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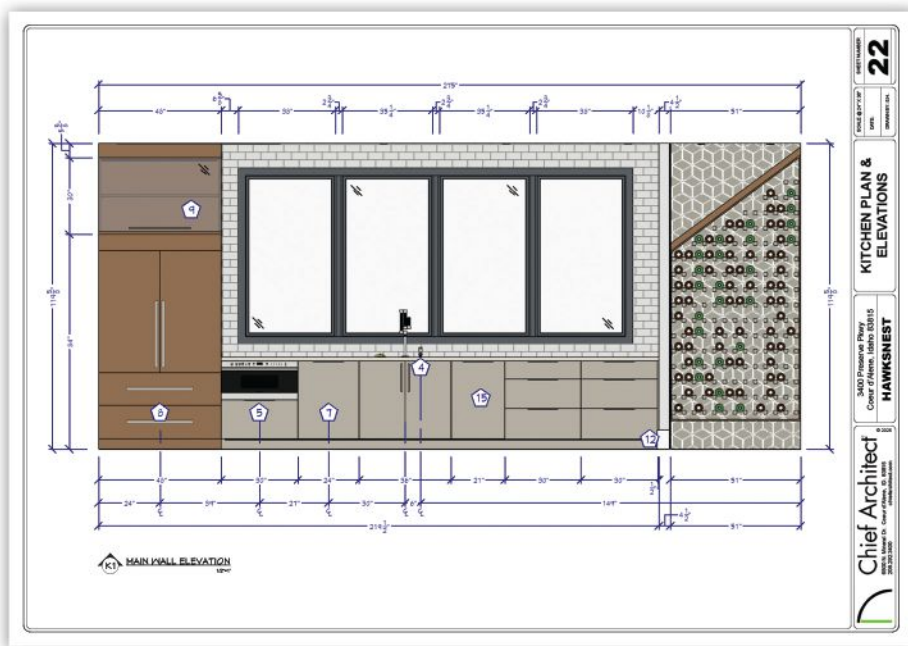
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Photo: Charlotte Lea Photography



Photo: Kelly Blackman for Emily Followill Photography



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ON THE COVER

In this kitchen, designed by Eb Min of Min Design in San Francisco, CA, the contrast of dark gray/black, white and light wood provides a clean and modern backdrop for the open floor plan apartment kitchen, allowing the client's artwork and collectibles to shine.

Photo: Brooke Holm



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Homing in on 'Hybrid' Shopping

IT'S A WHOLE new ballgame nowadays when it comes to shopping for the residential-design firms that specialize in kitchens, bathrooms and other remodeling solutions.

Stated simply, the days of consumers simply visiting brick-and-mortar showrooms to learn about products, design trends and corporate capabilities have morphed, in a growing number of cases, into a distinctly different kind of shopping journey.

Search engines, social-media platforms, online directories and map applications have made digital devices the primary tools for locating design firms today. Online experiences that start with engaging product information, high-quality imagery and customer reviews increasingly

“Creating a robust omnichannel retail strategy is a must for kitchen and bath design firms in today’s world of ‘phygital’ shopping.”

set the stage for consumer buying decisions. And while physical showrooms remain the purchase point in most cases, a growing number of kitchen and bath consumers are increasingly *blending* digital and in-store experiences at nearly every stage of their purchasing journey.

All of which is a major gamechanger for the kitchen and bath design trade.

“Hybrid” shopping – also known as “omnichannel” or “phygital” retailing – is an increasingly popular business model that combines the experience of visiting a physical location with the ease of digital research. When successfully employed, it provides consumers with *multiple* touchpoints, including company websites, e-commerce platforms, social media ties and physical locations. Simply stated, it’s all about delivering a more seamless, impactful and personalized shopping experience – allowing consumers to shop where, when, and how they want (see **related Consumer Buying Trends, Page 13**).

The beauty of a hybrid approach lies in both its power and versatility – its ability to allow design firms to combine the convenience of online shopping with the act of experiencing products and design pros face-to-face, creating a seamless, customer-centric journey between multiple touchpoints. For example, consumers can go online to browse products and company capabilities, read

reviews, solicit recommendations and make comparisons – and then visit a brick-and-mortar showroom to experience products in person. In some cases, they may reverse the process: beginning their shopping journey in a showroom and then completing the purchase online. Social media platforms have also become powerful drivers of home-improvement spending, particularly among younger shoppers.

What all this means, quite simply, is that in today’s hyper-competitive market, it’s no longer enough for a kitchen and bath design firm to exist solely in a single channel. Indeed, digital and physical channels should no longer be viewed as separate entities, but rather as purposefully linked components that serve customers *wherever* they’re shopping.

Whether in-store, online or through mobile apps, consumers should be able to instantly recognize a company’s products and capabilities, and obtain all the information they need to make a purchasing decision. That means assuring accuracy and consistency across all channels, particularly when it comes to pricing, promotions and product data. It also means recognizing that key differences exist among different demographic cohorts.

For example, while Baby Boomers much prefer the experience of brick-and-mortar establishments, and the interaction with design pros, Gen Z and Millennial shoppers rely far more heavily on digital resources. Homeowners also differ on how they shop for different products. For instance, while basic, lower-priced items rarely require in-person viewing, homeowners prefer to view complex and costly products – including cabinets, appliances, plumbing fixtures and countertops – in person before making a purchase.

Today’s consumers expect flawless service at every stage of their shopping journey. With growing numbers using multiple channels to shop for products and services, savvy design firms are increasingly focusing on investing in hybrid commerce solutions to provide a more seamless, integrated shopping experience across both digital and physical channels.

The goal, stated simply, is for design firms to meet consumers *wherever* they’re shopping – be it online, in-store or through mobile apps. By meshing the ease of online shopping with the power of physically seeing how a product works, design firms can satisfy consumers’ diverse preferences and empower customers to make more rewarding shopping decisions. ■



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Industry Pros Recall Learning Experiences

Q: *To learn from mistakes is one of life's lessons. What professional mistake or design misstep has taught you the most? What did you learn from this experience?*

"EARLY IN MY career, I learned the hard way to not just measure the space but to take note of the existing cabinetry. My client had 12"-deep wall kitchen cabinets but there was no backing. The cabinets that I sold did have backs which meant less space inside, and the client's dishes no longer fit."

*Sandra Tierney
Cabinets By Design
Escondido, CA*

"MY BIGGEST MISTAKE was failing to catch that the client's countertop template documents had not been updated to reflect the latest design revision. The revision had been sent to the fabricator prior to template. All the details on the template document were correct except the revised size of the island top, but it wasn't caught until installation was complete. The loss of time on a tight deadline, money out of pocket and sleep from the stress taught me a valuable lesson. Even when I trust a vendor or fabricator who has a perfect track record, I always double and triple check *all* the details now, even the basic ones we usually take for granted."

*Julie Shannon, designer
SH-Cabinetry
Plymouth, MA*

"ONCE, A CLIENT asked for a discount because the project was going to be substantially larger than our average project. I offered a 10% discount on our design services and the client convinced me that they had made all their selections and wanted a bigger discount. I agreed and we ended spending almost double the time undoing their design to provide them with exactly what they envisioned."

*Michael Menn, principal
Michael Menn Ltd.
Northbrook, IL*

"LIVING IN AN extremely humid climate has taught me that certain styles won't last and aren't appropriate unless the person runs an air conditioner and/or dehumidifier 24/7, or specifically lives in Waikoloa Village, essentially a desert. Examples include: inset cabinets, slab solid-wood doors, mitered styles; hickory tends to swell more depending on the door style, etc."

*Bryna Starling, owner
Kona Kitchen and Bath
Kailua Kona, HI*

"ONE OF THE most formative lessons in my career came from working alongside a fellow designer who was incredibly talented and, let's just say, very aware of it. At first, I admired the confidence, the strong opinions, and the ability to take up a lot of oxygen in the room. It didn't take long to realize that while the work was good, the process was exhausting.

That experience forced me to reassess how I defined 'great.' I learned that talent without humility doesn't elevate a team, it turns collaboration into crowd control. Great design isn't a solo act, and when one voice consistently drowns out the rest, even the best ideas start to lose their shine. What stuck with me most was recognizing the value of designers who bring curiosity, self-awareness, and a sense of shared ownership to the table. Serious potential paired with emotional intelligence will outperform ego every time, and it's a lot more enjoyable to work with.

That experience reshaped how I choose collaborators and how I try to show up myself. Today, I'm intentional about creating environments where strong opinions are welcome, but respect is required, because the best work happens when no one needs a spotlight just to feel seen."

*Michael A. Wright, principal designer
Wright by Design
Rocky River, OH*

"EARLY IN MY career, one of the biggest lessons came from underestimating how differently clients interpret drawings and renderings. I once approved a project where the technical design was correct, but I didn't spend enough time walking the client through how the space would feel in real-life proportions, depth and daily use.

When the project was installed, nothing was technically wrong, yet the client felt surprised. That moment taught me that good design is not only about aesthetics and precision, but also about communication and empathy.

Since then, I treat every design presentation as a conversation, not a delivery. I ask more questions, explain more scenarios, and make sure the client can truly imagine themselves living with the space. This approach has made my work stronger and my client relationships far more successful."

*Nadia Vorobyeva, designer
Welldone Cabinetry
Newark, CA*

"THERE ARE SOME odd times where issues that are not typical to foresee arise. We need to remember to have more grace and patience with ourselves (I have to remember this, too). Clients find weird issues that the majority do not, and we just need to find a suitable solution, still charge them for the changes and then add it to our checklists in the future.

I always say, 'We can't please everyone, we are not pizza.'"

*Stacy McCarthy
Stacy McCarthy Design
Palm Beach Gardens, FL*

"THE DESIGN MISTAKE I made was not for one of my clients (thankfully) but instead was for my own renovation. I had a master bathroom renovation that included a soaking tub that would also be used as a shower. The scenario was for an alcove bathtub/shower, which was surrounded by three walls.

Construction was going on, and I was working on other client projects when the project manager called to ask if I would like the soaking tub insert to be centered symmetrically in its structural frame. As someone who appreciates symmetry, I responded 'yes' to his question. However, by centering the tub in its framework, it left 3" of space between the raised bathtub edge and the wall, which created a trough for water to collect when showering.

I didn't stop working long enough to think it through, and learned a big lesson. It taught me firsthand to constantly monitor construction and never to leave details to be decided by someone else."

*Barbara Heard, owner
Barbara Heard Designs
Oakton, VA*

"THE MOST IMPORTANT thing I have learned from my mistakes is not to assume anything with a customer. Have very detailed contracts and specifications, explaining what is included and not included. Have all disclaimers signed, review your orders with the installing contractor if possible, or at least with a second set of eyes.

An oversight of one small detail can cost you much more down the road with product costs and/or contractor fees."

