last fall.

that requires functionality beyond the traditional." These newer roles for formerly functional spaces have given them added importance – and complexity – for designers of all kinds.

"With this in mind, even our most specialized kitchen and bath designers are interested in broadening their industry knowledge to embrace this shift," Watts comments. "The same is true vice versa for interior designers who have long visited High Point and want to learn more about the kitchen and bath specialties." HPMKT was the place to do this, she adds.

SHAPING THE SPACE

The vision for NKBA at Market unfolded in 'The Tent.' Present in the space were eight brands that specialize in kitchen and bath spaces and programming. "We had Anderson Tuftex | Shaw Floors, Bed Bath & Beyond Professional, Cosentino, Fabuwood, FreePower, Hettich, Uniform Studio and SKS | Signature Kitchen Suite," Watts shares. There were more than just static booths. "We sought to create diverse programming, including kitchen demonstrations with SKS, legacy insights from our Design Council and panel discussions delving into the intersection of NKBA and High Point."

Tent visitors received networking and educational opportunities, Watts says. "Networking with a new group is equally as rewarding for manufacturers as it is [for] members," she declares. "Our entire industry benefits when brands can reach a new customer who has a lightbulb moment as they connect a product to a project, or they think 'I can't wait to use this somewhere.' That's the magic of design trade shows and connecting with designers."

While the massive market has long been a major showcase for furniture and textiles, two



Fabuwood found High Point Market a target-rich environment of designers for its cabinetry lines.



Photo: Cosentino

Cosentino's latest Silestone Le Chic Bohème collection had its HPMKT debut last fall.

historic North Carolina industries, it's not exactly new to our spaces either; its executive Muller points out. "High Point Market is a whole-home Market, and thus we have had a presence of kitchen and bath here for years within the thousands of exhibitors that showcase." That made it a natural for an NKBA partnership, he adds, and one that created increased interest from Tent exhibitors for future tie-ins.

"This was SKS' first time onsite at High Point Market and what a great opportunity to connect with the design community and learn about all this event has to offer," Perrone declares.

It was also Cosentino's first time there. "Participating at Fall High Point Market offered a new opportunity for us to engage with a group of designers who may not have previously encountered our products," Dominguez says. The experience allowed the company to showcase its surfaces in a whole-home context, "inspiring designers to envision our brand as an integral part of their projects."

Another new to HPMKT brand was cabinetry maker Fabuwood. "The NKBA tent's curated environment allowed us to engage directly with

designers and retailers in a meaningful way, bridging the gap between kitchen, bath and broader interior design sectors," Brach says.

VIEW FROM THE TENT

The experience met the firm's expectations, the cabinetry executive adds. The setting, program and innovation opportunities "helped us effectively communicate our brand story. It was great to have face time with many like-minded brands and engage with renowned designers." Fabuwood sponsored NKBA's champagne toast with NKBA's CEO Bill Darcy presenting. "Attendance was strong, and it provided a perfect platform to engage with the High Point Market audience," he recalls.

"NKBA is a longstanding partner of SKS, and their pop-up NKBA Tent gave us the opportunity to test the waters and better understand what High Point Market is all about," Perrone adds.

Dominguez is also enthusiastic: "The experience exceeded our expectations. The Tent had exceptional foot traffic and attracted high-profile designers and media attendees." Cosentino's countertops were displayed in

collaboration with FreePower, giving attendees the chance to interact with the surfaces and sleek phone-charging capabilities, she explains.

In addition to K&B brands showing off their wares, there were cooking demonstrations by an SKS chef on the company's induction cooktop, plus an espresso bar, creative cocktails, light bites and a panel-heavy schedule.

Sherman, a popular industry speaker, SKS Design Collective member and veteran kitchen and bath designer, was one of the panelists. She's been trekking south to High Point for at least 15 years, she says, scouting out lighting, dining tables and seating, wine rooms, fabrics and other pieces she can use to create home environments for her clients.

She started seeing more vanity options from furniture makers about five years ago, she recalls, but the NKBA's presence took the K&B focus to a new level. "I felt like it was a first entrée into the sphere of High Point for the K&B world – like 'getting to know you' involvement." She describes the panels as being very well-attended. Hers focused on the kitchen's influence on home design. "As designers are expanding the use of cabinetry to home offices, coffee bars, wine bars, media rooms, home spas and gyms, the impact of the kitchen is influencing how these adjacent spaces will look and feel."

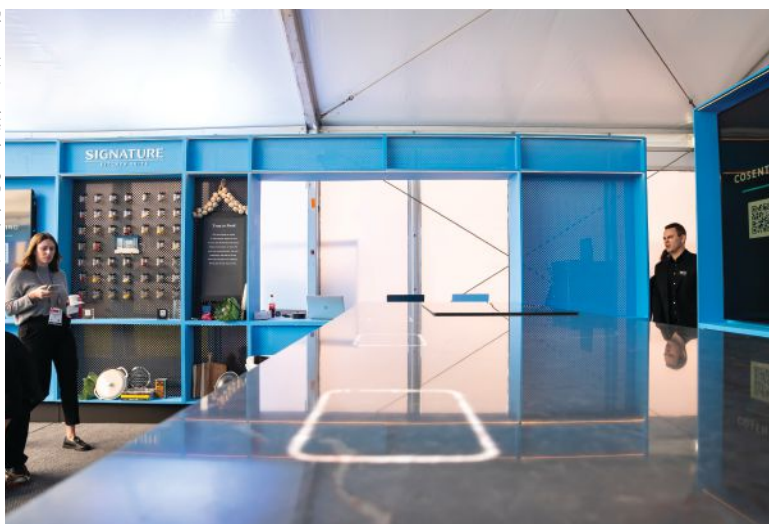
OUTSIDE THE TENT

Clendenon is also a High Point veteran. "April will be my 27th market!" she declares. The Pensacola pro mostly goes to see major upholstery and furnishings for seating, she says. She started seeing K&B offerings a few years ago. "Many vendors that are traditionally case goods showed new vanity lines. Some very cool things!"

"There are many, many reasons for K&B designers to go to High Point Market," she suggests, counting off numerous add-on sales opportunities, ample inspiration and a growing lighting presence. *(Who doesn't love a well-lit spa bathroom or chef's kitchen?)*

Muller describes designer attendee response as very positive. "An increased presence of kitchen and bath is only beneficial for buyers as

Photo: National Kitchen & Bath Association



▲ Cosentino showed off its new surfacing with FreePower wireless charging capability in the NKBA tent.

Photo: National Kitchen & Bath Association



■ Signature Kitchen Suite hosted cooking demonstrations on its new induction top in the NKBA tent.



SKS used its HPMKT presence to show off its latest induction cooktop.

Photo: Signature Kitchen Suite

they can cover all their needs with a trip to High Point Market,” he adds. Sherman agrees, seeing the continuing presence as proof of the interior design community’s interest in these key spaces.

FUTURE PLANS

“The activation was a success,” Muller concludes, adding, “The two organizations continue to discuss future plans/partnerships!” Watts agrees, glad to be continuing conversations about next year and beyond.

“We’d love to integrate even more products and brands to create a more hands-on experience for attendees,” the NKBA executive shares. “We know market goers are eager to get in-person, hands-on experience with brands and would love to be able to do this in an even bigger way.”

SKS’ Perrone sees the market as a worthwhile venue for its luxury appliances. “High Point proved to be an excellent way to connect with our design partners, including kitchen designers and the broader interiors community. We also made some good connections with various showrooms. HPMKT is ripe with possibilities, and we’re already brainstorming how we can make the next event even better, including interactive culinary experiences, integrating our products into more spaces, hosting special events and more – the possibilities are endless,” she enthuses.

Cosentino’s Dominguez is also enthusiastic about returning. “Looking ahead, we’d love to expand our presence at High Point Market to showcase the versatility of our products beyond countertops. This could include outdoor kitchens, custom furniture and other creative applications that demonstrate the breadth of possibilities with Cosentino surfaces.” She also sees the event as a good opportunity to market the company’s quick-ship program. “While High Point has historically focused less on kitchen and bath, we’re excited to see that changing and are eager to contribute to that evolution,” she adds.

Fabuwood’s Brach sees the venue as incredibly worthwhile for marketing their products and is already looking at a potential expansion for 2025. “For the next market we attend, we aim to expand our vignette offering to highlight more of our product lines and styles, providing additional interactive elements to engage attendees even further.



NKBA hosted a 60th anniversary dinner at Market last fall.

Photo: National Kitchen & Bath Association



NKBA brought member firms and designers together in its debut Market tent last fall.

Photo: National Kitchen & Bath Association



Designer panels with respected pros like Sharon Sherman were a popular draw at NKBA’s tent.

Photo: Signature Kitchen Suite

LAST WORDS

“For those who haven’t attended HPMKT, it’s definitely worth your time,” Perrone comments. “You won’t be disappointed – and you’ll get your steps in!” *Alright, I’m convinced!* Now who wants to share market tips, housing suggestions and a double room next fall?

Jamie Gold, CKD, CAPS, MCCWC is an author, wellness design consultant and industry speaker. Her award-winning third book, *Wellness by Design* (Simon & Schuster, 2020) is available wherever books are sold. Learn more about her wellness design CEU presentations, books, blog and consulting services at jamiegold.net.

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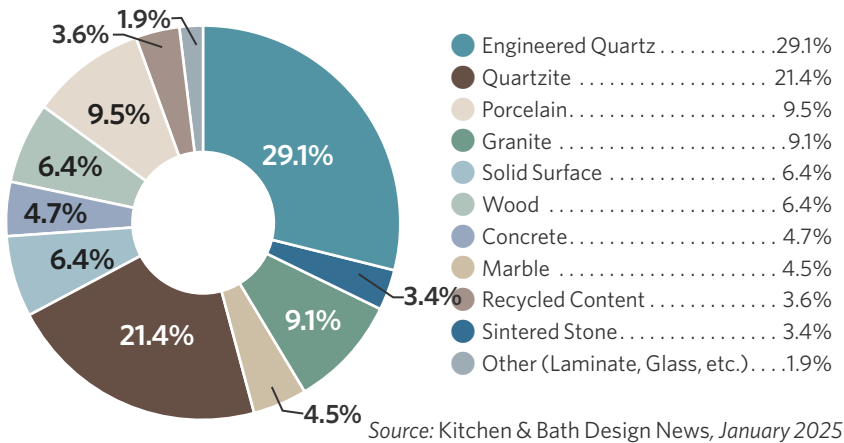
Bold Choices

Kitchen countertops continue to be specified in ways that offer consumers a widening palette of options that address their personal needs, budget and sense of style, a *KBDN* survey finds.

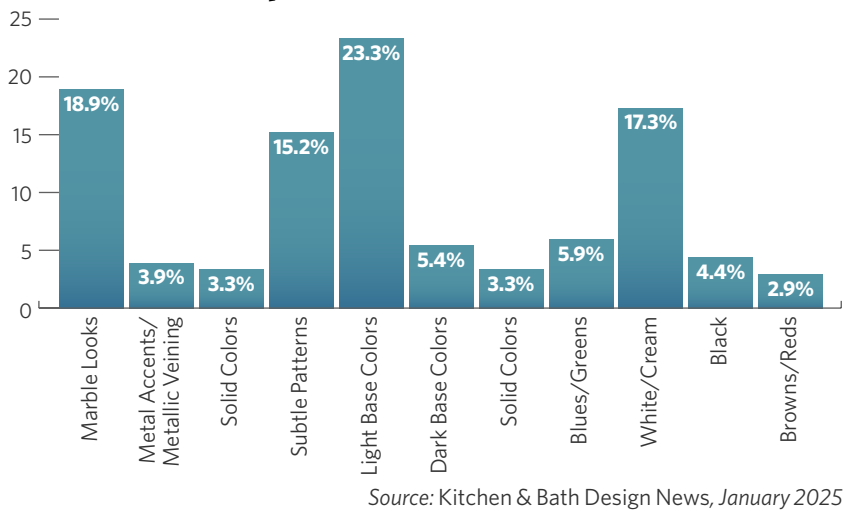
Engineered stone and quartzite top a lengthy list of countertop materials that are currently growing in demand, while an ever-widening palette of colors, patterns, finishes and other options are offering kitchen consumers exciting new ways to address their functional requirements, budget and sense of style.

