

Dan's Papers HOME GUIDE

Cool Kitchens

Let's face it, your kitchen is really your living room. It does happen to be the place where you cook, but for most, our kitchens provide much more. It's the first place you go when you get home, and often the last place you leave before heading to bed. You place notes for family members there, you hang your kid's art and eat meals there, even your best parties usually move to the kitchen - despite your efforts to keep guests in that stuffy living room.

With this said, the kitchen is also one of the most neglected rooms in the house. For all that goes on there, most homeowners fail to give this true heart of the home the dignity it deserves. It's not too late, and the possibilities are immense.

Scott Smith, president of Smith River Kitchens (a local business and self-proclaimed cardiologists for the heart of the home: www.smithriverkitchens.com) laid out the basics without getting into the numerous appliance variations, paint colors, veneers, and selections of counter stone. The first steps to an improved kitchen are fairly direct.

The main components are cabinets and counters. The cabinets consist of several sub-choices. First, you'll need to choose a box. This is the meat of the cabinet. Basically, it's the part of the cabinet you don't see until you open the doors to put away your favorite pasta dish, or when you're stashing a piece of useless hardware or a crumpled warranty that will hopefully disappear in the ever-expanding junk drawer.

The box really has only two options. There's the sturdy plywood box, or the cheaper MDF (particle-board) construction. MDF is functional, but plywood

is the superior choice. Once this is in place, you get three variations of cabinet (and drawer) facings. What you choose here has much more to do with personal preference than anything else.

The most expensive and popular style of facing is



Courtesy of Smith River Kitchens

called inset facing. Inset has the option of invisible hinges, but its main feature is closing flush to the frame, thus leaving a border around each door. The next major selection is called overlay facing, which can be installed in either partial or full overlay style. Full overlay is as it sounds. The doors and drawers have a lip that either fully covers or partially covers the cabinet frame. Full overlay in all cases has an invisible, or European, hinge, while partial can go either way. These variations can be found in hundreds of exciting styles, including glass, to fit any-

one's taste. Crystal Cabinet Works, Inc. has a wide selection you can peruse at: www.ccworks.com.

Now that you have a splendid display of cabinetry that is sure to impress your friends and make it even more difficult to keep them in the living room, you'll need new counter tops for them to sit all over. Formica will no longer do. Like the box and cabinets, there are a few basic categories of counter top. Wood is becoming less popular, but is always available to provide a cutting board whenever you feel like chopping. If this is important, another choice is the dwindling Corian counter top. Like wood, Corian is a cutting surface, but closely resembles the white synthetic cutting boards you bought at TJ Maxx for your barbecue last summer. It won't dull your knives, and doesn't scar. Corian works, but it's difficult to clean. Nowadays, most people prefer stone or stainless steel. Stainless provides a nice industrial look, but goes no further. Stone, on the other hand, has thousands of geological options for whatever your taste. With the actual material, there is a choice of two finishes. Today, honed (or matte finish) stone is generally preferred for a more reserved look, but polished stone continues to charm. Counter tops can be viewed at www.silestoneusa.com, one of many links provided through Smith River Kitchens' comprehensive site.

When you're ready to accept the room where you really "live," you'll find a fabulous kitchen can make all the difference. As the look of your new living room improves, so must the appliances. Pretty soon that 2004 Porsche SUV won't seem as important as a Garland stove or Sub-Zero refrigerator.

-Oliver Peterson