*Lauren Primavera
Rockland Interiors, Inc.
Nanuet, NY*

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Housing Market Upswing Seen in 2026

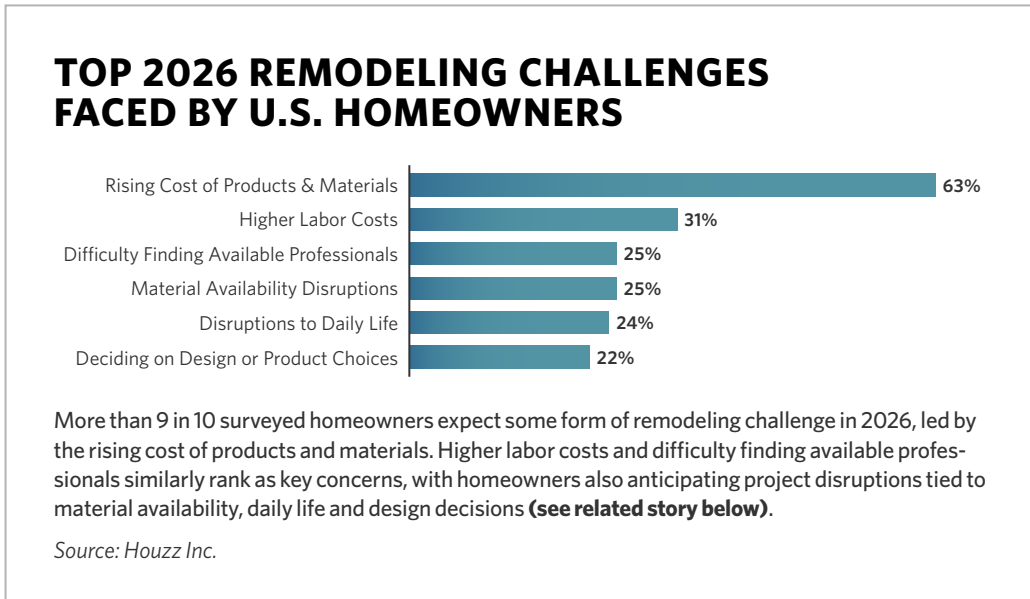
MAJOR MARKET indices are exhibiting signs of an upswing, with both the housing and remodeling sectors projected to post palpable gains in 2026, market analysts predict. Among the key statistics and forecasts released in recent weeks by government agencies, research firms and industry-related trade associations were the following:

HOUSING STARTS & NEW-HOME SALES

Builder confidence inched lower to start the year, as affordability concerns “continue to weigh heavily” on potential home buyers, and builders continue to grapple with rising construction costs and economic uncertainty, the National Association of Home Builders reported. “While the upper end of the housing market is holding steady, affordability conditions are taking a toll on the lower and mid-range sectors,” said NAHB Chairman Buddy Hughes. In a positive development, the average mortgage rate fell in January to its lowest rate in three years, said NAHB Chief Economist Robert Dietz, noting that builders’ future sales expectations are above the break-even level. “However, builders continue to face headwinds, as regulatory costs and material prices remain stubbornly high,” Dietz added.

EXISTING-HOME SALES

2025 was “another tough year” for existing-home buyers, marked by record-high prices and historically low sales, but 2026 should see marked improvement, the National Association of Realtors predicted. “After three years of flat home sales, a solid double-digit percentage increase is expected in 2026,” said Lawrence Yun, chief economist for



the Washington, DC-based NAR. “In 2026, we expect that higher inventory, modest improvements in affordability, and more accommodating monetary policy will attract buyers back to the market.” Existing-home sales are forecast to rise by 14% this year, while home prices are expected to decline by about 4% and mortgage rates are projected to average about 6%. “Similar to past years, more inventory is expected to come to market beginning in February,” Yun observed.

RESIDENTIAL REMODELING

Both the consumer and professional segments of the home-improvement market are projected to expand from 2026 through 2029, according to a forecast from the Home Improvement Research

Institute. Among key market drivers, said HIRI, are existing-home sales, which are projected to steadily climb; mortgage rates, which are edging down; inflation, which has eased from its peak; housing starts, projected to remain steady, and consumer sentiment, expected to recover as inflation cools and incomes stabilize. Other factors supporting remodeling growth include an aging housing stock, strong levels of homeowner equity and an increasing need for aging-in-place improvements, analysts noted. “Home prices may dip before rebounding, which could shift activities from maintenance-only to selective improvements,” said HIRI, adding that big-ticket, discretionary remodels “will be limited in the near term.” ■

MARKET ANALYSIS

Demand for Home Renovation ‘Remains Resilient,’ Survey Finds

PALO ALTO, CA — Demand for residential renovation “remains resilient” despite ongoing economic uncertainties, with homeowners “committed to their current homes and renovating to tailor homes to their changing needs,” a major new survey concludes.

According to the 2026 *U.S. Houzz Renovations Plans Report*, released by online design/remodeling platform Houzz Inc., more than nine in ten surveyed homeowners say they will proceed with planned renovation projects in 2026. Among those delaying or cancelling, the top reasons cited are that projects are not considered urgent or that timing is not ideal. Other concerns included high prices, budget constraints and economic uncertainty, said Houzz.

“Homeowners are committed to their planned projects in 2026, fully aware of the challenges,” said Marine Sargsyan, head of economic research at Houzz. “Since 2012, home

equity has grown faster than mortgage debt, giving homeowners financial flexibility to invest. At the same time, a shortage of housing supply persists, and the housing stock is aging.

“These long-term trends, paired with homeowners’ desire to stay put and personalize their living spaces, continue to support renovation activity, even as people navigate inflation and a shifting economic landscape,” Sargsyan added.

The majority of homeowners expect some challenges during their project, with rising product and material costs topping the list, followed by higher labor costs and finding available professionals. Many also expect issues with product availability and disruptions to daily life during renovations (see related graph, above right).

Among other survey findings:

- Homeowners’ commitment to their properties is a key driver for renovation activity.

Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents expect to remain in their homes for 11 years or more after renovating, and nearly half consider their current dwelling their “forever” home. In contrast, only 4% anticipate moving within the next year.

- Among households earning \$150,000–\$200,000, 64% describe themselves as very confident about moving ahead with renovations. In contrast, among households earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000, only 32% reported being very confident.
- More than half say they plan to maintain the same project scope heading into 2026, and 13% plan to expand it. High-budget households are even more bullish: 28% of homeowners planning projects over \$50,000 intend to increase their scope. ■



Social Media Spurring Purchases

INDIANAPOLIS — Social media is playing an expanding role when it comes to influencing home-remodeling purchases, according to a report from the Home Improvement Research Institute.

According to HIRI’s recent report, *Homeowner Social Media Influence on Home Improvement Shopping*, social media “has the potential to accomplish much more than raising brand awareness. It can motivate homeowners to initiate, or accelerate, home-improvement projects, and drive them to make product purchases online” (see related Editorial, Page 9).

Social media, said the Indianapolis-based HIRI, “is a strong spark for inspiration and project initiation. While it is rarely used as the first or primary resource that homeowners rely on for product research, it is gaining impact as a secondary or supporting source.”

This trend, said HIRI, is especially true of younger generations, Millennials and Gen Z, “who are actively participating in online communities and find themselves strongly influenced in terms of ambition, confidence and project initiation by peers, professionals and home improvement brands on social media channels.”

“Millennials and Gen Z individuals are the most engaged demographics when it comes to online communities,” HIRI said. “They value advice and insights from professionals and relatable peers alike. For younger homeowners, online communities build confidence and encourage more ambitious projects.”

In contrast, roughly 70% of Baby Boomers say they’re not at all active in online home improvement communities, from groups and forums to comment threads.

More than half of surveyed Gen Z and Millennial DIYers have initiated a project specifically because of an interaction with social media content, HIRI added, noting that social media plays its greatest role during the early inspiration and research phases of a project, with individuals using the digital tool for getting ideas and comparing a range of different products – and later, for troubleshooting, product checks or guidance throughout the purchase and installation process. YouTube is the most influential platform, followed by Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram, HIRI said.

About one-third of all homeowners say social media frequently influences their brand or product choices, with cabinets, exterior window treatments, furniture and countertops being among those categories where social media had the most significant influence on purchases. In addition, on average, nearly two projects per year are started or accelerated because of social media content, while one in three of those surveyed report increases of 25%+ in spending because of content seen on social media. Researchers reported they also found notable increases in terms of scope expansion, premium product upgrades, and unplanned feature additions, particularly among younger generations.

“Social media can be a powerful driver of home-improvement spending,” HIRI observed. “Younger homeowners report the highest rate of spending increases influenced by social media content. We also see notable increases in terms of scope expansion, premium product upgrades, and unplanned feature additions among this age group – and it far outpaces older generations.” ■

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SEN Design Group Abruptly Ends Operations

CHARLOTTE, NC — SEN Design Group, the nationwide network of independent kitchen and bath design firms and associated vendor brands, has abruptly ceased operations, according to multiple sources with knowledge of the Charlotte, NC-based organization.

Additional details about the organization's closure were unavailable as of press time. Phone calls by *Kitchen & Bath Design News* to SEN's headquarters were unanswered.

Founded in 1994 as the kitchen and bath industry's first, and most prominent, buying group and management-consulting organization, SEN Design Group was run for some three decades by its founder, Ken Peterson,

CKD, who relocated the organization from its original headquarters in Chapel Hill, NC to Charlotte.

In founding the buying group, Peterson's stated goal was to develop a community of kitchen and bath professionals for which he could share his experience in establishing and managing a Connecticut-based network of dealerships, and where members could address business management, sales, showroom operations and related issues. For years, the organization sponsored seminars, meetings, annual conferences and workshops, as well as an annual Vendor Showcase that provided members with the ability to interact with vendors - and obtain product-purchasing advantages

- at a booth-style trade show event.

In 2025, industry veteran Kathy Tilley was named as SEN's president, charged with overseeing strategic initiatives, enhancing member services and driving the organization's expansion. Peterson, who operationally retired at the time, continued to have a role on SEN's board of directors, according to the organization.

With 200+ members at its height, SEN had some 150 dealer-members at the time of its closure, along with several dozen vendor brands across cabinetry, appliances, surfaces, plumbing fixtures, hardware, closets, lighting, flooring, tile and business services.

— Eliot Sefrin



▣ Precision Stone recently opened its 'Experience Center' in a Chicago suburb.

Precision Stone Opens 'Experience Center'

ELK GROVE VILLAGE, IL — Precision Stone Design, a Chicago-area supplier and fabricator of luxury stone, has announced the grand opening of a 20,000-sq.-ft. "Experience Center" in the Chicago suburb of Elk Grove Village.

This addition complements the company's existing 20,000-sq.-ft. fabrication workshop and slab warehouse, together forming a "hub for design innovation, technology, and craftsmanship," company officials said.

The Experience Center expands Precision Stone Design's full-service approach - introducing curated stone sourcing and new product offerings to the company's fabrication and installation services, company officials observed.

"Precision Stone Design was founded on the belief that great design should be both beautiful and intelligent," said owner Gina Saran. "Our new Experience Center brings that vision to life - where technology, sustainability and creativity meet."

Kohler Unveils Bath Remodel Service

KOHLER, WI — Kitchen and bath product manufacturer Kohler Co. has announced the launch of "Reveal by KOHLER," a service "that streamlines bath and shower remodeling with expert guidance and professional start-to-finish installation."

The service, available through dealers nationwide, "provides homeowners with a complete solution that includes design consultation, product selection and white-glove installation completed in as little as a day," the Kohler, WI-based company said.

In conjunction with the launch, Reveal by KOHLER is partnering with Genevieve Gorder, an interior designer and TV personality known for her work on *Trading Spaces*, along with multiple HGTV and Netflix shows, Kohler said.

Congress Urged to Ease Housing Affordability 'Crisis'

WASHINGTON, DC — The most effective way to ease the nation's housing affordability crisis is for policymakers "to eliminate excessive regulations that are preventing builders from increasing the housing supply," the National Association of Home Builders told key members of Congress.

Testifying at a congressional panel hearing focusing on housing affordability, NAHB Chairman Buddy Hughes said that in order to ease housing constraints for home buyers and renters, "it is imperative to eliminate excessive regulations that hinder the construction of new homes and apartments."

"Regulations account for nearly 25% of the cost of a single-family home and more than 40% of the cost of a typical apartment development," said Hughes. "The time and costs associated with complying with a multitude of government regulations can be significant for small- and medium-sized builders, and ultimately limit housing supply."

Increased regulations, including "overly stringent" mandatory energy code requirements, are impeding the ability of builders to boost housing production, Hughes added.

"NAHB urges Congress and the (Trump) administration to prohibit HUD and USDA from enforcing a minimum energy standard that increases housing costs during a nationwide affordability crisis," said Hughes. "We also urge policymakers to respect state and local authority over code adoption and to reject mandates that most states have not determined are appropriate for their communities."

For multifamily projects with federal assistance, a key challenge for builders and developers is the requirement to source domestically for construction.

"While our members try to use products made within the U.S., it's not always practical because of price or availability," said Hughes. "Multifamily housing needs an exemption from this requirement to help avoid construction delays and additional costs."

OH Distributor Announces Name Change

COLUMBUS, OH — Diamond Hill Plywood, the Columbus, OH-based distributor of building products, has transitioned to the name Palmer-Donavin, the company announced.

The company name change, which went into effect on January 1, 2026 "reflects the company's continued commitment to simplifying how it serves customers while preserving the trusted relationships built over decades," corporate officials reported.