That is among the most significant findings of a nationwide survey conducted by *Kitchen & Bath Design News* among more than 200 kitchen design and remodeling professionals, who report that one or more countertops continue to serve as a key focal point of today's kitchens, serving not only in their traditional roles of food prep, dining, cleanup and entertaining, but increasingly as spaces for myriad household activities (see related story, Page 33).

1. Countertop Materials Growing in Demand



2. Colors/Patterns Being Favored For Countertop Surfaces



KBDN's annual countertop survey, conducted online early in 2025, also reinforced previous findings that countertop space is increasing as both an aesthetic and functional component in today's kitchens.

On the flip side, inflationary pressures are impacting the countertop-purchase decisions of price-conscious consumers, particularly in the low- to mid-end sectors of the housing and remodeling markets, *KBDN*'s survey found.

KEY FINDINGS

According to those surveyed, engineered quartz is, far and away, the countertop surfacing material that is growing most in demand among kitchen consumers, followed by quartzite, granite and an array of other options, including marble and wood. Also popular among today's countertop clients, design professionals report, are porcelain and a variety of solid surface materials (see Figure 1).

"Countertops tend to be the 'jewels' of the kitchen," one design pro told *KBDN*. "I'm seeing clients wanting tops that exhibit interesting, yet subtle, patterns for perimeter areas, and often dramatic, colorful and more exotic-looking island countertops. Backsplashes to the ceiling enhance the height of a kitchen space. Choices tend to be tile – subway, stacked, patterned – or sometimes metallic tiles, depending on the overall aesthetic."

"Quartz countertops took a turn for the better about five years ago, when manufacturers were able to better mimic the patterns of natural stone such as marble," a veteran design pro observed. "Until then, quartz counters looked totally man-made, with very generic and predictable patterns. Now, we can get honed surfaces with patterns that really look like natural stone."

"I've always gravitated toward using marble or natural stone," another designer observed. "Now that the initial quartz craze has subsided and concerns about silica exposure are growing, natural stone countertops are back in demand. Clients are becoming less fixated on durability and more appreciative of patina and the concept of a 'living kitchen.'"

"Quartzite has also become more popular, although it can be quite a bit more expensive than quartz," according to another kitchen remodeler. "If a client loves the look of quartzite, but is still looking at the budget, I might suggest just using quartzite on the island only."

An even wider range of colors and patterns – led by light base colors, marble looks and subtle patterns – are currently popular among kitchen clients, survey respondents told *KBDN* (see Figure 2).

"My clients usually follow my lead when it comes to their countertop selections, and that selection is based on the look and design of the space," another designer said. "Often I work with suppliers that offer a wide range of colors, finishes, sizes and designs that allow clients to have the best of both worlds."

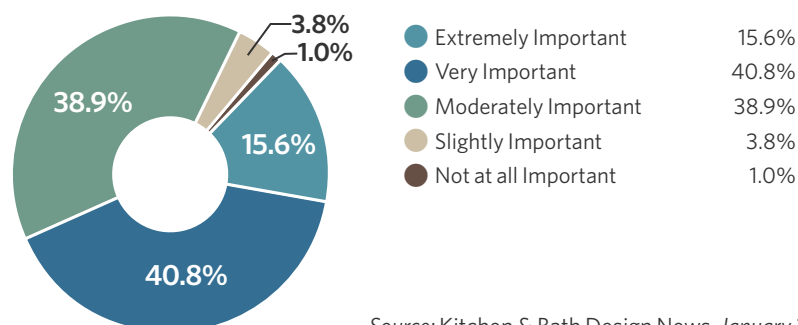
"The ability to have a natural-stone look while flexing a maintenance-free product with a limited lifetime warranty... that's what clients are gravitating to," stated another designer.

"The tried-and-true brand names from the past are being challenged by new competitors both in price and selection," yet another design pro said. "It has become tougher to discern the differences between products and quality, so selecting countertops has become much more difficult."

In a similar fashion, in a market in which inflationary pressures and elevated product/labor costs have led to cautious spending, an overwhelming number of homeowners are finding countertop costs either "extremely," "very" or "moderately" important in their purchase decisions compared to prior years, dealers and designers reported. In contrast, cost is not a factor in only a relative handful of countertop selections, survey respondents noted (see Figure 3).

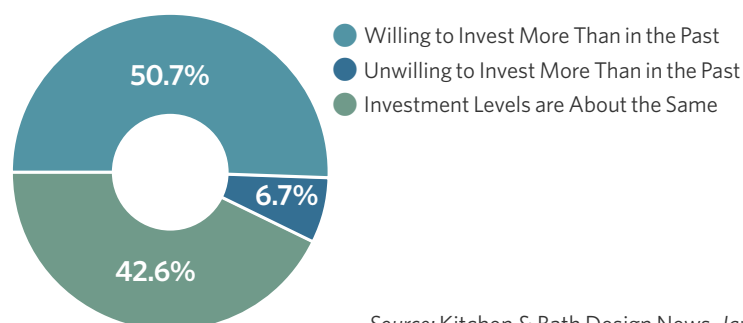
"All our costs have increased substantially," one designer

3. Importance of Cost to Homeowners When Deciding on a Countertop



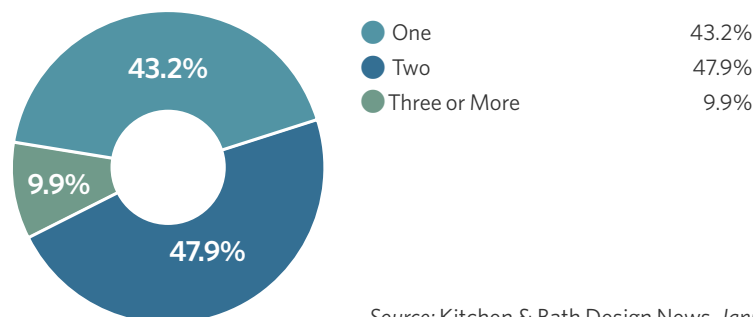
Source: Kitchen & Bath Design News, January 2025

4. Willingness of Clients to Invest in Countertops



Source: Kitchen & Bath Design News, January 2025

5. Number of Materials/Colors Typically Included in Kitchen Designs



Source: Kitchen & Bath Design News, January 2025

told KBDN. “This results in two types of buyers. One is looking solely based on price, and can’t afford what they really want. The other is stuck in their home, unable to sell at high mortgage rates, and they want the best option that’s available without a serious concern about price.”

Among the survey’s additional findings:

- Despite the prevailing cost-sensitivity, however, some 50.7% of the design professionals polled told KBDN that their kitchen clients are more willing now than in the past to invest in countertops. While 42.6% of those design pros reported that investment levels are about the same as in the past, only 6.7% said that client investment levels have declined (see Figure 4).
- More than one type of material, as well as multiple colors, are typically included in roughly 58% of the countertops they include in their kitchens, design professionals report (see Figure 5).

“Countertop colors are moving more into warm, earthy tones,” one designer told KBDN. “However, we’re also incorporating bold accent areas to really showcase a particular space.”

“We often do accent colors: one main solid color for the bulk of the countertop, and a busier ‘showstopper’ piece for the island,” another survey respondent noted. ■

Wide Range of Perspectives Reflect Myriad Options

CHICAGO — Design professionals have widely differing perspectives about the materials, colors, price points and other features they tend to specify for the countertops in the kitchens they design and sell – a reflection of the plethora of choices available, as well as costs and the preferences of clients.

“Most of my clients are going with quartz, especially because solid surface is so pricy it often comes out close to the cost of quartz, and quartz is seen as superior,” a surveyed design pro told *Kitchen & Bath Design News*.

“Laminate is mostly used for budget-friendly projects,” the designer added. “We steer people away from butcher block and toward veneer wood tops, or suggest they (shop) elsewhere for them, because butcher block has too many issues with humidity and wetness over time.”

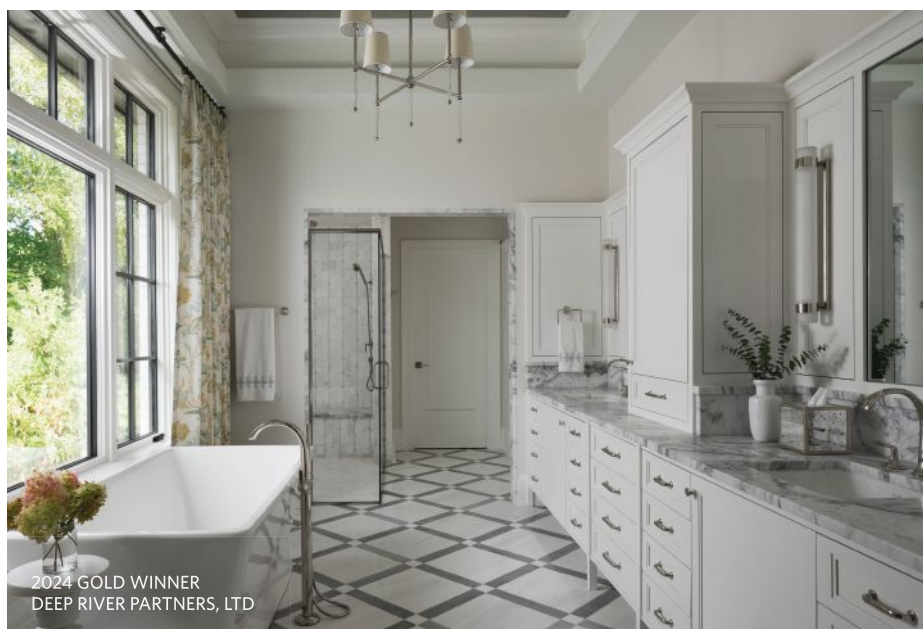
“We’re still seeing marble-look quartz being popular,” another designer commented. “Sometimes quartzite is a great option to create the look of a natural stone that’s not granite, doesn’t require the maintenance of marble, but has a luxury look and crystal effect. I know that porcelain continues to be up-and-coming, but I’m still afraid to spec it.”

Among the other countertop-related observations offered by surveyed design pros were the following:

- “Granite is on its way back in. My fabricator applies a 15-year sealer that mitigates some of the maintenance. Granite is still less expensive than quartz. Clients are more educated now. They know quartz can melt or scar. Many are incorporating butcher block as an alternative or additional material. Quartzite is ‘da bomb!’”
- “A few of my clients are asking for countertops that look a little more ‘vintage’ and organic, less like the consistency of quartz although still a popular choice. We’ve been looking at quartzite slabs, honed soapstone and even honed marble as possible options.”
- “Quartz seems to be the favored material, since simple-to-no maintenance is preferred by most clients, especially those seeking white or lighter colors. Quartzite is making a bit of a comeback, but mainly as a showpiece such as the island or serving bar.”
- “I’m seeing a split between clients who want engineered quartz for the durability and ease of cleaning and clients who are willing to spend more time cleaning to get the beauty and uniqueness of real stone. Quartzite is definitely on the rise.”
- “Natural teak and dark walnut seem to be a favorite with the dark robin egg blue, forest green and black cabinets. It’s half the price of granite, and warmer to the touch.”
- “I like manmade patterns better than the natural patterns, in general. They’re more consistent and don’t often have ‘big blotches.’”
- “Our clients tend to go more for natural stone with depth and character that’s enhanced with non-white cabinet colors and wood tones.”
- “The pendulum has definitely swung back to warm, dark and subtle. Our clients (prefer) warm, dark, rich tops that often have a texture or are honed, providing for a cozy feel and avoiding glare.”
- “Most of our clients are looking for a light and bright kitchen. They do not want dark tops or busy patterns. We sell mostly that look. Engineered stone is the lead seller.”



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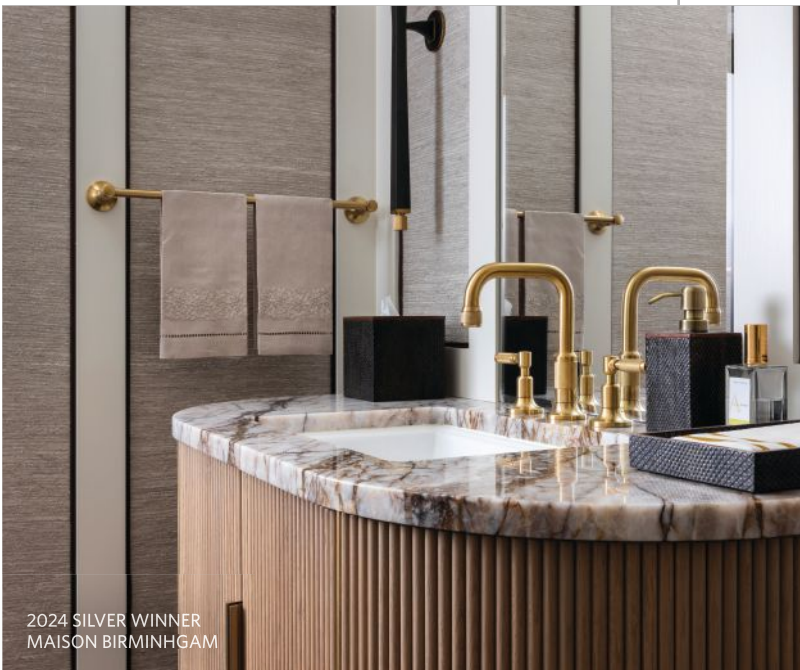
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Talking Tops

This collection of projects highlights a sampling of countertop finishes designers are choosing for today's kitchens.

BY KIM BERNDTSON



NATURAL
STONE
QUARTZITE

Photos: Niamh Barry

There are a lot of considerations that go into making countertop selections for a kitchen. Color, pattern and texture as well as durability, stain resistance and ease of maintenance routinely enter into the conversation.

Natural stone and quartz are often top of mind, but the list of choices is long enough that designers can find just the perfect fit. In some cases, that ideal fit may actually be a combination of finishes.

As part of this month's focus on surfacing, *KBDN* asked designers to share kitchen projects that showcase a perfect countertop fit for their clients.

ARIEL APTER, PRINCIPLE DESIGNER

Studio AA Interiors - Toronto, ON, Canada

Calacatta D'oro quartzite (island, perimeters)

Although located in the heart of Toronto's bustling The Junction neighborhood, Ariel Apter's clients wanted their cozy home to feel like they were revisiting the quaint and charming European countryside. Their newly purchased home had good 'bones,' but the homeowners wanted to revamp its design to better suit their style, so the designer completely gutted the main and second floors to transform them into her clients' dream home.

As that related to the kitchen, she completely rethought the layout of the space.

"We were able to increase the flow and give our clients a beautiful feature island, which is perfect for entertaining!" she relates.

Its subtle sage green base, which matches that of the perimeter's base and wall cabinetry, is topped with Calacatta D'oro quartzite that features deep browns, taupes, golds and grays against a foundation of warm white. The island's waterfall edges highlight the stone's dramatic veining pattern that is on full display from the adjacent dining room. The designer repeated the sophisticated and timeless stone as the perimeter's worktop surface.

"Its bold gold veining is unique and luxurious," Apter



indicates, noting that its rich, warm hue complements the warmth and color of the unlacquered brass cabinetry hardware and plumbing fixtures, gold-tone gallery shelf rails and island pendant lights, and polished brass La Cornue range trim and knobs. "We also gave the stone a polished finish to help protect the surface and give it some glam that makes it pop!"

Another benefit of the stone is that its natural beauty brings the outdoors in, which is further supported by several other natural elements such as the custom herringbone floor, open shelves and select wood cabinetry interiors.

"The floors, green cabinetry, unlacquered brass fixtures, venetian plaster hood, range and, of course, the quartzite countertops, all come together to make this kitchen special," she says. "With this renovation, there was almost no surface in this house that wasn't touched, and we can't wait to see our clients use this home for years to come!"



NATURAL
STONE
GRANITE

Photos: Abigail Jackson Photography

LESLIE COHEN, ASID, CID, NCIDQ, CKBD

Leslie Cohen Design - Raleigh, NC

Blue Dunes granite (perimeter)

Cambria Skara Brae quartz and walnut (island)

This active family of four wanted to lighten up their kitchen, add color and make the space more functional since it is the center of daily living and entertaining in their home.

"The previous layout was cramped and dark with inadequate counter and storage space," relates Leslie Cohen. "Changing this kitchen from a U-shape to one with an island opened up the space."

A color scheme that includes a mix of blues, greens, whites and creams with wood creates a relaxing, organic, light and timeless aesthetic. Multiple counter surfaces define different areas of the kitchen and add character. Each selection was made for its ease of maintenance since meals are prepared throughout the day, every day.

"These clients travel a lot and food preparation includes not only traditional American dishes, but Indian, Thai and other Asian foods," she explains.

The Blue Dunes granite perimeter counters offer a gorgeous medley of blues, browns and creams. The natural stone was also chosen to serve as the bench top in the 'drop area' because the family needed a durable surface for the endless amount of sports equipment that lands here.

"Natural stone has been making a comeback for several years," Cohen comments. "People love its beauty and depth. Plus, many granites don't really need sealers, and those that do have many sealing options available, everything from impregnated sealers with a 10-year warranty to daily cleaners that seal and clean at the same time.

"Also, all sorts of beautiful granites have become available, due in part to shipping costs that have totally changed the market," she continues. "It isn't really worth it for a distributor to bring over cheap, boring granite anymore because the shipping costs have become a very high percentage of the overall cost of an inexpensive stone, which makes it unattractive to buyers. With more expensive stones, the shipping costs are a lower percentage of the overall cost, so buying more beautiful, higher-quality stones is more cost effective than buying lower quality stones."



Cohen contrasted the granite with Cambria's Skara Brae quartz for the island's work surface.

"We wanted a lighter island with a non-granite pattern to differentiate it from the perimeter," she explains. "When my client saw this pattern, it was a 'go bold or go home' moment!"

The designer used walnut to define the eating/socializing side of the island, giving it an L-shape to promote conversation between seated guests. She finished it with a conversion varnish so it can be wiped clean.

"The walnut also complements the browns in the Blue Dunes granite, while preventing the large island from feeling too massive," she adds.



Photos: Austin LaRue Photography

EMILY MAREK, PRINCIPAL DESIGNER Emmy Couture Designs - Scottsdale, AZ Neolith Himalaya Crystal (islands, perimeter)

As a high-profile lifestyle influencer and mother of four kids, Emily Marek's client wanted the kitchen countertop surfaces in her new-construction home to be durable.

"It's a very busy kitchen," she says. "She's always cooking, so the durability and longevity of this sintered stone is important to her. Because of its composition, she won't ever have to seal it, and it will never discolor, even if exposed to heat. These countertops can stand the test of time, too, and they will still look stunning years from now."

This particular pattern, Himalaya Crystal, which is Neolith's tribute to the salt crystals of the namesake summit, is also timeless, which is another quality she desired for her kitchen.

"It has a natural stone look to it," the designer continues. "It has great depth with its veining pattern, which has all of the colors we were trying to pull out, like her cream-colored and gray cabinets and her gold-tone light fixtures."

Available in ultrasoft, silk and polished finishes, Marek opted for the latter.

"We wanted the surfaces to really sparkle," she explains. "A lot of natural stone countertops are polished and we wanted this sintered stone to have the same look and feel of natural stone."

Using the material in multiple areas throughout the kitchen, including as the countertops for the prep and eating/serving islands, the perimeter and the backsplash, maintains a consistent aesthetic.

"Seeing this material applied in a vertical aspect, like the backsplash, gives it a totally different look," the designer relates. "My client wanted a simple backsplash, as well as something that was easy to clean. Because we didn't need any grout, this single-slab backsplash accomplishes those goals. It also gives the cooking area, which features a beautiful plastered hood, an elevated look."

Marek repeated the sintered stone as the buffet top in the adjacent breakfast nook and as the countertop surfaces in the prep kitchen. Tucked behind the cooking wall, this secondary kitchen includes a full-size refrigerator, ice maker, sink, dishwasher, microwave, double ovens and plenty of storage on open shelves and inside drawers.





QUARTZ

Photos: Ryan Theede Photography

MAUREEN JAROCK, KITCHEN DESIGNER

Kitchens of the South - Hendersonville, NC

JENNIFER SCOTT, INTERIOR DESIGNER

Tyner Construction - Asheville, NC

Polarstone Calacatta Vagli quartz (island)

Cambria Devon quartz (perimeter, dry bar, walk-in pantry)

Budgets are an integral parameter for any kitchen project, and designers work diligently within them when considering material selections and design elements for any kitchen renovation or new construction project. However, sometimes clients are willing to adjust those budgets, extending them to include certain aesthetic or functional items that are seen as important to the project.

Such was the case for these homeowners, who saw the value of allocating additional funds to include Polarstone's Calacatta Vagli quartz as the island countertop for their new kitchen. The large island features an uninterrupted work surface for food prep and serving while an overhang allows for in-kitchen seating. Waterfall edges draw attention to the veining pattern and a 2.5" folded mitered edge adds visual 'heft.'

"The island material and thickened edge was over budget," explains Jennifer Scott. "However, the homeowners understood the importance of the statement that it makes."

For the perimeter, Cambria's Devon quartz, configured with shades of gray and black, serves as a contrast and complement with its darker hue and more monochromatic design. Its matte finish offers distinction to the polished finish given to the Calacatta Vagli surface.

The design duo extended the quartz as the backsplash behind the range to provide a seamless aesthetic and create an easy-to-clean surface. It continues behind the sink and into an illuminated niche that offers additional workspace. As well, they featured it as the countertop in the adjacent dry bar and walk-in pantry where its non-porous composition offers stain resistance from spills.

"The countertop selections were created to marry the modern



architecture articulated by the form of the home with the immortal elegance of a natural stone look," says Scott. "The sleek, earth-tone perimeter and backsplash coupled with the timeless look of Calacatta marble for the island create a modern-meets-timeless design."

That design theme is further supported by upper cabinetry that extends to the ceiling and is uniquely the same depth as the lower cabinets.

"It was a challenge to make sure all of the cabinetry was at the same depth, including the panels that extend to the ceiling, which at its highest point is 14'," emphasizes Jarock. "As well, we considered many stain colors and finally landed on this warm yet light, earthy tone that complements the countertop selections."

COUNTERTOP PROFILES



Photos: Andrew Lewis Architectural Photography

QUARTZ

NATE NICODEMUS, AIA, OWNER/FOUNDER Nicodemus Design – La Jolla, CA

Arizona Tile Della Terra Aerial quartz (island, perimeter)

These homeowners love mid-century modern design and the neighborhood in which they reside. So, when a fire tragically destroyed their home, they wanted to show respect to both when they rebuilt.

“We wanted the kitchen, and the home at large, to honor the mid-century history of the neighborhood,” says Nate Nicodemus. “We designed a contemporary home, but with a lot of the historic style used as inspiration. This led us to celebrate natural wood grain [white oak cabinetry and floors], exposed structural

elements [beams that span the kitchen from the exterior], pops of color [yellow pendant lights] and bold, fun countertops [quartz that resembles terrazzo]. Embracing a minimalist palette and detailing highlights the important design elements that remain.”

While mid-century modernism is heavily influenced by minimalism and is characterized by clean, simple lines, it also is not shy about personality and color, he points out. That’s where the Arizona Tile Della Terra quartz countertops, used on both the island and perimeter, come into play. The Aerial pattern resembles terrazzo and provides a moment of fun/personality while balancing out the restraint.

“A countertop is something people interact with closely and regularly,” he indicates. “It is touched and examined up close every day so it’s nice to have a layer of detail for the spaces where we slow down. The varied quartz pebbles provide that in this case. At a distance, the countertops have a fun field effect, but up close you notice the intricacies of each of the individual pieces.”

This particular pattern also includes many of the colors Nicodemus used throughout the home.

“The warm hues echo the white oak and some of the warmer tones we used in the kitchen and in the rest of the home,” he continues. “While I wanted a minimal color palette, I wanted to have some fun textural choices, too.”