"This transition is about clarity and consistency for our customers," said CEO Robyn Pollina. "While the name Diamond Hill Plywood has a strong legacy we're proud of, unifying under the Palmer-Donavin name allows us to better align our teams, resources and service model without changing the people or values our customers rely on."



📍 Celebrating the NKBA Susquehanna Valley Design Awards is the 2025 Awards Committee, including: Jason Artus, AKBD, Dovetail Sales; Brian Miller, CMKBD, Excel Remodeling; Heather Rineer, NCIDQ, Rineer Designs and Chapter President; Denise Newcomer, CKBD, Lezzer Lumber; elizaBeth Marcocci, CMKBD, Mother Hubbard's Custom Cabinetry; Lisa Martin, CKD, Bluebell Fine Cabinetry & Design, Chapter Secretary/ Treasurer Chair; Brittany Loeffler, White Good, Chapter Communications Chair; Evan Smith, ADU Appliance, Chapter Membership Chair and Rob Ross, Classic Rock, Chapter Programming Chair.

NKBA Chapter Cites Award Winners

YORK, PA — The National Kitchen & Bath Association's Susquehanna Valley Chapter has announced the winners of its 2025 Kitchen & Bath Design Awards, a program that highlights the region's most innovative kitchen and bath projects, "celebrating excellence in design, functionality and creativity," the NKBA chapter announced.

"The Kitchen & Bath Design Awards celebrate the creativity, skill and professionalism of our members," said Chapter President Heather Rineer, NCIDQ. "Each project represents thoughtful design solutions that improve functionality while elevating the spaces our clients use every day."

Among the 2025 Design Award winners were the following:

Primary Bathroom – 1st Place: Heather Rineer, NCIDQ, Rineer Designs; 2nd Place: Brian Miller, CMKBD, Excel Remodeling; 3rd Place: Jim Mirando, Jr., CMKBD, Excel Remodeling.

Secondary Bathroom – 1st Place: elizaBeth Marcocci, CMKBD, Mother Hubbard's Custom Cabinetry; 2nd Place: Jim Mirando, Jr., CMKBD, Excel Remodeling; 3rd Place: Valerie Kissinger, CKD, Dimensional Designs Unlimited.

Powder Room – 1st Place: Brian Miller, CMKBD, Excel Remodeling.

Recreation Space – 1st Place: Amy Sensenig, CKBD, TK Building + Design; 2nd Place: Henrietta Heisler & Olivia Shaak, Henrietta Heisler Interiors; 3rd Place: Alicia Goyette, AKBD, Excel Remodeling.

Utility Space – 1st Place: Allison Ong Shreffler & Matthew Shreffler, Allison Ong Shreffler Architecture + Designer; 2nd Place: Kimberly Boomer, Fit and Finish Design.

Showroom & Commercial Spaces – 1st Place: Heather Rineer, NCIDQ, Rineer Designs; 2nd Place: Kimberly Boomer, Fit and Finish Design.

Kitchens Under \$75,000 – 1st Place: Valerie Kissinger, CKD, Dimensional Designs Unlimited; 2nd Place: Alicia Goyette, AKBD, Excel Remodeling; 3rd Place: Denise Newcomer, CKBD, Lezzer Lumber.

Kitchens Between \$75,000 & \$150,000 – 1st Place: Jim Mirando, Jr., CMKBD, Excel Remodeling; 2nd Place: elizaBeth Marcocci, CMKBD, Mother Hubbard's Custom Cabinetry; 3rd Place: elizaBeth Marcocci, CMKBD, Mother Hubbard's Custom Cabinetry.

Kitchens Over \$150,000 – 1st Place: Stacey Kocevar, CKBD, Stacey Kocevar Designs; 2nd Place: John Petrie, CMKBD, Mother Hubbard's Custom Cabinetry; 3rd Place: John Petrie, CMKBD, Mother Hubbard's Custom Cabinetry.

Best Before & After – 1st Place: Heather Rineer, NCIDQ, Rineer Designs; 2nd Place: Allison Ong Shreffler, Allison Ong Shreffler Architecture + Designer; 3rd Place: Valerie S. B. Kissinger, CKD, Dimensional Designs Unlimited.

Judge's Choice Award – The Judge's Choice Award, presented to the highest-scoring project across all categories, was awarded to Stacey Kocevar, CKBD, Stacey Kocevar Designs.

Viking, U-Line, La Cornue Parent Firm Sells Stake to Private Equity Group

ELGIN, IL — The Middleby Corp., the parent company of several leading residential-cooking equipment brands, has entered into a definitive agreement under which it will sell a 51% stake in its Residential Kitchen business to affiliates of 26North Partners LP, a New York-based private equity firm, the company announced.

As a result of the transaction, which valued Middleby's Residential Kitchen unit at \$885 million, Middleby Corp. will own a 49% non-controlling interest in a new standalone joint venture that includes Viking, AGA Rangemaster, La Cornue and U-Line, among other brands of cooking equipment for the residential, commercial and industrial foodservice markets.

"This transaction enables Middleby to partially monetize the Residential Kitchen business at an attractive valuation and provides significant upfront cash proceeds to invest in shareholder return and growth initiatives, while enabling Middleby to participate in Residential Kitchen's upside potential," said Tim FitzGerald, president and CEO of the Elgin, IL-based Middleby Corp. "We're excited to partner with 26North, given its successful history of value creation in collaboration with corporate partners."

"This investment in the Residential Kitchen business...creates a dedicated platform for the most influential and iconic brands in residential and outdoor cooking, allowing them to continue setting the pace for the industry," added Mark Weinberg, a partner at 26North, which has some \$31 billion in assets under management, according to the company.

New Organization Aimed At Countertop Suppliers

PITTSBURGH — The International Surface Fabricators Association (ISFA) has announced the launch of the American Countertop Manufacturers Council (ACMC), an industry council created to provide countertop manufacturers and fabricators with "a transparent, documented and legally sound process for collaboration, issue resolution and consensus-based decision-making."

Administered by ISFA, ACMC was established to ensure that the countertop and surface fabrication industry has a single, organized forum to address industry issues, review regulatory and legislative developments, and adopt formal industry positions, according to ISFA, the trade organization that serves as the voice of the countertop and surface fabrication industry.

"ACMC is about structure, accountability and giving the industry a credible, organized voice," said ISFA CEO Laurie Weber. "This council creates a pathway for manufacturers and fabricators to engage on issues - before decisions are made for us."

ACMC, said Weber, is open to companies that provide fabrication services for countertop materials, including natural stone, engineered stone, porcelain slabs, wood, metal, concrete, laminate, recycled and sustainable materials, as well as emerging materials.

"The ACMC is focused on protecting lawful commerce in stone slab products, and ensuring accountability across the countertop supply chain," Weber said. "ACMC represents manufacturers and sellers committed to fact-based policy, responsible product stewardship and collaboration with industry and regulatory partners."

LX Hausys America Relocates Long Island Showroom

BETHPAGE, NY — LX Hausys America has relocated its Long Island showroom to a new space within GENROSE Stone & Tile in Bethpage, NY.

The new showroom provides an enhanced setting for designers, fabricators and homeowners to explore the company's surface materials, including VIATERA quartz surface and TERACANTO porcelain surface, with the same LX Hausys Long Island team delivering personalized service and product expertise, notes the firm.



Storia Flooring has opened two new Florida showrooms, including this one in West Palm Beach.

Flooring Supplier Expands FL Footprint

WEST PALM BEACH, FL — Storia Flooring, a West Palm Beach Florida-based supplier of premium flooring products, has expanded its footprint with the openings of two new showrooms in West Palm Beach and Naples, the company announced.

Building on the success of its first showroom in Miami's Design District, the expanded footprint will service customers on both Florida coasts, company officials said.

"We're thrilled to expand our presence in the Palm Beach community," said company founder Santiago Estevez. "This showroom reflects our commitment to quality, style and innovation in every product we offer, while continuing to foster long-lasting relationships with our clients."

The 2,200-sq.-ft. space, aimed at designers, architects, builders and other specifiers, will showcase an array of flooring options, including hardwood, natural stone, luxury vinyl and porcelain tile, as well as interactive areas where visitors can explore the latest flooring trends, Estevez noted, adding that Storia's new website – launched in tandem with the opening of the new locations – offers a curated digital experience.

Novalina Launches German-Engineered Kitchen Cabinet Line in U.S.

MIAMI, FL — Novalina, a new premium kitchen brand featuring German-manufactured cabinets, is officially launching in the U.S. in spring 2026. The brand combines German precision with features tailored specifically to U.S. living styles and expectations, according to the company.

"The U.S. market presents an exciting opportunity for us to introduce the authentic German tradition of quality engineering and modern yet approachable design to a new audience," said Alexander Reckzeh, CEO of Schueller Furniture North America Inc., Novalina's parent company.

Novalina's market entry begins in Florida, Georgia, Texas and the entire Southeast. The company has established a dedicated distribution center in North Carolina to enable efficient logistics and reliable product service across the region, the company adds. The distribution is currently operational and has filled the first orders.

All Novalina installers will go through the brand's certification program, which provides support, access to replacement parts and a service experience designed for long-term customer satisfaction, the firm reports.

Novalina will unveil a flagship showroom in Miami in the spring of 2026. The first Schueller Americas Center (SAC) by Schueller Furniture North America will offer designers, architects and real estate developers an experience with the brand's kitchen collections, which feature the signature modular designs by Schüller Möbelwerk GmbH, a leading kitchen manufacturer in Germany.

Plan Targeted at Cutting Silica Exposure for Fabricators

SACRAMENTO, CA — An "industry-supported plan" detailing how the countertop and surface fabrication industry can support government enforcement while reducing silica exposure on the shop floor has been presented to California public-safety officials by the International Surface Fabricators Association, the organization announced.

ISFA's presentation to the California Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board featured the rollout of a fabrication shop licensing-and-certification program aimed at strengthening compliance with existing rules, expanding training and third-party auditing, and establishing a verifiable system for material access tied to safety performance, according to ISFA, the trade association representing the countertop and surface fabrication industry.

ISFA's proposal, according to association officials, also includes a formal registry of approved shops eligible to purchase materials, "shifting enforcement upstream and helping prevent unsafe work before exposure occurs."

While the framework of the program was developed over three years "to ensure credibility, sound governance and alignment with OSHA- and ANSI-based models," ISFA emphasized the program's ability "to accelerate implementation to support California's immediate enforcement needs."

"The goal is practical support for regulators – not delay or avoidance," said ISFA CEO Laurie Weber. "The proposed approach is intended to complement existing inspection and citation authority by providing clearer standards, better documentation and additional tools to help enforcement resources go further."

Weber acknowledged "the seriousness of concerns" regarding employer negligence, adding that "sustainable progress requires moving beyond blame toward shared responsibility and workable solutions that protect workers and communities."

ISFA recently announced its "fierce opposition" to a petition by the Western Occupational & Environmental Medical Association (WOEMA) urging Cal/OSHA to prohibit the fabrication and installation of engineered stone containing more than 1% crystalline silica, a hazardous byproduct created in poorly controlled fabrication facilities.

Weber emphasized ISFA's "commitment to following established processes, maintaining transparency, and engaging respectfully with regulators, the medical community, and other stakeholders." ISFA's work, she continued, "is guided by responsibility to workers and the industry – not by external approval or public narratives."

Long-term solutions, she added, depend on recognizing (medical) expertise "and ensuring those directly involved in fabrication are part of the process."

ISFA reiterated that its approach "is based on collaboration and co-regulation: industry defining clear, enforceable standards and government retaining oversight and enforcement authority."

"This model is used across multiple regulated industries and is intended to strengthen – rather than replace – public enforcement," Weber said. "ISFA has deep respect for the medical community. However, ISFA does not support a blanket ban on engineered stone, and believes the conclusions presented in WOEMA's petition do not fully reflect the operational economic and regulatory realities of the industry."

Factory Opened by Heritage Wood Mills

GLASGOW, MO — Custom cabinet manufacturer Heritage Wood Mills has opened a new manufacturing facility at its headquarters in Glasgow, MI, the company announced.

The facility, according to company officials, will serve customers across Missouri and surrounding states. Founded in 2018, Heritage Wood Mills, a division of CAM Construction Services, specializes in producing custom cabinetry for kitchens, baths, walk-in closets and other applications, as well as commercial casework.