“When I started my design firm 15 years ago, these homeowners were one of my first clients so it was a joy to finally get to renovate their kitchen, which was long overdue since it hadn’t been done in probably 30 or 40 years,” she relates. “They didn’t think they would be able to have an island because the kitchen was pretty narrow. That meant we would have to forego cabinetry on one side, which then meant we would need to have a very long island to give them the storage space and seating they needed.”

Even with the challenges, Verga persevered. Not only did she include an island, but she included one that is 12’ in length.

Another of Verga’s defining design techniques is creating seamless island countertops, even those with extended dimensions. One way she accomplishes that is to use a variety of materials, which provides for an expected and accepted seam. In this case, she used walnut butcher block on one end. It sits atop an oak cabinet that is slightly taller than the rest of the island, which features a seamless slab of LX Hausys’ Viatera Minuet quartz.

“There is such a richness to walnut that people are really attracted to right now,” she says. “It adds a layer of provenance, which is especially important when someone wants something that feels historic and timeless, which is what these clients wanted.”

The designer often uses natural stone in her designs, especially quartzite. However, these clients wanted something extremely durable, thus the Minuet quartz. As a way to include natural stone, Verga opted for Black Vermont granite for the perimeter worktop surface.

“It’s a great durable stone at a really good price point,” she relates. “This particular one is a solid black, which is what we wanted for this installation, but there are some very interesting black granites with white and brown veins, and there are even some that have a marble feel. We’ve seen some really beautiful granites, and we’ve been using them more and more.”



Photos: Toni Deis Creative

WOOD

MIRIAM SILVER VERGA, PRINCIPLE DESIGNER Mimi & Hill – Westfield, NJ

Walnut butcher block (island)

LX Hausys Viatera Minuet quartz (island)

Black Vermont granite (perimeter)

Miriam Silver Verga is well-known for her ability to incorporate islands into her kitchen designs, sometimes even when all hope seems lost. So, when these homeowners came to her with a desire for the foundational and room-defining design element in their historic home, she was happy to oblige.



PORCELAIN

Photos: Erika Bierman

MITRA SHAHI, CONSTRUCTION MANAGER/ INTERIOR DESIGNER

Shahi Design Group – Los Angeles, CA

Statuario Michelangelo porcelain (island, perimeter, pantry)

Mitra Shahi's client enjoys getting together on the weekends for family meals with her parents at their home in Los Angeles. Those events are made even more pleasant with the recent renovation of the entire first floor, which included tearing down a wall to create an open-concept living area and thoughtful kitchen with high-end appliances and custom cabinetry. At its heart is a spacious, 12'-long island topped with a seamless slab of Statuario Michelangelo porcelain.

"She wanted a large island to maximize countertop and work space," says the designer. "She also wanted low-maintenance finishes that would be easy for her aging parents, who are in their 80s and 90s, to take care of. I frequently use porcelain slabs because they are more durable than natural stone."

Shahi chose a honed finish for the porcelain, which gives it a more natural appearance and minimizes glare from natural light that flows into the room from the patio doors and abundant windows. Choosing a porcelain slab pattern with a bit of veining keeps the space from looking too sterile given its foundation of bright white and white/gray three-dimensional ledger stone backsplash. Gold-toned cabinetry hardware and lighting fixtures as well as wood-look porcelain flooring, which features a custom decorative pattern, also add warmth to the space.

"She wanted something with a bit of movement so it would look natural, but not be too busy," she explains. "This particular pattern gives a luxurious, sophisticated look to the space."

Although manmade, porcelain slabs, like natural stone, are each unique, so Shahi took her client to the local stone yard to select those that suited her taste. Since she used porcelain for the island, perimeter and adjacent walk-in pantry, which also features the same custom cabinetry and backsplash tile as the kitchen, she needed multiple slabs.

"It's a lot of fun to pick out the perfect slab," she says. "Each one is a little bit different."

"This kitchen was such a joy to design," Shahi adds. "My client grew up in this home, and she loved being able to give her mother a beautiful space to cook. They all look forward to enjoying the home for many more generations."



STAINLESS
STEEL

Photos: Mike Schwartz

JENNIE BISHOP, CO-FOUNDER

Studio Gild – Chicago, IL

Stainless steel (island, perimeter)

Working with repeat clients can oftentimes streamline the design process since both parties are already familiar with each other. So, when this client requested stainless steel countertops for the renovated kitchen in his former live/work loft space located in Manhattan's Tribeca neighborhood, Jennie Bishop wasn't necessarily surprised.

"I have done six projects with this client, both in New York and Colorado, and this is his second or third kitchen with stainless steel countertops," she indicates. "He's very exacting and knowledgeable, and he knows what he wants. He's an attorney and an art collector, but he's also a self-taught chef who loves to cook."

While her client appreciates the material's stain resistance and anti-microbial properties, he is also familiar with its susceptibility to scratching.

"Stainless steel falls into a category of 'authentic' materials," says Bishop. "Over time, he will be able to see his favorite place to cut veggies. That can be a beautiful thing...for people like this client who crave authenticity and are accepting of materials that develop a patina."

In addition to topping the perimeter and island, the latter of which features waterfall edges and an integrated sink, stainless steel makes an appearance in several places throughout the kitchen, including as the backsplash behind the range, as the cabinetry faces and as the island façade. As well, stainless steel with a brushed finish serves as the ventilation hood surround that soars to the ceiling.

Because stainless steel can be considered a 'cold' design element, both physically and aesthetically, Bishop warmed up the space with a floor-to-ceiling wall of cabinetry sheathed in an off-white paint. The adjacent brick wall, a holdout from the building's 1865 construction, is also painted a warm white, which is a bit transparent and distressed just enough to allow part of the brown brick to shine through. The wood floor and an abundance of natural light add further warmth to the space. ■

Small Yet Mighty

What they lack in square footage, powder rooms and half-baths can more than make up in style.

BY AUTUMN MCGARR

Despite its typically tiny footprint, the powder room has the potential to see heavier guest traffic than any other bath in the house, particularly if the homeowners are big on entertaining.

Of course, it would be easy enough to just cram a builder-grade toilet and pedestal sink into the room, shut the door and call it a day. However, treated thoughtfully, the powder room can be the designer's amuse-bouche – a bite-size stunner ideal for showcasing creative flourishes that might be too much in a larger room.

There are nearly endless approaches for powder room and half-bath design: the client might crave something understated, elegant and soothing as a master spa-bath in miniature, or perhaps they want to go bold with a daring space that stands out as an exclamation point in the home.

This month, *Kitchen & Bath Design News* asked selected designers to show off some of their favorite powder and half-bath projects, from the fresh to the fearless.

HARMONIZING OLD & NEW

"It's the one place you can really pack a punch," says Nureed Saeed, of powder rooms. Saeed is owner and creative director of full-service interior design firm Nu Interiors, a uniquely bi-coastal firm serving both California's Bay Area and New Jersey, specializing in kitchen and bath renovations.

Packing a punch in limited space was the brief for a powder room in a West Coast 1920s colonial – that is, the cramped 3'x3' one-time-closet with accordion doors and a raised floor. "The house never had a powder room until a previous 1980s renovation shoved one into a closet," Saeed explains. The awkward step-up floor concealed plumbing grafted into a space it had never been (and had no business being!).

As the powder room was part of a larger home renovation that included the nearby kitchen and dining room, Saeed was able to poach a few additional square feet from the dining room, which allowed for an expanded – though still tiny – 3'x5' footprint. Relocating the plumbing to the correct place in the basement allowed her to lower the elevated floor, further opening the space.

The obvious star of the room is the vibrant geometric Kelly Wearstler wallpaper, which calls back to the softer green hues featured in the kitchen. The flooring, by Fireclay Tile, offers another playful geometric touch with its Moroccan-inspired interlocking star and cross shapes, while the subdued matte gray hue and corresponding painted trim prevents too much visual noise. A floating concrete sink and wall-hung Duravit toilet save space while allowing for ease of maintenance and cleaning.



Photo: Aimee Herring Ryan

Formerly a closet, this powder bath remodel by Nureed Saeed stands out with bold wallpaper.

The revamped powder room met with approval from more than the homeowners – "Even the client's former-contractor father approved!" Saeed remarks.

A second powder bath project was coincidentally also located in a 1920s colonial – on the East Coast this time.

"The clients were young people relocating from the city who wanted to modernize the home without destroying the history," Saeed explains. She further describes them as "a really cool couple, always ahead of the curve," noting that they were among the first U.S. owners of an electric Tesla vehicle and were passionate about sustainability.

Prior to the renovation, the house only had one upstairs bathroom shared by the whole family. Because there simply was not enough square footage in the home to fit everything on the family's wish list – which included a family room, expanded kitchen, mudroom and powder room – Saeed proposed and designed a 1,400-sq.-ft. indoor-outdoor addition. Situated at the back of the home, the more modern two-storey addition provides a fascinating visual contrast to the existing structure without eliminating its history.

The new powder room was designed to intentionally straddle the historic and contemporary elements of the home. "I tried to merge old and new, which is a lot of what I do," notes Saeed. "I went with a subway tile because it wouldn't feel out of place but would still be pulled forward in time by more modern wallpaper." The wallpaper, a collaboration between Heath Ceramics and Hygge & West, is contrasted with a



Photo: Airnee Herring Ryan

Saeed focused on merging classic and contemporary design elements in this powder bath.



Photos: Nicole Larson Photography

Wood-look porcelain tile wainscoting brings a sense of warmth to this powder bath by Meredith Weiss.

moody, saturated accent wall color that references the more modern gray-green kitchen.

THE YOUNG & THE DRAMATIC

“The fun thing about working with all couples is, you learn something all the time,” remarks Meredith Weiss, founder and president of Long Island-based firm Merri Interiors. “I feel from young couples especially, they want it to feel like *their* house – not some random boring adult house. They take a little bit deeper of a plunge and tend to be more fashion-forward.”

Powder rooms are an ideal venue to showcase a young couple’s boldly independent taste. One such family engaged Weiss’s services for a first-floor remodel encompassing the kitchen, living room, full bath and half bath. “She had taste that was classic but trendy in other ways – simplicity, not too modern, timeless and dramatic,” says Weiss. “I knew she had good style based on her accessories and how she had her nails done; she always had a different manicure. I felt immediately that I could match her style.”

The powder room was conceived as “almost a reverse photo negative” to the rest of the floor, which featured light neutrals with dark accents. Accordingly, the powder room also features all neutral colors, but utilized in such a way that the space is dark and dramatic – all beneath a black ceiling. “A white ceiling would have outlined just how small the space is,” Weiss explains.

A dark and abstract floral wallpaper carries the moody atmosphere down from the ceiling, terminating at wainscoting in a wood-look elongated tile in “a neutral light color for contrast while maintaining warmth,” Weiss says, adding that the wallpaper and tile combine to create a subtle biophilic nod.

Touches such as black sink legs and a gold and black light fixture tie back into kitchen accents, creating a sense of unity despite the contrast.



The star of the show in this powder room by Meredith Weiss is the dimensional back-painted gold tile.



A custom floating vanity anchors this half bath project by Ariana Lovato.



Connected to a children's play area, this powder room designed by Lovato uses black tile in playful, unexpected ways.

A unique ceiling color is featured in a second powder room project for a different young family: navy this time. “These were very fun people with an unfun house,” says Weiss. “It was out of date and just not *theirs*. Their style was classic but fun and not old.”

The navy-colored ceiling crowns a climbing botanical wallpaper in an eye-catching scale, but the real showstopper is further down. “Certainly no one walks into a bathroom project thinking they’re going to purchase a gold floor!” says Weiss, of the gold back-painted hexagonal glass floor tile. “Because it’s glass, it feels very dimensional.”

CUSTOM CREATIVITY

“In general, we want the powder room to feel like it’s an extension of the home, but it’s a chance to create a bolder feel in the space,” says Ariana Lovato, founder and principal designer for coastal California firm Honeycomb Home Design. “We always treat it as an opportunity to make an impact.”