"This is a big milestone not just for Heritage Wood Mills, but for Glasgow as well," said Clint Jacobs, CEO of Heritage Wood Mills. "This new facility is a reflection of our commitment to investing in local jobs, preserving true craftsmanship, and building a sustainable future right here at home."



UMI Stone recently opened a 20,000-sq.-ft. showroom in Sarasota, FL.

Stone Distributor Opens FL Showroom

ATLANTA — UMI Stone, the Atlanta-based wholesale distributor of natural stone, quartz, porcelain, specialty slabs and sinks has shored up its Florida presence with a 20,000-sq.-ft. showroom in Sarasota, FL, the company announced.

The Sarasota facility, aimed at strengthening the company's Gulf Coast presence between Tampa and Naples, features a curated indoor slab gallery showcasing natural stone, Pompeii Quartz, Infinity porcelain slabs and specialty surfacing materials, corporate officials said.

The company also has multiple locations in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia.

Designery Opens NC, NY Locations

CHARLOTTE, NC — The Designery, a chain of full-service kitchen, bath and closet design centers, has marked the opening of a North Charlotte location, the company announced.

The Designery North Charlotte is owned and operated by business partners Carolina Preciado and Michael Simcox, who said, "Charlotte's continued growth makes it an ideal market for kitchen and bath remodeling, with many homes reaching an age where renovations and updates are increasingly in demand."

In addition to the Charlotte location, The Designery has also opened another location in New York City, the company announced.

The Designery was founded in 2007 as A1 Kitchen and Bath, a product-wholesale outlet serving the Chattanooga, TN market. In 2019, the company rebranded as The Designery, and established a franchise to expand its model for product selection, design expertise, project management and installation services across the U.S.

Millwork Supplier Unveils Distribution Hub

RALEIGH, NC — ITC Millwork, a Raleigh, NC-based supplier of architectural millwork solutions, has expanded its regional presence with a 32,000-sq.-ft. distribution hub and service center in Garner, NC, the company announced.

Strategically located to serve Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill and surrounding communities, with additional reach to North Carolina's coastal markets, the new facility "strengthens ITC's ability to support the area's growing community of custom builders and trade professionals," company officials said.

The new facility consolidates trade support services under one roof, "streamlining operations and improving accessibility for the ITC's expanding client base, said the company, whose product line includes stock and custom mouldings, interior doors, stair parts, hardware and specialty architectural details.

Design Pros Named to '2026 Caesarstone Circle'

CHARLOTTE, NC — Caesarstone, the nationwide supplier of quartz, porcelain and other countertop surfacing materials, has announced the "2026 Caesarstone Circle," a bi-annual program that recognizes a select group of design professionals "who are shaping the future of interior design."

The new members of the program include Sara Malek Barney of BANDD Design, Hill Rondero of Ro House, Matthew Quinn of Matthew Quinn Collective, Jessica Davis of Atelier Design, and Jennifer Hutton of Grau Design Studio. Each member was chosen for their creative excellence and industry influence, "as well as for their ability to inspire others through intentional, expressive and technically thoughtful design," Caesarstone said, adding that the designers will be spotlighted throughout the year, with opportunities to share insights and showcase their work on Caesarstone's platforms and at industry events.

Previous Caesarstone Circle members include Joy Green, Camille Styles, Kickie Chudikova, Vanessa Fong and Marti Gallucci.

"We champion creators who set the pace of the industry and infuse every space with vision, emotion and depth," said Lindsey Waldrep, v.p./marketing for Caesarstone. "We're proud to collaborate with these incredible talents and help share their voices."

Student Design Winners Named by NKBA

BETHLEHEM, PA — Emma Bunz, a student at Lakeland College in Vermilion, Alberta, Canada has won the top prize for a bathroom design in the "2024-2025 Student Design Competition" sponsored by the National Kitchen & Bath Association.

Bunz, who was cited for a project entitled "Bringing It Back," was awarded a \$5,000 scholarship for her winning entry in the annual student design competition, according to the NKBA, which recognized six Student Design Competition winners during KBIS 2026 in Orlando last month.

Catherine Wright, a design student at Century College in White Bear Lake, MN, earned a second-place win and a \$2,500 scholarship for her "Private Retreat in Style & Function."

Judges for the annual design contest included Rebecca Sutton, CMKBD, CKBR, senior designer at Kitchen Design Concepts in Dallas; Jenni Russell, CMKBD, of Design in Perspective in Colorado Springs, CO, and Paula Kennedy, CMKBD, owner of Timeless Kitchen Design in Seattle, *KBDN* columnist and an educator at the Heritage School of Interior Design.

Construction Resources Acquires Texas-Based Product Distributor

DECATUR, GA — Construction Resources Company, LLC, a luxury kitchen and bath product supplier with showrooms throughout the southeastern U.S., has completed the acquisition of The Jarrell Company, a Dallas-based luxury appliance, plumbing and lighting distributor, the company announced. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

"We're excited to have The Jarrell Company as a key partner in the Construction Resources' family of companies, and to expand our operations into Texas," said Mitch Hires, CEO of Construction Resources, which is headquartered near Atlanta. "We plan to invest in their growth and support them as needed to continue delivering premium appliance, plumbing and lighting offerings to the builder and designer communities."

Eric Neel, president of The Jarrell Company, and his leadership team, will remain with Construction Resources following the acquisition, according to both companies.

"For more than 75 years, The Jarrell Company has served homebuilders, remodelers, designers and premium consumers," Neel observed. "We're excited to become a part of Construction Resources, and we look forward to serving our customers with the same great service from the same group of professionals for years to come."





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DAN LUCK

Business Budgeting is Not Optional

BY THE TIME you read this article, the first quarter of 2026 will be nearly behind us. The question every owner and executive should be asking is simple: *Are you on track to achieve the goals you set for the year?* Did you begin the year with a written annual budget and a clear financial plan, or did budgeting once again fall victim to urgency, discomfort or avoidance?

In the kitchen and bath industry, budgeting is often treated as a necessary evil, acknowledged as important yet quietly avoided. Many owners believe they “know their numbers” intuitively but never commit them to paper. Others find the process intimidating, anxiety-inducing or simply overwhelming. And some never learned how to create a budget in the first place. As a result, attention is placed almost entirely on generating revenue, a fixation that frequently masks deeper financial problems.

Years ago, I attended an industry event in Washington, DC, where I sat at a long conference table with peers from across the country. The facilitator asked each participant to share their annual revenue from the previous year. One by one, figures were announced, often with pride, ego and a clear sense of status attached to the numbers.

The facilitator then paused and asked the next question: *What was your net profit?* The room fell silent. The bravado evaporated.

The lesson was immediate and lasting: it’s not how much revenue your business generates, it’s how much cash remains after competitive wages are paid, vendors are satisfied, overhead is covered and taxes are accounted for.

“A budget should be an active living management tool that guides resource allocation, performance measurement and decision-making throughout the year.”

Without an intentional plan, strong revenue can still result in weak or nonexistent profit.

That is precisely why budgeting matters. A budget is not simply a spreadsheet or a set of numbers. It is a decision-making framework that determines how you price your products, value your services, manage your team and whether your business produces predictable profits or chronic stress.

A well-constructed budget provides a roadmap for the year ahead. It defines a preferred future and establishes what success looks like financially at year-end. Unfortunately, many businesses treat



budgets as static documents created for bankers or advisors, filed away and reviewed only after the year is over. That approach misses the point entirely.

A budget should be an active living management tool that guides resource allocation, performance measurement and decision-making throughout the year. If you don’t yet have a 2026 budget in place, it’s not too late.

START WITH INTENT, NOT A SPREADSHEET

Resist the urge to open a spreadsheet and start entering numbers immediately. Effective budgeting begins with clarity of intent. Rather than thinking in one-year increments, consider building a three-year budget. A multi-year view forces strategic thinking and provides a longer-term vision of what the company could become. It also allows leadership to anticipate staffing needs, capacity constraints and profitability targets with greater accuracy.

As you evaluate expenses, apply one guiding principle: *Does this expense deliver value to the client?* If the answer or the value is negligible, the funding for that expense should be questioned.

Budgeting is a structured, multi-step process.

Step One: Think Conceptually

Begin by defining the business model that best supports your financial goals. Are you operating as a design studio, a showroom, or a design-build firm? Each model carries different staffing requirements, overhead structures and margin expectations.

Next, establish owner compensation intentionally. Ask yourself: *If I were replaced tomorrow, what would it cost to hire someone with my responsibilities?* Owner’s salary should reflect market-rate compensation, not what is left over.

Then determine your net profit target. How much cash should the business generate after all expenses are paid? Profit should never be an accident or an afterthought. It should be planned for with the same discipline as any other expense.

Finally, consider your strategic plan. Growth initiatives, technological investments, market expansion and process improvements all carry financial implications that must be reflected in the budget.

Step Two: Complete the Supporting Spreadsheets

Before assembling the master budget, prepare supporting schedules. Start with a detailed compensation spreadsheet that lists all employees, wages, benefits, payroll taxes and planned team additions. For future years, include anticipated hires and market-rate compensation assumptions.

Next, develop a sales forecast. Revenue projections should be broken down by salesperson and by category, whether by product mix or project type. Review projections critically to ensure they are achievable rather than aspirational. Overly aggressive “blue sky” forecasts undermine the credibility of the entire budget.

Step Three: Understand the Budget Structure

A three-year budget is a forward-looking projection built on assumptions and scenarios. It becomes a planning tool that models “what if” scenarios and stress-tests the business against downturns or unexpected changes.

The budget should include a summary page that provides a high-level snapshot of anticipated performance. This overview typically includes projected revenue, operating expenses by category, other income and expenses, and projected net income.

One critical discipline at this stage: *do not calculate gross profit yet*. This is a common mistake. Gross profit should be determined only after all expenses and net profit targets are clearly defined.

Step Four: Detail All Expenses

Next, capture every anticipated expense for the year. Break costs into logical categories: produc-

Your business should not function as a hobby. It is a vehicle for wealth creation and long-term financial security. Net profit should be designed into the plan, not hoped for.

Step Six: Reverse Engineer Gross Profit

Only after expenses and net profit targets are finalized should the gross profit dollars required

process and then reverse-engineering them, the organization can gain clarity on pricing decisions.

Your competitors, manufacturers and sales representatives should not be the ones dictating your pricing structure. Your budget should. It defines the gross profit dollars and margins required to sustain the business, compensate the team appropriately and deliver a return on investment

An annual budget is a roadmap to a preferred future. For kitchen and bath dealers, budgeting brings clarity, discipline and alignment – ensuring resources are invested where they create the most value for your firm. Commit to the process. Write the plan. Use it actively. Your future depends on it. ■

“Your business should not function as a hobby. It is a vehicle for wealth creation and long-term financial security.”

tion, sales and administration. Transfer compensation data directly from the wage schedule into the appropriate expense buckets.

Be sure to include other income and expenses, such as purchase discounts, rebates, interest income and loan interest.

Step Five: Determine Net Profit

How much net profit should the company generate after paying competitive wages, covering overhead and satisfying vendors?

be calculated. This is where disciplined budgeting separates high-performing firms from the rest.

Reverse engineer the gross profit dollars required to fund all operating expenses, owner compensation, market-rate staff wages and desired net profit. Subtract gross profit dollars from projected revenue to determine cost of goods sold.

BUDGET DETERMINES PRICING

A budget is, in effect, your profit plan. By establishing net profit goals early in the

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. Dan welcomes questions and comments at dluck@sendesign.com.

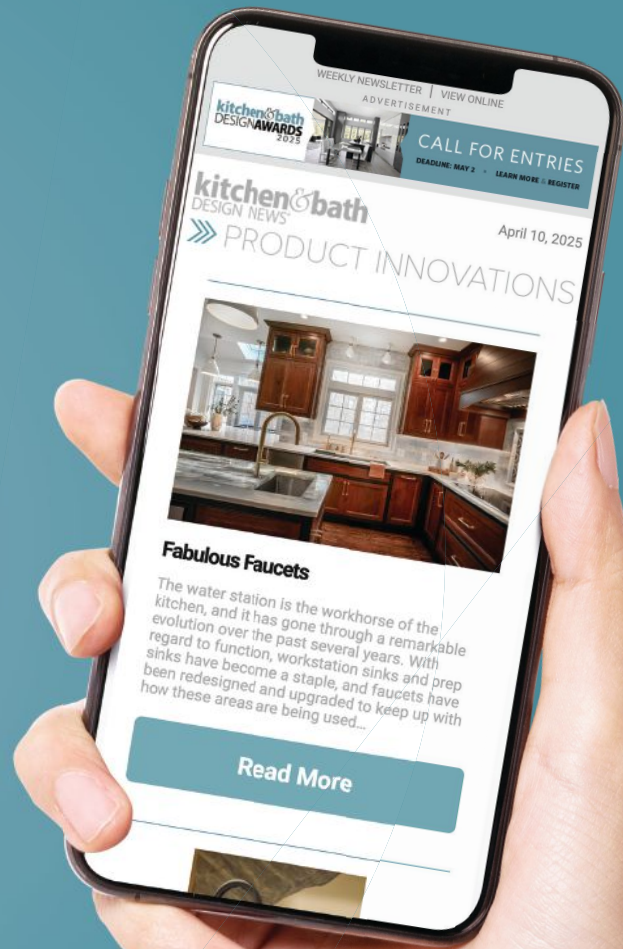
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ANDREW MOSS

Navigating the Customer Journey

MOST OF US think of customer service as something that appears only after a problem arises. It's reactive by nature, called into action when an order goes wrong, a product fails or expectations aren't met.

Yet "customer service" has become a catch-all phrase for everything from support to relationship building, often framed as the department responsible for "wowing" customers. The question is whether that framing truly reflects how trust, loyalty and long-term relationships are built, or whether we're using the wrong language altogether. Are we really meant to be servicing customers, or are we meant to be doing something more meaningful?

In talking to showroom personnel, manufacturers and many others, customer service is often cited as one of the key "competitive advantages." No matter what, all showrooms feel that they are unique by citing their customer

after-sale support, warehousing, inventory management, technology infrastructure and company culture.

Start with sticky notes and a very long, tall wall. Get your team together and lay out the major moments first: the introduction, signing a contract, initial and final selections, and other key milestones. Then, fill in the gaps – how do you move from one milestone to the next, or how do you move backwards if something goes wrong. Once you have the entire process written down, look for holes and pain points. You can find everything here from a bad customer intake process, confusing invoices, a phone line that always goes to voicemail, slow response times or anything else that harms the experience. Try to look at it from an outsider's perspective with the goal of identifying anything that is not exceptional.

friend. This is where you are going to set your key performance indicators and understand how the changes you made worked or didn't. You'll have to ask yourself what else needs to be done to solve the pain point. While it can be difficult, you have to be able to admit to yourself if your intervention didn't work, and you may have to undo the effort.

- **Repeat:** Even if you've come up with a great solution, you still have more pain points to solve, and you have to ensure that your interventions are still working. This is an ongoing process of iteration on your business.
- **Walkthrough:** A simple example of this may help demonstrate the concept. In this scenario, you are a showroom that both sells products and offers design services.

For customer acquisition, you have a mix of print ads, digital ads, word of mouth and a base of designers who bring clients to you. One pain point that you identify is that you have no mechanism to actually identify customers from your print and digital ads. In response, you add a QR code to your ads that links to an intake form for customers to enter their contact information so you can follow up.

You then look at your initial consult with the client. As you walk through your space, you recognize that your entrance way and lobby are outdated and dirty. You then spend some money on planting flowers, getting new window graphics, updating some furniture, and having a cleaning crew do a deep clean.

You get great results on your light renovation. The designers you have worked with are all very complimentary. You see an uptick of business from those designers as they are more likely to bring clients to you versus the competition.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, your sustainable competitive advantage doesn't come from doing what everyone else does. It comes from a fanatical commitment to your customer and making sure that they have the best possible experience with you from beginning to end. ■

Andrew Moss is the v.p. of operations at Advance Plumbing & Heating Supply Company, a fourth-generation plumbing distributor headquartered in Detroit, MI. In addition, he serves on the Decorative Plumbing & Hardware Association board and is involved in various organizations within the Detroit Jewish community.

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“Customer service has become a catch-all phrase for everything from support to relationship building.”

service as top-notch. That begs the question, if everyone differentiates themselves with amazing customer service, then is that simply the customers' expectation? Is amazing customer service the ante to play in this industry?

What if the goal was not to react to your customer, but rather to proactively control every single touchpoint you have with that customer from start to finish? How might your customer relationships change if all your attention goes into creating a seamless experience that leaves the customer raving about you and your company? What makes your experience better than everyone else's, in this industry and beyond?

Those questions are, in a nutshell, the guiding questions of customer journey management, your method to create a sustainable competitive advantage. Disclaimer: If you are not comfortable with a deep analysis of your business and a potential overhaul of the details, then this approach isn't for you.

SERVING THE CUSTOMER

The stages of this process are mapping, testing, implementation, analysis and repeat. Let's jump in.

- **Mapping:** During mapping, you must lay out the current path customers take from discovering you to the end of the relationship. This step requires you to assess the current state of your marketing, outside sales, project touchpoints, sales process,

- **Testing:** This is where you are going to test different ways of resolving pain points. This is meant to be "minimally invasive" and cost effective. If your invoices are confusing, create an Excel template that is clearer. If your phone lines always go to voicemail, set the phone line up to ring your own cell phone and make sure to answer as many calls as possible. If something feels clunky during testing, try something else. The goal with testing is to keep trying different things until you find something that eliminates or greatly reduces a pain point. This is not a permanent solution (yet); it is a low-cost way to figure out if the problems you identified are real problems and what a solution may be.
- **Implementation:** You've already identified pain points and tested ways to fix them. Now you need to invest the proper resources into a permanent solution. If your phone lines were an issue, hire a receptionist to make sure the line always gets answered. Bring in new invoicing software to create cleaner, clearer and more brand-specific invoices.

Whatever you found during testing, you need to solidify the change in a way that ensures that this pain point is solved to such an extent that you can move on to other issues. Bring in the right people, put in the time and make sure you do this properly.

- **Analysis:** Much like mapping, analysis is where brutal honesty is going to be your best

MAKE 2026 YOUR YEAR! ENTER THE CHRYSALIS AWARDS

The 2026 Chrysalis Awards for Remodeling Excellence is now open to receive entries.



Make this the year that you are recognized for your great remodeling and design projects. Entering the *Chrysalis Awards for Remodeling Excellence* is a great way to do that.

You'll find details on the 2026 program and the entry process on our website at www.chrysalisawards.com.

PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

Any project completed after January 1, 2023 is eligible. This includes previous Chrysalis entries that did not win a Chrysalis Award, as well as entries from other competitions. Any contractor, architect or design professional in the United States may enter.

CATEGORIES

General categories include: Kitchen, Bath, Addition, Residential Interior, Whole House, Basement, Outdoor Living and others. You can find a complete list and description of the categories at www.chrysalisawards.com.

FORMAT

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.

REGISTRATION

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

and click on the "Enter the Chrysalis Awards" button and it will take you directly to the registration page. Once you register, you can create, import, or edit your entries, and you will receive ongoing updates and information on the Chrysalis Awards.

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 2026 program.

DEADLINE

May 1, 2026. Entrants will be notified of the results in June.

You can see snapshots of the 2025 winning entries displayed on www.chrysalisawards.com as well as all winning projects since 2000.

You can also see the 2025 winners featured on the *Qualified Remodeler* website at qualifiedremodeler.com/category/chrysalis-awards/.

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Layered Kitchen Radiates Warmth

BY KIM BERNDTSON

Designed with influences from extensive global travels, cherished collections and beloved inherited family pieces, this home feels authentic and personal...with a story to tell.

ST. PETERSBURG, FL — These homeowners enlisted the expertise of Brooke Eversoll when they renovated their previous home, so when they decided to build a new one, there was never any question about who would help them design it and navigate the construction process.

Situated on an inland canal in the Snell Isle neighborhood of St. Petersburg, FL, Eversoll, CMKBD/founder/principal designer of Bee Studios in St. Petersburg, grounded the new residence in influences from her clients' extensive global travels, cherished collections and beloved pieces inherited from family members.

"Even though it's a new home, it was intentionally layered so it doesn't feel new," she

reports, noting a collaboration with DC Studio and Reno Boyd Building Co. "It was designed with a story to tell."

Eversoll stresses that she was able to tell that story more authentically and personally because she was involved in the design process from the beginning.

"I find that if people come to me after they already have building plans, it may be too late for them to get what they really want," she reports. "A home should be a collaboration of many professionals, and we all have our own lanes. An architect is not a kitchen designer, and a kitchen designer is not an architect. I have seen too many times when a client may want something, but it isn't possible because the structural work

is already done. So, to be able to sit at the table from the start and literally stand on a lot before any dirt has been moved is invaluable. It was very exciting to plan the interiors of this home simultaneously with the structure so these clients could have a home designed specifically for them."

NEUTRAL PALETTE WITH CONTRAST

In the kitchen, that personalization focuses on creating a space that is approachable, warm and livable, but with a modern edge. Its neutral palette is built on a foundation of deep black and bright white accented with wood, all of which are represented in the custom Bee Studios' (private labeled Jay Rambo) cabinetry.

The outermost entertaining island, located nearest to the bar and living spaces where it can readily accommodate guests, features bright white cabinetry. The highly functional working island, which is 39" tall to accommodate the husband's 6'6" height, has a base of rift-cut oak



RIFT-CUT OAK CABINERY

Conceals handleless ovens behind pocket doors

QUARTZITE BACKSPLASH

Reminds homeowners of time spent in Africa

ENTERTAINING ISLAND

Features a walnut bar top for added warmth



Photos: Amy Lamb; NativeHouse Photography

Brooke Eversoll included two islands in the kitchen. One is designed as an 'entertaining' island, the other as the 'working' island. Multiple cabinetry and countertop choices accommodate aesthetics and functionality and add to the kitchen's layered look.

that is stained in a hue dark enough to provide plenty of contrast yet light enough to allow its natural textural grain pattern to shine through so it doesn't read as another painted element. It matches the Sub-Zero refrigerator/freezer appliance panels, tall pantry cabinetry and floating shelves around the perimeter. Walnut base cabinets frame the kitchen, where their continuous horizontal grain pattern exudes a high-end, luxurious feel.

"The wood adds warmth to the kitchen," she states. "My clients wanted poured concrete floors, which can read cold, sterile and uninviting. By pulling in the walnut, as well as the oak, we were able to warm up the home and breathe life into it. If we would have only used white cabinetry, we would have had a very different vibe. At the end of the day, this house has white walls and concrete floors, but it's about what we married with them that makes it feel like a cozy home."

Eversoll also used multiple materials to top the cabinetry, including Caesarstone's Vivid White quartz for the islands. She draped the working island with waterfall edges on each end.

"I love waterfalls, and not just for their beauty," she notes. "They are also very functional because they protect the cabinetry from inevitable dings that happen when people walk by."

Mitered edges give the island a heftier appearance and echo the chunky L-shaped walnut bar top that defines the seating area of the entertaining island, which also features the bright white quartz in a thinner, more traditional, 3cm thickness.



☒ Brooke Eversoll showcased three different countertop choices throughout the kitchen, one of which is an African quartzite that she also used as a backsplash behind the range. It reminds her clients of their travels.

☒ The working island includes a 4' workstation sink set within a quartz countertop with mitered edges that give the island a heftier appearance.



There is only one wall with floor-to-ceiling cabinetry, which is thoughtfully designed as a workhorse for the kitchen. One side includes plentiful storage on shelves and in walnut rollouts. The other side features two handleless wall ovens with vertical tray storage above and a walnut rollout below. Adjacent appliance panels conceal the column refrigerator and freezer.

and crown moulding. This design is more intentional, where I played with blocks of colors and shapes that feel like furniture. The room looks more elevated and feels less like a kitchen.”

Although there is only one wall with floor-to-ceiling cabinetry, Eversoll thoughtfully designed it as a workhorse. One side of the tall pantry includes plentiful storage on shelves and in walnut rollouts, all hidden behind pocket doors.