The undeniable star of the powder room in one new-build project in San Francisco is the floating walnut vanity, which boasts unique rounded corners. “We landed this project through Instagram,” says Lovato. “She reached out specifically asking about our cabinet line.” The line in question,

Honey Cabinetry, offers semi-custom and fully custom options in an intimate boutique experience. For this project, the client requested a custom vanity, and Lovato worked with her cabinetry team to deliver the rounded edges that the client craved.

“The powder room is a lot darker and moodier than anything else in the house,” notes Lovato. “They wanted it to feel like its own little special room.” Dark chevron tile and a minimalist mirror with edges that nod to the shape of the vanity allow the custom piece to take center stage, complemented by light sconces from Visual Comfort in brass with an alabaster shade.

Another project, located in the Bay Area, also features cabinetry from the firm’s custom line, in rift-sawn white oak. This powder room, part of a whole-home remodel, was located just off the play area for the family’s four young children. “They wanted it to be fun for the kids, but easy to keep clean,” Lovato explains. “It’s itty-bitty, just a sink and toilet.”

Striking black Savoy Swiss Cross tile from Ann Sacks travels up the vanity wall and creeps across the ceiling – an unexpectedly sweet and playful use of a typically severe color – while the vanity top, vessel sink and brass sconces maintain a bright and clean feel.



Photos: Natalia Robert Photo

NUANCED NEUTRALS, THOUGHTFUL TEXTURES

Another West Coaster, Megan Siason – the mind behind award-winning firm m studio interior design – tackled a whole-home remodel with a complicated goal, which was particularly reflected in the powder bath.

“Interestingly enough, the original home for this powder bath started out as a small, less than 1,000-sq.-ft. home in La Playa/San Diego, CA that was completely torn down and built to approximately 5,000 sq. ft.,” she relates. “The clients are repeat clients of mine who, after completing their primary residence, decided to purchase the home across the way to ensure that no one else would buy and build upwards to obstruct their view of the harbor, Downtown SD, Shelter Island, etc. It’s quite a view.”

The motivations behind the build and design made for a bit of a tricky design direction. “What made this space (and the entire home) somewhat challenging was that the clients could not tell me or the contractors whether they would plan to rent [the home] out short-term or long-term, or sell during our overall process,” Siason explains. “Since this home was not intended to be their primary residence...we were very careful to designate finishes that were not just universal, but intriguing, eye-catching and (to be very frank) wallet-friendly!”

The goal for the powder room became to create a space that would be neutral, yet anything but boring, with “economical, yet subtly captivating and easy-to-maintain finishes throughout,” Siason adds, “Of course, with my focus on creating spaces where people can thrive (and not yet knowing who these people would be!), I wanted to create a space that felt inviting, where literally anyone would feel welcome regardless of their personal style or design preferences.”

Siason endeavored to create layers of texture and movement within a neutral color palette. A wall of light textural porcelain tile contrasts with a painted accent wall in a darker, deeper tone. Hexagonal porcelain floor mosaic tile “offers some movement against the more neutral palette,” while “the graining in the wood veneer wall mounted vanity is another layer of soothing texture to ground the rounded vessel sink.”

The resultant space is “super neutral, yet pleasant...that feeling when you walk into a spa that’s not overdone in marble (I still love marble!), but that feeling of ease and restfulness without any pretension.” ■



In Vogue, In Between

Difficult to classify and not always given the love it deserves is the 3/4 bath. Smaller than the average primary or master bath, this bath typically offers a functional toilet/sink/shower trifecta and, in many homes, serves the needs of kids, in-laws and guests. Of course, especially where guests are concerned, this means that the 3/4 bath needs to pull double duty as a style statement and a functional space.

Such was the challenge faced by Ariana Lovato of Honeycomb Home Design when creating this mid-century-inspired half bath, part of a whole home remodel in upscale Santa Barbara suburb, Hope Ranch. “We had a lot of fun,” Lovato says.

Taking style cues from renowned post-war California designer Cliff May’s work, the freshened bath features a custom vanity by Lovato’s in-house cabinetry line, Honey Cabinetry, against a wall of vertical subway tile in a soothing blue-green colorway. Terrazzo flooring by Concrete Collaborative carries over into the bath and shower nook from outside of the bathroom, lending a sense of continuity to the space.



Essential Options

A desire for convenient, diverse capabilities with advanced technology and visual appeal is driving today's cooking appliance trends.

BY ELIZABETH RICHARDS

Cooking appliances are central to the work of the kitchen, and must be versatile, flexible, easy to operate and aesthetically pleasing all at the same time. One of the main requirements for cooking appliances is that they are equipped with multiple functions and features that make creating meals simple and convenient.

"A standout feature in modern cooking appliances is versatility and programmability, allowing users to pre-set a range of cooking times and modes, providing stress-free meal preparation all from one appliance," remarks Henry Eng, v.p. of cooking for GE Appliances in Louisville, KY.

Technological advances are also important in cooking appliances, from connectivity and Artificial Intelligence (AI) assistance to less visible enhancements that bolster function. "Technology is fundamentally accelerating the evolution of appliances, driving innovation across the industry," observes Michael Magnani, director product planning for Englewood Cliffs, NJ-based Signature Kitchen Suite. "This impact is seen in both the consumer-facing features and the behind-the-scenes advancements that deliver improved performance and user experience."

Aesthetically, trends vary widely, but bolder colors, unique accents and sleek designs are favored by many. Sue Bailey, brand developer for Viking Range in Greenwood, MS, explains, "Cooking continues to be the focal point of the kitchen, and appliances are playing a big role in both how kitchens look and function. Bold colors are making a comeback, and brass accents are



Fulgor Milano's Matteo Collection is a series of contemporary kitchen appliances that includes induction and gas cooktops, wall ovens, specialty ovens and built-in coffee systems. Crafted in Italy, the appliances are available in stainless steel or matte black finishes. fulgor-milano.com



ROBAM introduces its 30" Dual Fuel Range, which features five gas burners with multiple levels ranging from 5,000 to 18,000 BTU. The large capacity, 5.0-cu.-ft. European-style convection oven delivers evenly distributed heat and a wide range of temperature controls, from 80 to 550 degrees F. robamliving.com



Empava's 30" Built-in Induction Cooktop delivers up to 4,400 watts with proprietary MagniBridge technology that syncs two burners for griddle-style cooking, and as low as 400 watts for delicate dishes. It features glide touch controls that adjust 18 power levels, and an auto switch-off feature. empava.com



The **JennAir** 36" Downdraft Induction Cooktop features a slim profile that eliminates the need for bulky hoods and removes cabinet constraints, notes the firm. The downdraft ventilation is centered in the cooktop, capturing smoke and odors and running it through a filter. jennair.com

becoming a favorite for adding a sense of warmth and character to spaces. These additions help make kitchens feel more inviting and unique."

"At the same time, there's a strong trend toward ultra-modern kitchen designs, with black glass appliances standing out," she adds. "These sleek appliances aren't just about looks – they're designed to blend seamlessly with cabinetry, creating a clean, minimalist look. They're also super easy to clean, which makes them practical for busy households. Black glass really strikes that perfect balance of style and function, appealing to homeowners who want a modern yet low-maintenance option."

Cooking appliance trends also include increased attention to induction, convenience and healthy cooking options say manufacturers recently surveyed by *Kitchen & Bath Design News*.

A WELL-STOCKED TOOLBOX

The cooking capabilities that consumers want are as varied as the consumers themselves, creating a need for a range of attributes and features that can be tailored to the homeowner's unique experience.

"Today's cooking appliances are equipped with essential features that elevate both performance and convenience," says Stephen Polloni, president, The Vetta Group, which is the North American office for Italy-based Fulgor Milano. "Advanced technologies like induction cooking with precise temperature control, ovens with integrated air fryers, true convection



Bertazzoni presents its new 24", 30" and 36" Induction Built-in Cooktops, which include touch controls, digital-timed cooking functions and sensors that detect cookware size and adjust the heated area. The cooking surface includes four heating zones and two bridge areas for larger cookware. us.bertazzoni.com



Thermador's Pro Harmony Liberty Induction Cooktop includes the Heatshift that allows users to change power levels by moving cookware and MoveMode transfers cooking settings from one zone to another by moving a pot across the cooktop. The cooktop also features PowerBoost for a surge of power. thermador.com



Induction cooktops from **LG Electronics** feature SmoothTouch Glass Controls as well as four cooking elements and power levels. An Energy Efficiency indicator helps maximize the power and energy efficiency of each element. The LG SmartThinQ Technology provides remote and voice operation. lg.com



The **Coyote Outdoor Living** Hybrid Pizza Oven delivers gas, wood or combination baking for the outdoors. The oven includes a seamless dome, advanced heat management with 7+ insulation layers and a double-wall insulated chimney. Temperatures can range up to 1,000 degrees F. coyoteoutdoor.com



Lynx Grills has launched its Built-In Kamado Grill, an 18" grill with 1.5" of premium grade, insulating ceramic construction for heat retention. Available in Gloss Black and Matte Gray, the grill sports 250 square inches of cooking surface with precision temperature control from 225 to 750 degrees F. lynxgrills.com



The **Fire Magic** EL500 Electric built-in grills from **RH Peterson Co.** heat up to 700 degrees F. The grills also feature a 30"x16" cooking surface, stainless steel Flavor Grids, Diamond Sear cooking grids and thermostatic control with touchscreen panel or via Bluetooth or WiFi control from a smart device. firemagicgrills.com



The Prima Collection of Italian-made 36" ranges – in gas, electric and dual-fuel models – include a 5.0-cu.-ft. oven cavity with easy-clean enamel, a soft-close oven door and five burners, notes **Verona Appliances**. The Dual Fuel and Electric models feature a digital clock and time plus 11 oven functions. veronaappliances.com



The SWB3085HS combines the Easy-Wave Open, Smart Microwave Drawer oven with its True European Convection Wall Oven with Soft-Close into one appliance. The unit shares a single full-color touch screen control panel, works with Alexa, and includes a **Sharp USA** Smart Cook feature. sharpusa.com

systems and steam cooking options are transforming the kitchen. These technologies make cooking faster, healthier and more energy efficient than ever before." Customization to suit personal preferences and needs is becoming increasingly popular in kitchen design, he adds.

Other manufacturers agree that it's important for cooking appliances to have multiple options for flexibility and convenience. "The must-have feature for modern cooking appliances is multi-modality, which offers the flexibility to tackle a wide variety of cooking tasks. Think of it like a chef's toolbox – each tool serves a different purpose," offers Magnani. "Modern appliances combine multiple cooking methods – such as steam, convection, air-fry, microwave, sous vide and speed cooking in a combi wall oven – allowing consumers to switch seamlessly between techniques to achieve perfect results."

"Homeowners want appliances adaptable to their preferences," notes Skyler Stevenson, head of North America Brand Strategy + Product for Gaggenau, based in Irvine, CA. "For example, our Combi-Steam Oven offers the personalization of recipes and automatic programs providing culinary assistance entirely adjustable by the home chef using Home Connect or intuitive TFT controls."

"Multi-functional appliances are another standout trend, with homeowners seeking solutions that maximize efficiency without compromising performance," agrees Polloni. "Appliances like Fulgor Milano's 3-in-1

Speed Oven deliver multiple functions in a compact design."

In addition to ample options for cooking, features that add ease and convenience are important, manufacturers say. So, too, are tools designed with very specific purposes that help achieve desired results.

"Home chefs today are seeking innovative tools that help them master their culinary skills with ease and confidence," Polloni states.

"In addition to enhancing their cooking techniques through connected features, consumers are looking for products that are easy to clean," Eng observes, such as the company's removable EasyWash Oven Tray.

"As engineering capabilities continue to grow, we're seeing more specific demands for features that cater to niche markets," comments Emily Intravia, marketing manager at Summit Appliance, based in Bronx, NY. For instance, Summit introduced the Safety First series of cooktops that include an automatic shutoff at the 30-minute mark, she says.

Bailey adds, "For home chefs, precision tools are becoming a must have, and meat probes are a perfect example of this. While they've been a staple in ovens, we're seeing them used in more and more appliances now. Meat probes let you cook meats to the exact right temperature every time, improving the taste and texture of your dishes without having to open the oven door and disrupt the cooking process."