“The pantry was not only designed to be functional, but to also be beautiful when the doors are open,” she explains.

The other side of the pantry features a handleless Wolf wall oven and steam oven with vertical tray storage above and a walnut rollout below.

“Planning the hidden ovens was nothing short of an engineering feat!” she stresses. “There was a lot of thought that went into them. My client only uses the ovens when the doors are open, but since they are handleless, she can conceal them when she isn’t using them. Again, it’s one more design element that makes the kitchen feel less ‘kitcheny.”

The only other wall cabinets in the kitchen are located in the bar, which includes a Sub-Zero ice maker, Sub-Zero refrigerator/freezer drawers and an 18" Galley bar sink that complements the 4' Galley workstation sink with 12" DryDock extension in the main island. As well, a coffee station is tucked behind ‘garage’ doors.

It also showcases a focal point within the entire kitchen...the New Ravenna’s Indus mosaic tile backsplash.

“I selected that tile very early on because it captured the entire color palette,” Eversoll relates. “The mosaics also look handmade. They are perfectly imperfect.” ■

“I played with the thicknesses of the countertops to add to that layered look my clients wanted,” she relates.

Eversoll showcased a third countertop choice, Calacatta Namibia quartzite, around the perimeter where she also extended it as the backsplash behind the Wolf cooktop.

“There is a lot of countertop space in this kitchen, so I wanted to use multiple materials,” she explains. “This particular stone comes from Africa, which is a place my clients visit frequently. We didn’t necessarily choose it for that reason, but it did help solidify the decision!”

PUSHING THE LIMITS

Because the ceilings in the home are tall, at 10', Eversoll intentionally minimized the number of cabinets that extend to its full height. Just one wall includes anything taller than traditional base cabinetry, and the rest are filled with windows that showcase the view or are completely open to adjacent rooms.

“The current instinct is to run cabinets to the ceiling, but that can feel very overpowering and very ‘plug and play,’” she says. “Instead, I wanted to push the limits...push the trend of just filling a room floor to ceiling with cabinets

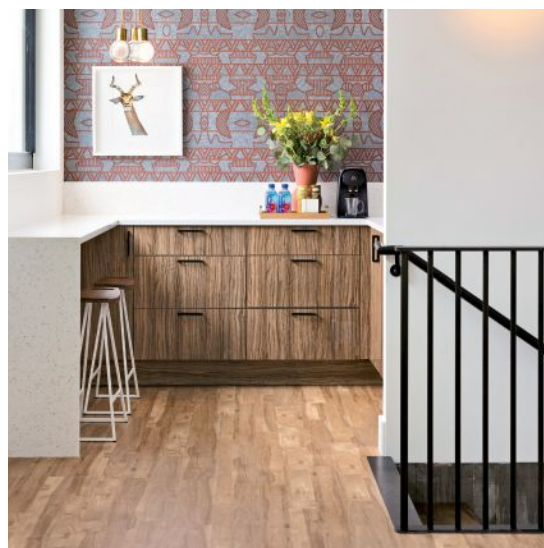
SIMPLE, YET BEAUTIFUL

Brooke Eversoll designed every nook and cranny in her clients’ home, including a small alcove at the top of the stairs to the second floor. The petite room is equipped with a beverage refrigerator, sink, plenty of countertop space and a couple of stools where guests can enjoy a cup of coffee and a view of the water.

“I love how this space turned out,” she says. “It’s simple, yet beautiful.”

A standout feature is the wallpaper, which was selected for its texture and ability to remind her clients of their travels to Africa.

“When you look at the wallpaper up close, the small dots look like tiny beads that African women use to make elaborate beaded necklaces,” she relates. “It’s perfect for them!”





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INNOVATORS

2026

Wish Lists of First-Time Homeowners

BY JAMIE GOLD

Millennials and other first-time homebuyers have discerning taste when it comes to indoor and outdoor kitchens.

MY PARENTS BOUGHT their first home – the four bedroom Brooklyn Dutch Colonial I grew up in – when they were expecting their first child, my older sister. My dad was in his late 20s and my mom in her early 20s. If memory serves, they paid \$25,000 for that house in 1958. It last sold in 2018 for \$1.25 million. There aren't many 20-something couples who could afford that same family home today.

According to the National Association of Realtors, “the typical age of first-time buyers climbed to an all-time high of 40 years” last year, and they dropped as a share of home sales to a record low of 21%. The study also predicted that these Millennial owners will likely have fewer moves over their lifetime as a result.

What impact will these trends have on your sales to this next generation of new homeowners? I reached out to professionals across industries and geography for a two-part column. We'll look at kitchens, sustainability, technology and outdoor living spaces in this issue. In May, we'll look at bathrooms, wellness and laundry rooms.

- Interior designer Cate Gutter in Charlotte, NC.
- Interior designer Anne Hulcher Tollett in Richmond, VA.

- Dallas-based interior designer Veronica Sanders.
- College Station, TX-based homebuilder Doug French with Stylecraft.
- Angie Hicks, co-founder of home improvement platform Angi.
- Amanda Crigar, v.p. of Las Vegas-based smart home technology firm Acoustic Design Systems.
- Abbey Stark, home furnishing direction leader at IKEA US.
- San Francisco area and wine country real estate agent Arrian Binnings with Christie's International.
- Seattle area real estate agent Brandi B. Nelson with Luxury Portfolio International.

MILLENNIAL IMPACT

Kitchens are among the most important interior spaces in a home and, Binnings declares, “Their condition can make or break a sale.” When he's working with a starter home listing, he's often advising sellers about improvements like new countertops, backsplashes, faucets, fixtures and appliances. *(Pro Tip: Maybe connect with a few agents in your area to be their*

resource.) “They function as the heart of the home, which leads buyers to prioritize kitchen upgrades over most other improvements.”

Like Binnings, Nelson provides insights on cosmetic updates and brings in pros for more construction-oriented projects. “That extra clarity really gives buyers the confidence they need,” she shares. In many cases, these first-time homeowners are taking a breather after closing and starting with a smaller upgrade first. They'll often tackle kitchen remodels in phases over one to three years after close, she adds.

While these first-time homeowners are a smaller slice of the potential client pie today, they are not without significance. Hicks says, “Younger homeowners are increasingly influencing home project trends.” She also reports that Angi's 2025 State of Home Spending Report shows them spending more on home projects per household than any other generation.

Here's what they're doing: “In 2026, Millennials are most interested in installing new appliances, completing regular maintenance, remodeling bathrooms and kitchens, and painting home interiors and exteriors,” the

Photo: Team Binnings/Jacob Elliot (Photographer)



📍 Kitchen updated for starter home listing.

Photo: Angi



Millennials are prioritizing kitchen remodels.

report finds. “Millennials are also taking on a lot of big projects – 77% plan to take on a major project (remodel a bathroom, install an HVAC system, etc.) in the next five years,” the Angi report notes.

SOURCING OPTIONS

You may be wondering how these newbies are finding their design pros. Tollett says her new homeowner clients are coming from family-based referrals. That provides a valuable advantage. “Even if they are buying their first house, they’ve heard about us from their parents, so they’ve likely lived through a renovation, and we talk to them the exact same way as we would a more experienced homeowner,” the Richmond designer comments.

Gutter’s first-time clients tend to find her through real estate agent referrals or social media. “There’s definitely more education and reassurance involved when working with first-time homeowners,” she observes. “We spend more time walking through the process, sequencing, and costs, and helping clients think long-term rather than chasing trends. There can be more handholding, but that’s part of the joy. Remodeling is new territory, and our role is to guide them with clarity and confidence.”

Most of Sanders’ clients are finding her through Google, so she focuses on keeping her business profile there updated. Instagram and referrals are also client sources. “I would say my only communication that’s different is my welcome message, congratulating them on their first home. In both cases, I treat each home like it’s brand new, as the goal is to give it a totally different feel from what currently exists.”

SETTING BUDGETS

With the bleak stats on first-time buyers and record home prices, you might be wondering how these owners can afford to remodel their homes. “Our first-time homeowners are financing their projects from their own money or they take out a bank loan,” Tollett says. Sometimes, especially for younger clients, the budgets are smaller, but that’s not always the case, she observes.

Nelson says most of her buyers are paying cash over time for their desired remodels. “Renovation loans and HELOCs [home equity lines of credit] are much less common for first-time buyers. Projects phased out over time tend to feel more manageable and align better with their comfort level (and sanity).”

For Gutter, it’s often a mix of savings, renovation loans and HELOCs. “First-time homeowners tend to be thoughtful and conservative, often phasing projects rather than doing everything at once.” While acknowledging that their budgets are typically tighter, she describes these first-time owners as incredibly intentional. “They’re thoughtful about where to invest and where to pull back, and many of these relationships grow over time as their families and homes evolve.” *Think about the long-term potential of a younger client with a long wish list!*

“Their budgets are usually lower compared to long-time owners’ budgets in general, as they are generally relying on personal savings,” Sanders shares, and sometimes they suffer from misguided expectations. The Dallas designer blames that on a variety of factors, including “watching home makeover television shows, underestimating the state of the economy and current market pricing, or a lack of

Photo: Stylecraft/ York Photography and Media LLC



Affordable starter townhomes offer waterfall countertop edges.

education on why quality pieces cost more than fast furniture purchased from mass markets.” *I think that’s a phenomenon seen across most age groups and regions!*

Stylecraft builds townhouses for first-time homebuyers in South Texas that are stylish, well-equipped and, notably, affordable. The townhouse format makes affordability more possible for the builder. New construction mortgage packages make it more possible for the buyer. Digital marketing, social media and real estate pros create awareness. “Once the word got out, buyers received it really well. We saw young professionals leaving apartments for the first-time because finally there was something attainable for them to buy,” French recalls. *Hallelujah!*

Photo: IKEA



First-time buyers are interested in induction cooking.



Photo: IKEA



Photo: Veronica Sanders / Rendering by Aaron Dougherty Photography

Outdoor spaces are highly valued by first time buyers.

Integrated appliances are on first-time buyers' wish lists.

KITCHEN TRENDS

Binnings says first-time homebuyers' must-haves include adequate storage, proper ventilation and durable countertops, while wants include an island with seating, a pantry, stainless steel appliances, stone or engineered tops, soft-close cabinets, an appliance garage, hardwood or tile floors. Waterfall edging on islands has become a nice 'luxury' upgrade. Islands and walk-in pantries are strong wants, but not requirements, for Nelson's clients.

These are seemingly practical folks, at least judging by some of their kitchen preferences. "Many clients love drawers and are moving away from shelves that need dusting. They prefer to tuck their items away to make their lives easier and less cluttered," Tollett shares. They also love integrated refrigeration, the Richmond designer comments. Sanders' clients are also interested

in integrated appliances. Surface-wise, Tollett's clients are drawn to soapstone counters and hardwood floors, engineered if the budget requires it.

"Storage is everything," Gutter declares. "Pull-outs, pantry upgrades and multi-functional pieces are always high priorities." Marble and quartzite dominate their countertop selections, while wood flooring and stone-inspired finishes are popular too. IKEA's Stark says that wood and laminate flooring continue to be leading choices in kitchen design, especially in open-concept floor plans.

Sanders stresses that storage is always the most important factor for her first-time homeowners. "I'm either opening walls to accommodate more space or altering layouts to accommodate – even incorporating drawers in the toe kick for added space." Surface-wise, they're craving white quartz countertops, possibly with

veining for character. "No busy, exotic countertops or flooring, but preferably natural materials or engineered for long wear," she notes.

"We put the focus on higher-end modern finishes," French reports. "Waterfall granite islands, stainless steel vent hoods, undercounter microwaves, tile backsplashes, and two-tone soft-close cabinets" enhance Stylecraft's townhouse kitchens and make them stand out from the competition, the builder notes.

OUTDOOR LIVING TRENDS

"Outdoor kitchens are generally a nice-to-have rather than a necessity, and their perceived value varies significantly based on climate, usability and overall outdoor space design," Binnings shares. He does note that they have taken on increased importance since the pandemic. The San Francisco agent lists a plumbed grill, sink, refrigerator and countertop prep space as must-haves for outdoor kitchens. Want-to-haves include beverage coolers, smokers or pizza ovens, and bar or counter seating.

"Outdoor kitchens tend to be a wonderful luxury for first-time homeowners," Tollett observes. When they can equip them, the primary cook is choosing an amazing grill, she notes.

Outdoor living is a major feature of North Carolina living, Gutter comments, and many of her first-time buyers are including it in their projects. "Grills, smokers and setups adjacent to outdoor seating areas are most common. The focus is on usability and gathering, rather than overly elaborate installations."

Younger homeowners, likely to be first-time owners, are putting a greater emphasis on outdoor kitchens and living than older generations, Hicks observes. While their numbers aren't yet large – "16% of surveyed Millennials added an outdoor living space (like an outdoor kitchen) in 2025, and 26% have plans to add one in the next five years – the Angi executive points



Photo: Samsung US

Appliance brands are marketing to tech enthusiast homeowners.

out that outdoor projects lend themselves to phasing. “For example, you can install the patio flooring now, but the outdoor appliances later down the line. This is ideal for young people who have a lot of priorities to juggle and may not be able to do large projects all at once.”

Nelson’s Seattle buyers love a covered outdoor space, she says. “I see this as a common must-have,” she comments. “Other must-haves include electrical access (for string lights and a firepit vibe), plus enough space for a grill and a comfortable seating area. A want-to-have is, of course, a built-in outdoor kitchen – fun, elevated and very ‘hosting-ready,’ but not something most first-time buyers expect.”

TECHNOLOGY TRENDS

“Young home buyers are steering away from smart home technology because it changes so quickly,” Tollett stresses. The Richmond designer reports that they prefer phone-based systems that won’t require them to rewire their houses down the line. She also muses, “They have fallen prey to smart fixtures, only to quickly realize they break often, and then go back to the tried-and-true traditional fixtures.”

Gutter’s clients are also mixed on tech, she says. “Smart appliances and lighting are appealing when they feel intuitive and genuinely useful, but not when they add unnecessary complexity or cost.”

Sanders clients are bullish on tech, she shares, and home automation is a top priority. “Having the home smart-wired to connect to Alexa or Google, where they can automate their light settings or command the drapery to raise or lower at a certain time of day [is desired]. They are also looking for video security features, such as the

Ring camera, or to at least have the wiring integrated so they can add these features later.”

Angi clients are also tech-friendly, Hicks notes. “They’re interested in high-tech kitchen upgrades, like smart refrigerators, voice-activated faucets and phone-controlled ovens,” she says.

Crigar’s technology clients are often regional and national homebuilders. “Our role stays the same regardless of builder size: ensuring homes are properly wired and ready for today’s technology – and tomorrow’s upgrades.” For kitchens, that’s often in-ceiling speakers and LED lighting. “These features enhance everyday living and entertaining without adding complexity for first-time homeowners,” she explains. For starter home buyers, LEDs and kitchen audio are the most requested technology upgrades. “Reliable internet connections at kitchen tables or islands – especially for work-from-home households – are also becoming increasingly important,” the technology executive adds. For outdoor spaces, audio is by far the most requested, she says. “Outdoor TVs are also becoming increasingly popular for entertaining.”

Overall, Crigar points to voice control products like Alexa and Google Home making smart home technology “approachable and affordable.” Systems like Sonos wireless audio are also appealing, “because homeowners can start small and expand over time.”

SUSTAINABILITY TRENDS

Angi’s clients are sustainability-oriented, Hicks reveals. “In 2026, younger homeowners are focusing on natural and eco-friendly materials. Natural wood cabinets/countertops and eco-friendly touches like low-VOC paint are some of the most popular kitchen trends for



Photo: Cate Gutter/Dustin Peck (Photographer)

Ample storage is a first-time owners’ must-have item.

Millennials this year.” (That seems to be less of a concern for the designer clients.)

IKEA’s are too, Stark says. “First-time home buyers typically buy or replace refrigerators and washers within the first year, with a preference for energy-efficient, affordable and durable models rather than smart features.”

For Binnings’ first-time buyers, “Affordability remains the top priority,” so sustainability and other values take a back seat. They can provide meaningful differentiation for a listing though, rather than serving as primary decision makers for buyers. They are leaning toward induction cooking appliances, he says, noting that it’s required in some of his San Francisco Bay Area jurisdictions. Nelson says induction is gaining interest in her Seattle market, but it’s not always available in the starter home price range.

LAST WORDS

“Builders should focus on young couples and first-time buyers because the demand is there and it is unmet,” French declares. *I strongly agree.* These young couples are the future of our society. Being able to own their first homes helps them start families, build wealth...and afford your products and services!

Hicks sums up their impact succinctly: Since they spend more than any other age group, “Millennials’ preferences will increasingly shape home trends and the home improvement industry as a whole.” *That is definitely worth noting!* ■



Jamie Gold, CKD, CAPS, MCCWC is an author, wellness design consultant and NKBA Chapter Presenter. Her third book, *Wellness by Design* (Simon & Schuster), published October 1, 2020.

Learn more about her Wellness Market presentations, books and consulting services at jamiiegold.net.

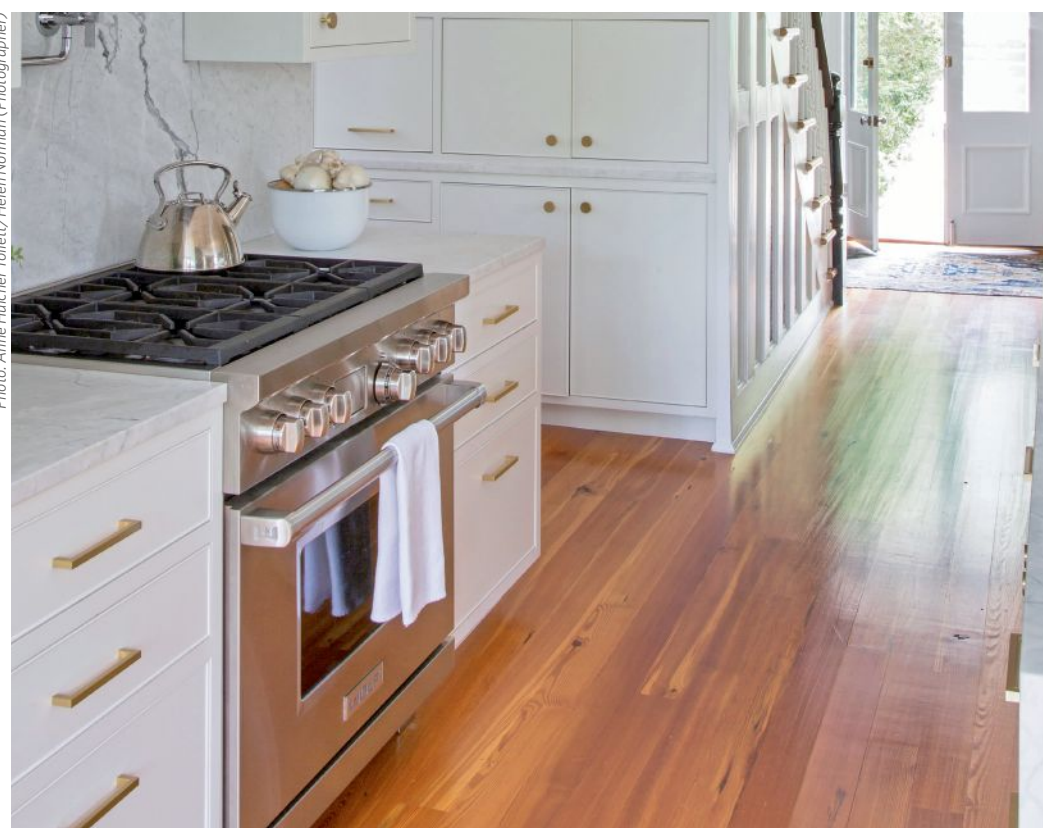


Photo: Anne Hulcher-Tollett/Helen Norman (Photographer)

Stainless steel appliances are a first-time owners’ wish list item.



Photos: Peak Visuals

Garage Transforms into Bright, Airy Kitchen

Natural light and neutral tones tie this new kitchen to the existing elements of the original home.

BALTIMORE, MD — In an era when altering the current space is often more beneficial and cost-efficient than starting over in a different home, looking beyond the existing interior walls for inspiration is becoming more commonplace. For Samantha Tarazon and her clients, the home's garage became the ideal spot for a brand new and fully functional kitchen.

Working with contractor Joy Remodeling, Tarazon, co-founder and principal of Ann Lane Home in Baltimore, MD, set out to not only expand the living and cooking space but create a cohesive flow between the old and new areas — both visually and structurally.

“We focused on maintaining architectural harmony — matching materials, rooflines and window proportions — while introducing contemporary updates that enhance functionality,” Tarazon notes.

Structural modifications were made to open up access between the two spaces, ensuring a

smooth transition. Energy efficiency, accessibility and long-term durability were key considerations throughout the renovation, she comments.

“The goal was to create a warm, timeless kitchen that felt naturally connected to the existing home — as if it had always been part of the original design,” she explains. “We aimed for a style that blended classic detailing with modern functionality: clean lines, natural textures and an inviting palette that balances sophistication with everyday comfort.”

The inspiration drew from the home's character, “layering in materials that felt authentic and enduring rather than trendy,” she continues. “We achieved this by focusing on balance and continuity.”

The neutral palette creates a light, open aesthetic that works with the rest of the home. Custom cabinetry in a warm-toned neutral on the perimeter sets the stage for a contrasting cranberry island, a piece requested by the homeowners to act as the center of the home's activities. The cabinetry's traditional profile is paired with

contemporary hardware and streamlined fixtures, bridging old and new. Taj Mahal quartzite countertops add a luxurious yet subtle natural stone element, with soft veining that adds movement and warmth. The glossy, creamy tile backsplash enhances the light and texture, while a custom beadboard ceiling brings an architectural element.

New openings and sightlines add an abundance of natural light, which heightens the sense of connection between the kitchen and adjoining spaces, states Tarazon. Layered lighting is provided via decorative pendants and sconces, with brass tones that echo the natural undertones of the quartzite.

The homeowners desired a kitchen that not only functioned well but also connected them more closely to their garden and outdoor spaces. To accommodate, large windows were placed to frame garden views and take advantage of the natural light throughout the day. Tarazon also oriented the cooking area toward the backyard, providing the homeowners with a view while preparing food. The natural wood tones and stone in the kitchen also echo the outside world and tie the room to the existing home. ■



The cooktop is specifically situated to take advantage of the garden views

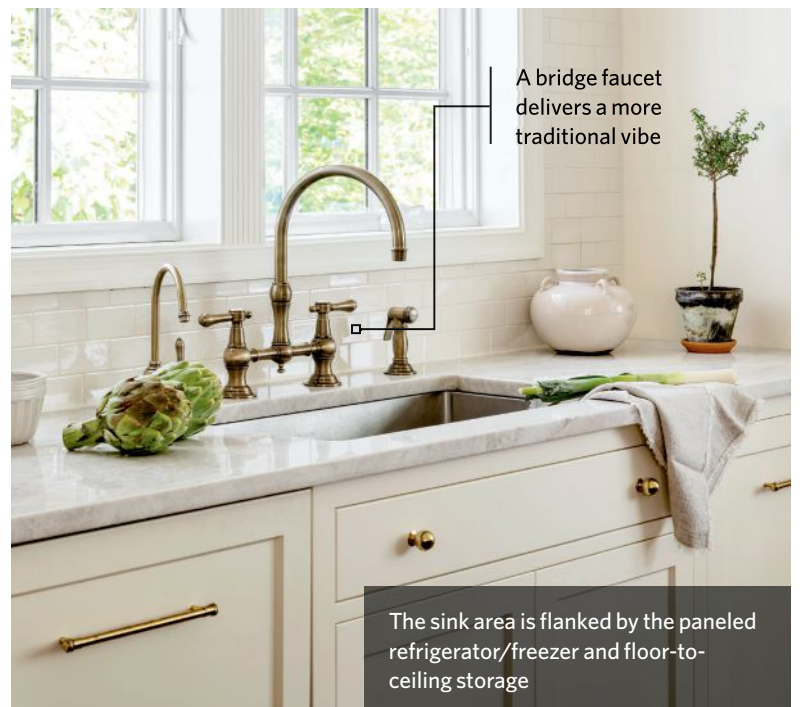
Traditional and modern hardware shine in a brass finish that highlights tones in the quartzite countertops



Glass-front upper cabinetry adds to the room's timeless aesthetic

The beadboard ceiling and wood flooring add architectural elements that tie the old and new spaces together

“The goal was to create a warm, timeless kitchen that felt naturally connected to the existing home – as if it had always been part of the original design.”