She continues, "Warming drawers with built-in meat probes take things even further. They're ideal for slow-cooking dishes like prime



According to **Signature Kitchen Suite**, its 36" Induction Pro Range is the first professional induction range with steam functionality and a 7,000-watt burner. The 6.3-cu.-ft. oven combines steam and ProHeat Convection, plus air fry capabilities. ThinQ UP technology lets users upgrade software. signaturekitchensuite.com



From **BlueStar** comes the 48" Platinum Series Induction Range with a matte finish cooktop and a large cooking surface with power indicator lights. Expansive 11" zones and four 9" zones are featured, along with a bridge function. The range can be customized with 1,000+ colors and 10 metal trim options. bluestarcooking.com



The **THOR Kitchen** 36" Tilt Panel Professional Gas Range is fashioned from stainless steel and showcases professional-grade features, including tilt panel touch controls, high-powered burners, continuous cast iron cooking grates and convection fan. The air fry feature allows for frying without fat. thorkitchen.com



Wolf has introduced Colored Accent Doors, which deliver a fresh alternative to the company's classic stainless steel finishes. Available in white or black, the powder-coated steel doors allow homeowners to personalize the look of their Dual Fuel Range to match any aesthetic, notes the firm. subzero-wolf.com



The 30" Bridge Induction Cooktop showcases a sleek black glass surface with four burners that is paired with easy-to-use Slide Touch Controls that offer precise power adjustments. The SiIKEN mat enhances cooking stability, simplifies cleanup and protects the surface, notes **Kenyon International**. cookwithkenyon.com



This **Miele** 30" Induction Range is a fully electric model with induction cooktop and M Touch technology – Multi-colored TFT touch display. Four induction cooking zones are featured, while Moisture Plus and a wireless precision probe assist with determining proper roasting and baking temperatures. mieleusa.com



Summit Appliance offers its Safety First radiant and induction cooktops, which are equipped with a built-in automatic shutoff system that disables the power after 30 minutes. The cooktop also turns off after one minute of no activity, and overflow protection powers off the cooktop if boiling liquid is detected. summitappliance.com



Aurora Borealis is the latest curated color collection from **Elmira Stove Works**. Available as custom colors on its Northstar and Heritage products, the colors are inspired by the Northern Lights. The four shades include Helium Halo, Charged Atmosphere, Hydrogen Horizon and Night Watch. elmirastoveworks.com

rib, allowing you to maintain a consistent, low temperature for tender, flavorful results. Features like these combine precision and convenience, making them a must for serious cooks.”

INTUITIVE CONNECTIONS

In a tech crazy world, it’s no surprise that cooking appliances are more connected and offer more advanced, intuitive features than ever before.

“Technology is reshaping the kitchen, transforming it beyond simply a functional area. It allows us to create spaces that feel more like curated interiors as well as provide convenience and control,” reports Stevenson. “Gaggenau’s appliances with Home Connect enable control through mobile devices, offering features like remote monitoring, personalized cooking programs and perfectly tempering your wine.”

“Consumers are increasingly recognizing the value of WiFi and smart connectivity for their day-to-day lives,” remarks Magnani. “Initially, these technologies offered benefits like remote monitoring and control...Now, expanded features like cameras in ovens that leverage AI to recommend the best auto cook recipes are helping consumers achieve optimal cooking results, making the technology a central part of the cooking.”

“Connected technology is also transforming the service experience across appliances, not just in cooking and refrigeration,” he adds. “For example, ThinQ Care allows appliances to self-diagnose and communicate

directly with service teams when issues arise. This connected system streamlines the repair process, reducing downtime and ensuring faster, more efficient service.”

Magnani points out, “These examples illustrate how technology is not just enhancing the functionality of appliances but also creating a more personalized and seamless user experience. As technology continues to advance, appliances will only become smarter, more efficient and more intuitive, helping consumers achieve optimal results with less effort.”

“Technology is transforming how we use cooking appliances, making them more intuitive and connected,” Bailey agrees. “Smart ovens and cooktops are becoming more common, offering features like remote monitoring and control. This lets you adjust temperatures or settings right from your phone, which is a huge help for multitasking or managing a busy household.”

“Many appliances like the Viking RVL now come with integrated recipe libraries and guided cooking programs. Having access to hundreds of professional recipes at your fingertips makes cooking easier and encourages people to try new dishes. These tech features make cooking more seamless and enjoyable while saving time and reducing stress,” she emphasizes.

“Artificial intelligence is increasingly becoming integrated in cooking appliances, revolutionizing the way we prepare and think about food,”



From **ZLINE Kitchen and Bath** comes this dual-fuel range with a gas cooktop and six auto-reignition burners and an electric convection oven. The Auto-graph Edition also features a streamlined panel front with white matte door, ZLINE's Horizon window design and champagne bronze accents. zlinekitchen.com



KitchenAid's Multifunction Over-the-Range Microwave Oven with Infrared Sensor Modes combines an air fryer, toaster oven, convection oven, dehydrator, bread proofer, microwave and ventilation hood, notes the firm. WiFi capabilities allow for remote control with the KitchenAid App or voice. kitchenaid.com



The Dolce Vita collection includes 30" and 36" models with stainless steel and polished chrome, with added trim options of burnished brass and gunmetal, are available. The ranges, from **Officine Gullo**, feature a digital control interface, dual-flame burners, dual convection ovens and Cool-Touch door. officinegullo.com



GE has introduced the 30" Slide-In Electric Convection Range with an Easy-Wash Oven Tray, a removable tray that is dishwasher safe. No Pre-Heat Air Fry and Pizza provide faster cooking, notes the firm, while No Preheat Fresh Reheat heats up previously cooked food. WiFi connected, it operates with SmartHQ. geappliances.com



Gas and induction cooktop systems from **Tulip Cooking** are made for seamless integration into countertops. Designed and handcrafted in The Netherlands, the modular induction burners allow for flexible burner placement, while the gas burners provide optimal flame control and fuel efficiency. tulipcooking.com



The Series 11 48" Professional Induction Range from **Fisher & Paykel** has six induction cooking zones, with two zones that can pair into the larger SmartZones for sizable cookware. The oven's two cavities can be controlled by a touch screen and offer 15 oven functions in the main cavity and 11 in the secondary. fisherpaykel.com



Midea's gas slide-in range features an edge-to-edge cooktop, blue backlighting on the knobs, a glass touch control panel, 6.1-cu.-ft. capacity and dial-tech smart oven control. It offers WiFi connectivity, Air Fry Convection Mode and a Perfect Cook Probe with smartphone alerts via the MSmarthome App. midea.com



The Benchmark Series 36" Induction Cooktop from **Bosch** allows remote monitoring and access via the Home Connect app. FlexInduction combines two cooking zones, and PowerMove divides FlexInduction into three power level zones. PreciseSelect selects between 17 different power levels. bosch-home.com

Eng states. "This seamless blend of technology not only simplifies the cooking process but also transforms how users interact with their kitchen appliances."

EMBRACING INDUCTION

Technology also opens up multiple avenues for consumers to become more educated about, and comfortable with, specific types of cooking. Induction has been garnering interest for years, but has really begun to be favored in the American market recently.

"Induction is the magic word of 2025," stresses Intravia. "Between government rebates, environmental concerns and, finally, more acceptance in the American market, we expect to see far more kitchens transitioning to this technology."

She adds, "Induction has been available to the U.S. market for decades, but so many consumers were terrified of this mysterious technology. It took the internet a little time to build a whole library of educational cooking resources – everything from TikTok videos to virtual classes hosted by celebrity chefs – and now consumers are more comfortable."

"Induction cooking has been growing in popularity for years and continues to gain momentum," agrees Bailey. "People love it because it offers incredible control – you can melt butter or chocolate gently, but it's also powerful enough to boil water faster than any gas or electric cooktop."

Induction cooking is also appealing to consumers concerned about health and sustainability, manufacturers say. "Beyond performance, induction is getting even more attention now because of its safety and environmental benefits," Bailey stresses. "Induction stands out as a cleaner, safer alternative. It's also energy efficient and keeps surfaces cool to the touch while cooking, which adds another layer of appeal for families and modern households."

"The growing demand for sustainable products and eco-friendly solutions and the roll-out of the Inflation Reduction Act rebates has impacted the design and features of modern cooking appliances," says Eng. "This shift is reflected in the rise of energy-efficient models, such as induction cooktops, which offer faster and more efficient heating."

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

Aesthetically, manufacturers say, stainless steel is still the top choice for cooking appliances. But there are plenty of other options that appeal to the desire for customization: bold colors, darker finishes, metallic accents, and black-and-white combinations are popular selections.

"Stainless steel has long been a staple in kitchen finishes due to its timeless appeal, durability and ease of maintenance," says Polloni. "However, the trend is shifting towards a broader range of textures and finishes. Matte black is increasingly gaining popularity for its sleek,



Photo: L'Atelier Paris Haute Design

L'Atelier Paris Haute Design crafts made-to-measure, professional-grade custom French cooking ranges and full luxury kitchens, inspired by Parisian haute cuisine. There are no bounds on length, color, trim finish options and configurations for the ultra-luxe kitchen solutions.
leatelierparis.com



The **Aga Elise Induction 48"** range delivers a large cooking surface and two 2.8-cu.-ft. ovens, along with a designated broiler rack. Showcasing an iconic aesthetic, the range features antique brass cruciform knobs as well as a number of antique brass accents.
agarangeusa.com



Gaggenau's Vario induction cooktop can be combined with gas, electric grill, teppanyaki or wok induction cooktop. The induction portion is available in multiple widths with flexible burners, and can pair with downdraft technology via Home Connect.
gaggenau.com



Viking Range has introduced brushed brass accents for select 5 Series Ranges. Brass features include handle endcaps, knob bezels and the Viking logo. For additional customization, the company offers a curated palette of 18 designer-curated colors.
vikingrange.com



Blending performance with technology, **Dacor's** Induction Range features Dual Four-Part Convection, as well as integrated Air Sous Vide and Air Fry functions. The 7" Sync Burner allows for various cookware sizes, while the Dual Noise Canceling technology ensures quiet operation.
dacor.com



Designed for smaller spaces, the 24" Induction Range from **SMEG** features a sleek touch cooktop display for easy operation, a beveled edge for flush, seamless installation, automatic pot recognition and a meat probe for temperature control. Nine modes deliver cooking versatility.
smeg.com



The **Monogram 30"** Hearth Oven is a smart electric hearth oven that uses precision-controlled electric heating zones that can reach up to 1,300 degrees F, mimicking the performance of traditional wood-fired ovens. WiFi functionality integrates with smart home systems and mobile apps.
monogram.com



The Gemstone Series from **KUCHT** features this range with dark stainless steel finish and gold accents, available in full gas or dual-fuel models in 30", 36" or 48". This series offers a range of cooking options with an optional reversible grill/griddle and high BTU burners.
kucht.com

modern look and ability to resist fingerprints, offering a more contemporary alternative to traditional stainless steel." Fulgor Milano is currently launching its Matteo Collection, available in Matte Black and Stainless Steel finishes, in North America.

"Alongside metallic finishes, color accents are on the rise as a way to personalize kitchen spaces," Polloni adds. "We offer six interchangeable door color kit options for our Sofia Professional range collection that allow homeowners to easily customize their appliances to match their kitchen décor or add a bold splash of color to the space."

Magnani believes that authenticity is key. "We are seeing a preference for real, high-quality materials that seamlessly blend into the kitchen environment. Stainless steel remains a staple, but there's a clear trend toward a softer, less reflective version. SKS recently launched a muted Satin Stainless Steel, which has been well received by the design community. This bead-blasted matte finish gives the traditional stainless steel a warmer, satin tone and a more transitional look. It has all the benefits of stainless – durability, sleekness and ease of care – while offering a new, more approachable feel for today's kitchens," he reports.

"We see a continued trend toward darker materiality shaping modern kitchen design, with rich finishes adding dramatic contrast and sophistication," notes Stevenson. "Prioritizing authentic materials over man-made alternatives, we ensure each appliance embodies timeless luxury

and enduring appeal."

Bailey agrees that dark tones are trending, with finishes like the company's Cast Black becoming favorites. "The matte black finish gives a clean, modern look without being overpowering, making it perfect for minimalist designs," she reports. Antique Bronze is also capturing attention with its warm, rich tone and subtle hints of gold, she adds. "It adds a touch of luxury and pairs beautifully with Viking's new brass accents on the range, creating a cohesive and elevated look that's both functional and stylish," Bailey notes.

Bolder colors and designs that attract attention are also on the rise, according to some manufacturers.

"This year, bold colors are stealing the spotlight in the kitchen, and Viking's new designer-curated finishes are leading the charge," assures Bailey. "Blues, in particular, are a huge trend. Shades like November Sky, Squall, Splash and Slate Blue have been incredibly popular because they bring a calm yet sophisticated vibe to the kitchen."

"As bold colors continue to gain popularity in home design, all-black and all-white appliances have emerged as striking complements to these vibrant choices in wall colors and cabinetry. This stark contrast not only enhances the visual appeal of your space but also turns your appliances into standout features of your home decor while still harmonizing with the overall design scheme," stresses Eng. ■



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Flooring Flourishes

WHILE THERE ARE a multitude of trends influencing the selection of tile for the kitchen, bath, laundry room and other spaces throughout the home, two are currently exerting their influence when it comes to flooring. The embracing of nature and biophilic design has led to a range of materials and tones, while the desire for more colorful, personalized spaces has expanded options in patterns and colors.

Design that leans on nature as a strong influence can incorporate wood and natural wood tones, stone and concrete looks and the colors of the outdoors, especially greens, browns, blues and grays. While marble looks have been front and center the past several years, natural stones and stone aesthetics have expanded to include the appearance of quartzite, slate and limestone.

The rise of color being used throughout the home is a direct reflection of homeowners moving away from resale value and embracing more personalized design. Concrete tiles with colorful hues, vibrant mosaics creating distinctive shapes and bold patterns that can be used on both the floor and the wall provide a customized look that clients and designers crave.

On this and the next two pages, *Kitchen & Bath Design News* displays some of the latest flooring products for the home.

1. The Exotika Collection from **MSI** features 24"x48" porcelain tiles inspired by the natural allure of onyx and marble and showcasing a palette of greens, blues, purples and more. These tiles feature rectified edges for seamless installation and minimal grout visibility.

msisurfaces.com

2. The CraftedConnections collection from **LX Hausys America** is a line of luxury vinyl tile featuring 18 wood and eight stone designs. The collection utilizes TrueMatte technology and is available in two specifications: a 2.5mm thickness with a 20-mil wear layer and a 5mm thickness.

lxhausys.com/us/index

3. **Ann Sacks** has launched the Terossa Collection comprised of four hand-crafted designs – Ottogono Lancette, Piramidi, Small Vermiculatum and Plain Field – that incorporate waterjet cut stones of Botticino, Afion Violet, Red Marble or Red Travertine. The stones are strategically laid into patterns against fields of terra cotta.

annsacks.kohler.com

4. **Havwoods'** TreeAzzo is an FSC-certified, resin-bound wood particle product. The standard resin colorways include Raspberry, Nougat, Nougat Brushed, Fig, Liquorice, Pistachio, Blueberry and Oyster. It is fully customizable in size and offered with a drop-edge finish, creating the look of solid terrazzo.

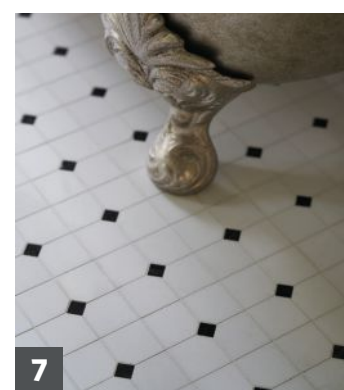
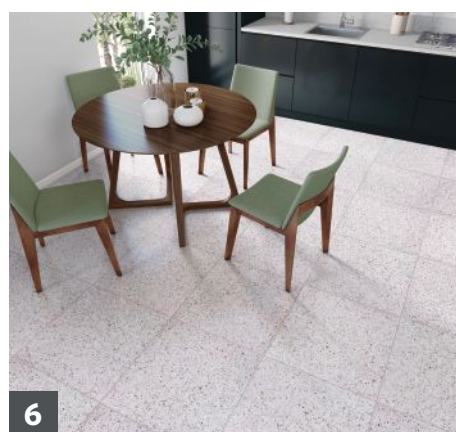
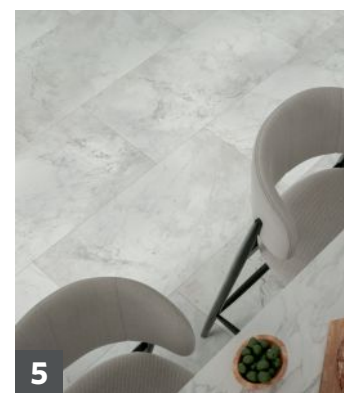
havwoods.com/us

5. **Matter Surfaces'** Oversize Tile collection by Parador Modular ONE provides a stone and concrete look. The tile is available in Stone Atlas Shadow Grey, Stone Atlas Light Grey and Marble Eos White.

mattersurfaces.com

6. **Villa Lagoon Tile's** 24" handcrafted Terrazzo Tile Slabs are available in 16 patterns, including six new colorways – Cane, Dorsoduro, Pompano, Palm Springs, Sedona and Venezia. The tile slabs incorporate marble chips, glass, shells, natural stones or other materials.

villalagoontile.com





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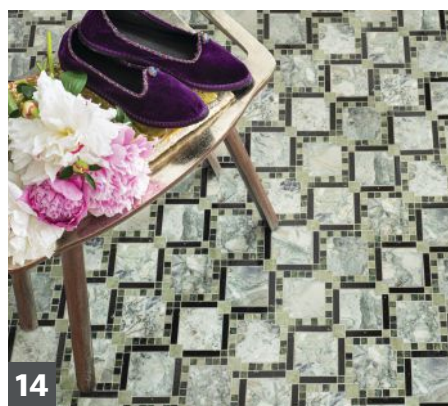
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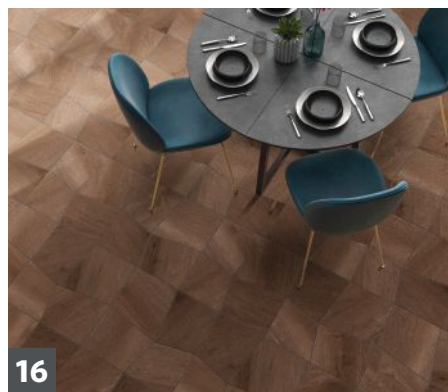
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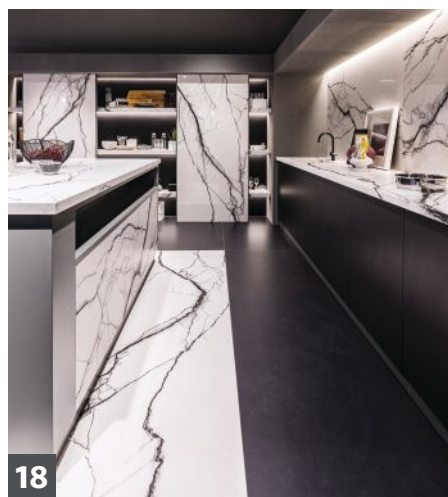
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7. Devon&Devon's collection of artisanal crafted Elite floors combines precious marbles with contrasting colors to generate geometric patterns. The Elite 4 collection (shown) is available in the variants Bianco Carrara + Nero Marquina, Crema Marfil + Nero Marquina, Emperador Light + Crema Marfil or Nero Marquina + Crema Marfil. devon-devon.com/eu

8. Inspired by sedimentary limestone, the Intense series from **Arizona Tile** is offered in 12"x24", 24"x24", 8"x48" and 24"x48". The 24"x48" size includes a Trait texture that recreates the effect of chiseled stone. arizonatile.com

9. Betsy Encaustic Cement Tile is a new tile from **Otto Tiles** Signature Collection with a playful palette of colors. Due to a mixture of cutting-edge cement development and handmade production techniques, Betsy tiles are slimmer with less weight, less thickness and more saturated hues, states the firm. ottotiles.com

10. Laminam's large-format porcelain slabs are available in a wide range of colors, textures and finishes. Laminam slabs are UV-resistant, ensuring they won't fade or degrade over time, the company states. laminam.com/en

11. AHF Products is expanding its Armstrong Flooring Alterna collection with 10 new designs in stone and marble. Reflecting the look of natural stone, porcelain and ceramic, the key to Alterna's realism is its engineered stone construction, which includes more than 75 percent limestone, notes the company. ahfproducts.com/en-us

12. Crossville's Trajectory is a concrete-look porcelain tile available in a curated palette of four colors – Direction, Path, Flight and Flow. Trajectory comes in a range of sizes, including 12"x24" and 24"x24" field tiles, both rectified for precision installation. The design can be enhanced with complementing mosaics. crossvilleinc.com

13. The Tele di Marmo Lumia collection from **Emilceramica** features slabs with a backlit effect to emphasize the stone's translucence. The collection offers three variants – Ivory Gioiello, Labradorite and Golden Ambra – and a vast range of sizes and finishes. emilgroup.com/emilceramica

14. The San Marco collection from **New Ravenna** features 10 patterns designed by Jacquelyn Bizzotto that capture the artisanal elements synonymous with Venice. The material selections in San Marco embrace the functional luxury of marble, quartzite, limestone, travertine, Glazed Basalto and Basalto Orvieto, with each tessera honed or polished to create a textured patina. newravenna.com

15. Inspired by the energy of geometric patterns, **Panariagroup USA's** Playlist by Panaria Ceramica is available in 3"x12" and 8"x8" formats. The tile is offered in 12 color options and geometric decors in both neutral and color mixes. panaria.us

16. The Malibu Plank collection from **MILE®stone** brings the natural beauty of wood to life, the company states. It is available in three colors and features an exclusive large format size of 12"x70". The collection also has a modern deco called Lagoon. This design is complemented by a versatile chevron deco. milestonetiles.com

17. Hacienda is a new design pattern launched in **Artaic's** Designs on Demand collection. Hacienda adds mosaic art to any interior or exterior surface, offering an addition to any space with orders by the square foot. artaic.com

18. FLORIM stone from **Florim** is a versatile porcelain stoneware surface with a wide array of designs and textures in a single large format (320x160 cm) with three different thicknesses (6, 12, 20 mm). All FLORIM stone collections are part of CarbonZero, the range of Carbon Neutral surfaces by Florim. florim.com/en

19. The Urban Essence collection of porcelain tile from **American Olean** delivers a distinctive spin on concrete-look tile, blending high variation and authentic graphics for an industrial aesthetic, notes the company. Offering various sizes in five neutral tones, the company states the 15"x30" lays the groundwork for a bold statement, while the 1"x6" mosaic draws interest with the linear shape, the firm adds. It is suitable for floor, wall, countertop and exterior floor applications.
americanolean.com

20. **Nemo Tile + Stone's** Dolcissima porcelain slab collection, designed to mimic the look and feel of luxury marble, is available in 17 stone aesthetics including Calacatta Oro, Statuarietto, Arabescato and Basalto Grey. Available in a 12mm thickness or 6mm upon request, Dolcissima offers a hygienic solution with a non-porous surface and a resilient body resistant to chemicals and scratches, ensuring ease of maintenance, the company states. It is available in 12mm or 6mm upon request.
nemotile.com

21. XLIGHT is **Porcelanosa's** large-format porcelain tile available in extra slim sizes that recreates the look of cement, marble, stone, wood and metal. This technical porcelain tile is offered in four finishes – polished, silk, textured and natural. XLIGHT is available in 24"x47," 47"x47" or 47"x106" and comes in two thicknesses – 6mm or 9mm.
porcelanosa.com/us

22. Featuring eight bold art deco-inspired patterns, Sovran from **Daltile** epitomizes luxury and durability, marrying marble opulence with the practicality of ColorBody porcelain, the company states. Each tile boasts timeless elegance reminiscent of classic white and black marble, with intricate veins that vary between pieces. The expansive 24"x48" size with rectified edges creates seamless installations.
daltile.com

23. Each glazed porcelain tile in the Martel collection from **Emser Tile** boasts a distinctive glazing, reminiscent of handcrafted artistry, ensuring no two pieces are identical, according to the company. Martel is available in two sizes and four colors: Snow, River, Bark and Garden.
emser.com

24. Inspired by ancient craftsmanship techniques, Terracreta from **Louisville Tile** offers a blend of traditional artistry and modern innovation, the company states. Handcrafted details like raised edges and irregular textures enhance the tile's authentic look, notes the firm. Made from high-quality materials, Terracreta is durable and easy to maintain, the firm adds. Shown is Terracreta 10"x8.5" Cesello Hex in Argilla Matte.
louisville-tile.com

25. **Marazzi's** Cotto Revival pays homage to the historic artistry of Spanish Revival tile and handmade Talavera tile, delivering a decidedly Latin flair. A collection full of cotto inspiration in warm and cool tones is available in a glazed porcelain 8"x8" and 8" hexagon as well as the linear 2"x9" brick. It is suitable for floors and walls.
marazziusa.com

26. **Artistic Tile's** Game On Collection is designed by Michelle Gerson and features a bold return to basic shapes with unexpected touches, notes the company. The collection features four customizable designs – Spot-On, Slide (shown), Zip and Stix – each available in a range of sizes in both mosaic form and as large format tile.
artistictile.com

27. **WOW Design**, a design studio that specializes in small-scale signature tile designs, has introduced the Bit Collection, which is inspired by digital graphics. Made up of unusually small tiles, the format conjures up the world of digital graphics thanks to its size, notes the firm. Bit's rectangular tiles come in a 3.7x11.6cm format and its square ones in a 11.6 x11.6cm format in a choice of nine colors and a matte or a high-glaze finish.
wowdesigneu.com



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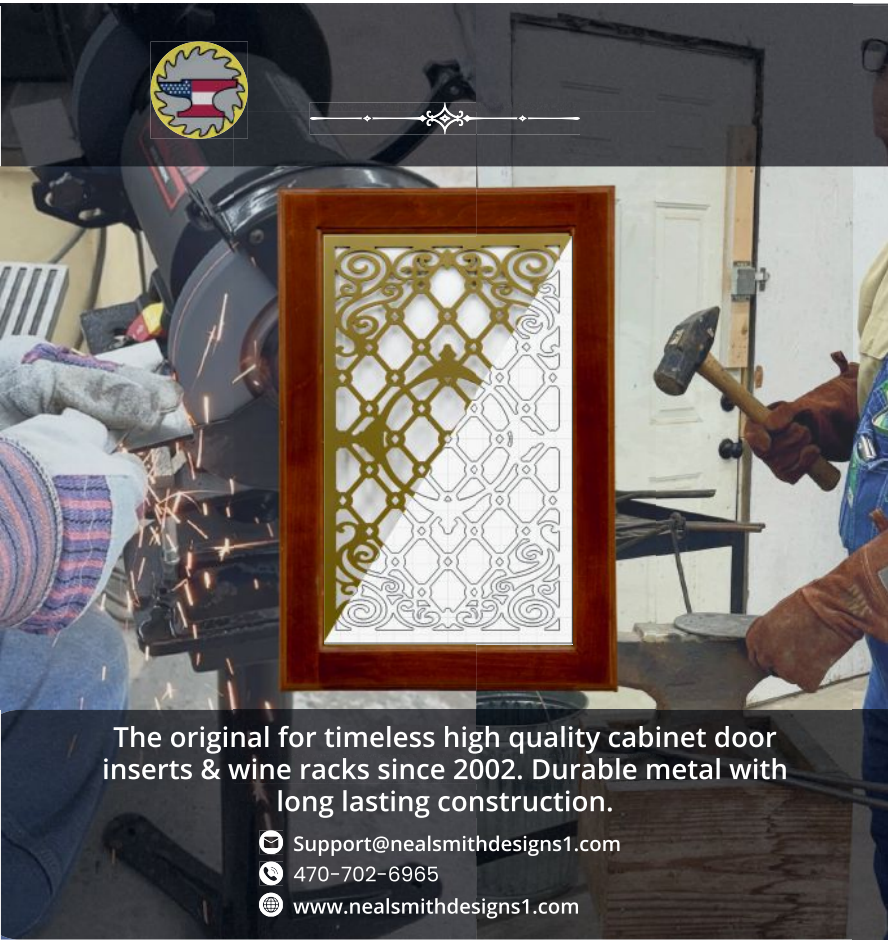
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NEW PRODUCTS

WARM HPL CABINET TONES

REHAU has expanded its RAUVISIO terra soft, textured HPL surface line with five new colors, featuring Fireside Walnut. Inspired by Mocha Mousse, Pantone's Color of the Year for 2025, the shade adds a warm touch to millwork designs, notes the firm. The woodgrain surface of the engineered wood product provides impact and chip resistance, and its deeply textured surface lends an authentic wood look and feel, adds the company. The line initially featured nine colorways with primarily cool undertones, but now includes several warm-toned options, including Soundside Oak, Lighthouse Oak, Sundial Oak and Midsummer Elm. Rehau.com/us-en/millwork/surfaces/natural/rauvizio-terra



UNDERCOUNTER REFRIGERATION

Dacor has added to its selection of luxury kitchen appliances with the introduction of its Undercounter Collection, which includes Wine Cellar and Beverage Refrigerator configurations. The Wine Cellar features Dual Temperature Zones for storing red and white wines, the company's GlideRack system crafted from oak wood and precision rails, and its Presenter Shelf. It holds 41 bottles. The Beverage Refrigerator sports adjustable glass shelves and has room for up to 128 canned beverages. Also featured are SteelCool technology with LED 3D Lighting and intuitive Touch Control Panel. dacor.com

BAMBOO LEG DESIGN

Inspired by current design trends, the legs of the Bamboo Leg collection from **Osborne Wood Products** were created to resemble natural bamboo poles with round profiles and carved nodes placed along each piece. A top square block is included in the designs for ease of attachment to table aprons and table-tops. The collection includes a large range of sizes, including 18", 29", 34-1/2" and 35-1/2" heights. All come in various widths from 3" to 5", and are available in over 10 wood species including stain and paint grade options. osbornewood.com



VESSEL FAUCET

The Wren Single Handle Vessel Faucet from **Barclay Products** sports a striking design and wooden finish for a distinctive look. Made with solid brass construction, the faucet offers a 1.2 gpm flow rate and ceramic cartridge. A matching drain is included. barclayproducts.com



GEOMETRIC OVAL BASIN

Acquabella's Stelvio oval vessel basin features a singular textured exterior surface with geometric cuts. It measures 22"x15" and is 6" deep and is crafted from the company's signature mineral composite material that offers a smooth-to-the-touch finish and easy-to-clean antibacterial surface. It is available in standard gloss white, as well as matte white, matte gray, matte charcoal, matte sand and matte black. acquabella.com

METALLIC WOOD HOOD FINISHING

Stanisci Design has partnered with **Grothouse Lumber**, utilizing a specialized Anvil metallic finishing program with Grothouse to finish complete wood hoods and accent pieces on its hoods. Grothouse's proprietary finish system utilizes real metals in copper, brass, steel and more that are liquified and sprayed onto the wood hoods, moldings and decorative accent pieces. The program is offered with eight different metal finish options in smooth or vintage/antique appearances. wood-hood.com



HAMMERED BRASS PREP SINK

The new handcrafted brass prep sink from **Stone Forest** is constructed with a hammered interior and completed with a warm, luminous finish, notes the company. The sink basin is available in brushed or polished brass and accommodates a 3.5" kitchen drain; it is also available in a stainless steel variation. stoneforest.com

CUSTOMIZABLE TUB

The sculptural, freestanding Coachella bathtub showcases a wing-like silhouette inspired by the rooflines of mid-century modernist residences in Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley. Set on a seamless integral pedestal, the tub features a gentle slope and integrated lumbar support. From **Hydro Systems**, Coachella is crafted from HydroLuxe solid surface and can be customized by format, size, color and finishes and can be equipped with multiple hydrotherapeutic technologies. hydrosystem.com





BLADE-LIKE TOWEL WARMER

Katana, the aluminum electric towel warmer designed by AL Studio and available from **antoniolupi**, takes its inspiration from the Japanese samurai sword, echoing the sharp profile of the blade. It features divergent lines that define its structure and a diagonal cut at one end that create a sense of movement, notes the firm. Available in all the shades of the antoniolupi color palette, the towel warmer can be installed vertically or horizontally. antoniolupi.it



DOWNSIZED VANITY

Devon&Devon's Music vanity is now available in a new configuration. At only 68 cm, the Music Junior delivers its distinctive curved design to small baths. The vanity includes a large storage drawer and contrasting profiles, and is available in glossy lacquered wood in Pure White, Cream, Warm Grey and Deep Black in tulipwood veneer or a combination with antiqued, hand-applied aluminum leaf. The top is Absolute Black granite or Calacatta Oro marble. devon-devon.com



VANITY STORAGE DRAWER

Dura Supreme Cabinetry's Vanity Grooming Drawer storage accessory offers convenient, organized and safe in-drawer storage of heating elements/curling iron/blow dryer with an included power outlet, according to the company. The drawer features stainless steel cups, and the in-drawer power outlet is designed with a switch to quickly activate styling tools without plugging and unplugging devices. durasupreme.com



INTEGRATED WINE CABINET

From **Fisher & Paykel** comes the Series 9 24" Integrated Wine Cabinet, a panel-ready undercounter appliance that features two cooling zones supported by two evaporators and ActiveSmart technology that adjusts the temperature based on habitual use. Compact in size, the cabinet fits up to 35 bottles across all shelves. Each preset temperature zone can be adjusted via the unit's integrated touchscreen. fisherpaykel.com



FREESTANDING TUBS

Handcrafted in the U.S. from SculptureStone, the tubs of the MTI Collection from **MTI Baths** are individually manufactured and handcrafted. The tubs in the line are available as soaking baths or air baths in white or biscuit with a soft matte or hand-polished deep gloss finish. The proprietary SculptureStone material delivers tubs that are 100% solid throughout, non-porous, and stain-, mold- and mildew-resistant, states the firm. The tubs are available in six exterior colors. Shown is Alissa. mtibaths.com

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Bath Becomes Accessible Art



BEFORE

This Glendora, CA master bath needed not only a style refresh, but an accessibility update – one of the clients had recently started using a wheelchair to get around and desired a bath that would be not only ADA compliant, but reflective of their eclectic, nature-forward style. Two areas in particular – the toilet and bath – presented a particularly tricky layout to navigate while using a wheelchair.

Designer Shannon Anderson of Anderson Reconstruction Inc. was tasked with creating a space that would be attentive to changing mobility needs without sacrificing the ‘wow’ factor. She drew inspiration from the existing terrarium along the back wall, as well as the natural light that filtered in through the terrarium’s large windows.



Photos: Shannon Anderson

AFTER

The shower and bath area, located in front of the terrarium, simply was not suitable for a person with limited mobility; climbing in and out was no longer doable or safe for the client. Additionally, the sheer size of the tub, combined with the wraparound vanity, relegated the toilet area to a small nook between the shower and wall, making it difficult to maneuver a mobility aid into position.

Although the beautiful terrarium was left as is, the tub and deck had to go. By lowering the subfloor several inches, the Anderson Reconstruction team was able to create a walk/roll-in shower. The shower valve and handheld were relocated to a feature tower, making them easy to reach from a sitting position, and new backing and support systems enabled the custom shower door to be ceiling-mounted for a truly curbless entry. The vanity was reduced in size, enabling easy movement with mobility devices. A ledge along the terrarium wall provides seating for the clients and caregivers.

The shower area features sleek Isenberg fixtures and 2"x2" porcelain floor tile by Arizona Tile. Between the greenery of the terrarium and the large-format porcelain wall tile in the wet room, the new space is both accessible and eye-catching.

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