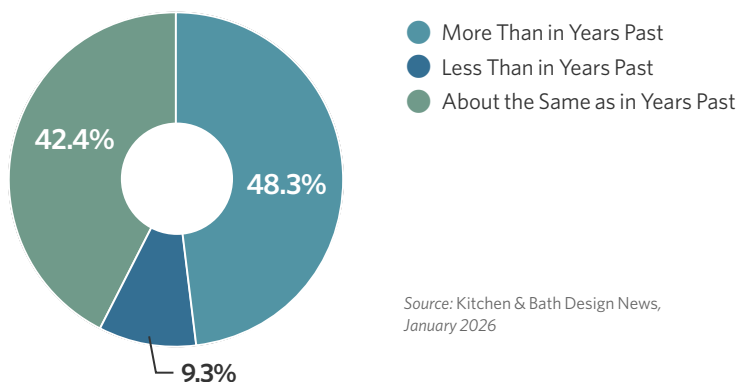
A bridge faucet delivers a more traditional vibe

The sink area is flanked by the paneled refrigerator/freezer and floor-to-ceiling storage

Tops in Their Class

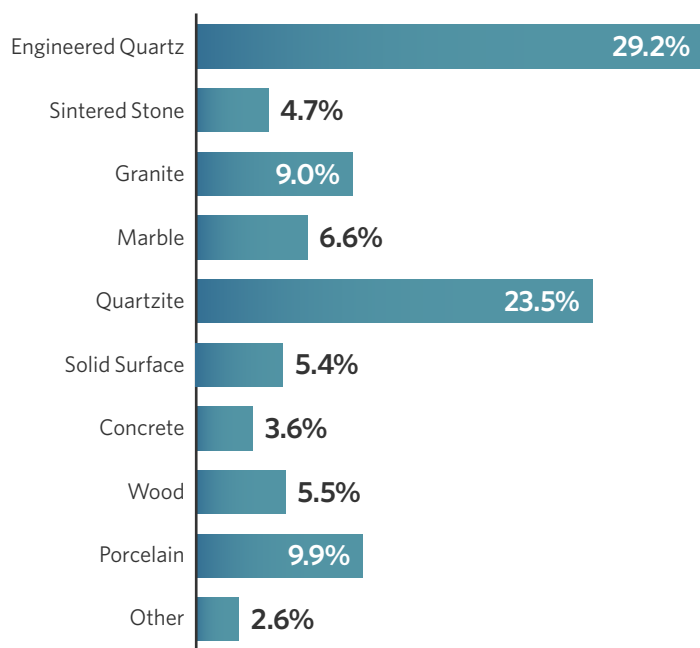
Countertops remain a major focal point of homeowner interest and investment in today’s new and remodeled kitchens, a *KBDN* survey reveals.

1. Willingness of Clients To Invest in Countertops



Source: Kitchen & Bath Design News, January 2026

2. Countertop Materials Most Growing in Demand



Source: Kitchen & Bath Design News, January 2026

CHICAGO — Today’s consumers continue to invest generously in the expansive array of materials, colors, patterns and finishes available for kitchen countertops – even in the face of inflationary pressures resulting in price increases for many of the most popular options.

At the same time, quartz and quartzite continue, as in recent years, to top the list of countertop materials growing most rapidly in demand, while consumers – impacted by economic, political and supply chain issues – are also increasingly basing purchase decisions, one way or the other, on whether countertop materials are made in America or elsewhere.

Those are among the key findings culled from a nationwide survey conducted by *Kitchen & Bath Design News* among 300+ kitchen design and remodeling professionals. *KBDN*’s annual countertop survey, fielded online in January, also reinforced the continued importance of countertops as both an aesthetic and functional component in today’s kitchens, serving not only in their traditional roles of food prep, dining and entertaining, but increasingly as spaces for myriad household activities.

According to the survey results, nearly half of those polled (48.3%) report that their clients are willing to invest more now on their kitchen countertops than in years past. In contrast, fewer than 10% said their clients are investing less now in countertops, and the balance cite investment levels that are about the same as in past years (see Figure 1).

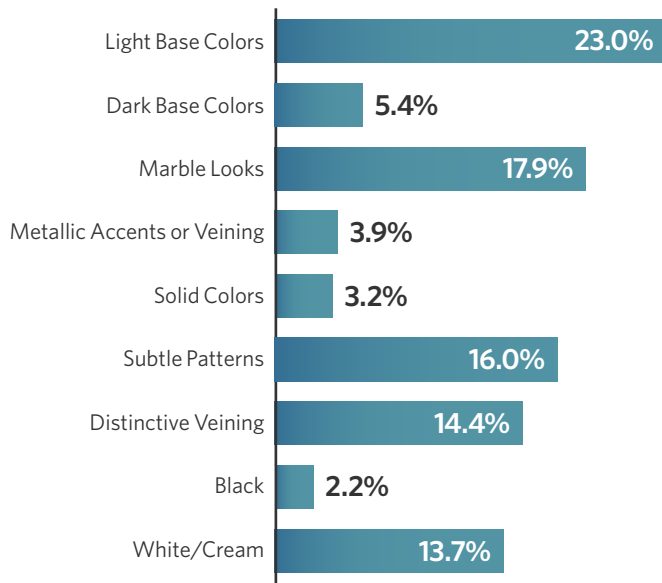
In a related finding, nearly half of the survey’s (46.3%) respondents told *KBDN* that, when choosing a countertop, cost is either only moderately important, slightly important or not important at all.

KBDN’s survey also found, as in recent years, that quartz and quartzite are far and away the countertop surfacing materials growing most in demand, followed by porcelain, granite, marble and an array of other options, including sintered stone, wood, concrete and a variety of solid-surface materials. Light base colors, marble looks and subtle finishes lead the list of colors and patterns that are currently popular among kitchen clients, survey respondents told *KBDN*. Ease of maintenance and durability are the countertop properties that are most in demand, surveyed design pros reported (see Figures 2 & 3).

Among the survey’s additional findings:

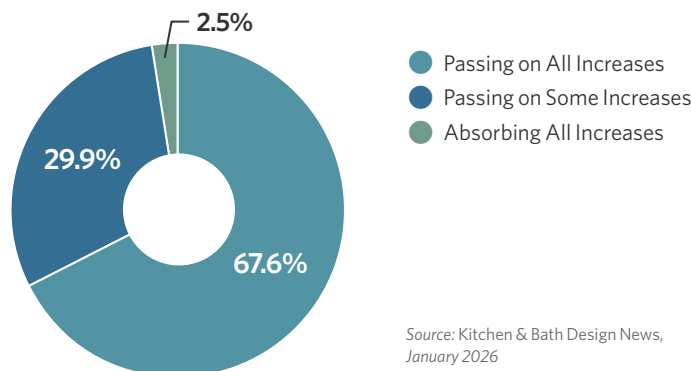
- The vast majority of surveyed design professionals report that they are passing countertop price increases on to their clients, rather than absorbing the price hikes themselves (see Figure 5).
- When it comes to whether a countertop material is produced in the U.S., slightly more than half of those surveyed (54.2%) told *KBDN* that the origin of the material is either “moderately,” “very” or “extremely” important to them. By comparison, roughly 46% said the question of “made in U.S.” is either “not at all” or only “slightly” important (see Figure 6). ■

3. Colors/Patterns Being Favored For Countertop Surfaces



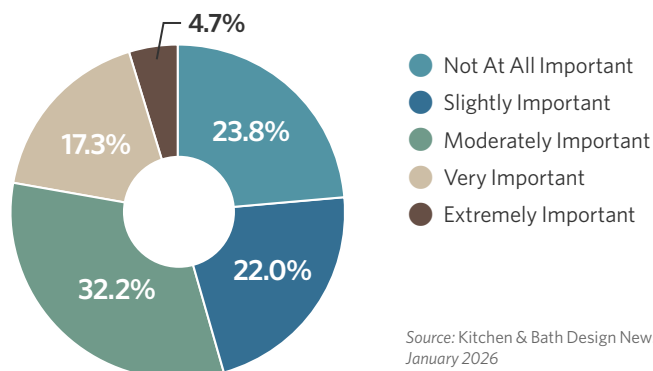
Source: Kitchen & Bath Design News, January 2026

4. Passing Countertop Cost Increases to Clients



Source: Kitchen & Bath Design News, January 2026

5. Importance to Clients Of 'Made in the U.S.'



Source: Kitchen & Bath Design News, January 2026

Natural Stone A Countertop Mainstay, Design Pros Report

CHICAGO — Natural stone – particularly granite, marble, quartzite and wood – continues to be a mainstay among the expansive array of countertop materials currently finding applications in today’s remodeled kitchen, design professionals are telling *Kitchen & Bath Design News*.

According to *KBDN*’s annual countertop survey, natural stone accounts for nearly half of the myriad countertop materials requested by kitchen consumers and specified by design firms.

“The natural stone market is still very strong,” one designer told *KBDN*. “We will always steer clients toward natural products, since natural stone’s three-dimensional appearance cannot be duplicated in man-made products.”

“Natural stone sales continue to increase year over year,” said another. “Full-height splashes are also increasing year over year.”

Additional comments regarding the use of natural stone include the following:

- “We have been trying really hard to go back to natural stones. We make sure to educate the client ahead of time on maintenance involved with the surfaces, as well as the alternative to these options. We’ve been back to using a lot of granite, marble and quartzite.”
- “Although clients desire low maintenance and high durability, we prefer real marble, quartzite, granite, etc. over the faux-silica-based products. Although they have a place in the market for being durable, faux stones do not have the look and feel of real stone – and over time they wind up looking ‘fake’ as newer/better faux stones emerge.”
- “I do a lot of quartz for my clients with young children, but I am also finding a lot of people who want real stone are moving towards quartzite and are okay with the maintenance.”
- “Quartzite and semi-precious stone have long been favored by high-end clients, but in the mid-range I’d say quartzite is a new idea. They know granite and quartz, and the design process usually includes some education. For families, maintenance and ease of cleaning are always a concern. Clients don’t want to have to seal their stone.”
- “My customers are looking for more dramatic countertops than in years past. They’re tired of white/gray looks and want more patterning and colors. This trend is encouraging us to find marble and quartzite, which give my customers the dramatic look they’re craving.”
- “I’ve been designing and installing butcherblock countertops and baker racks. Clients want to enjoy what they see – like the contrasting veins, natural wood or a nice display of clean space to enjoy working on.”
- “We are always trying to find materials that bring color and texture together as a cohesive blending of color palettes. Price is not as important as it is to be able to provide a beautiful solution.”
- “Countertops today are all about that effortless, natural look without the upkeep. I see more requests for warmer, earthier neutrals like sandy beiges and creamy tones with gentle veining in matte, honed or leather finish.”

Countertops to Count On

Countertops are some of the hardest working surfaces in a kitchen. This collection of projects highlights some materials that are not only dependable, but are beautiful, too.

BY KIM BERNDTSON

A lot is asked of kitchen countertops. Homeowners need to navigate all sorts of kitchen hazards that can wreak havoc on them...everything from acidic foods like lemon juice and tomato sauces, to richly colored liquids like red wine, and even sharp knives and heat, to name a few. And, those countertops have to look good, too.

Fortunately, countertops are available in a variety of materials, colors, patterns and textures, which give them the ability to seamlessly function in a multitude of situations, all while being beautiful at the same time.

As a supplement to this month's Countertops & Surfacing Survey, *KBDN* asked designers to share projects that showcase a variety of countertop choices that enhance the aesthetics and function of kitchens.



Photos: Lumen Creative Co.

NATURAL STONE - QUARTZITE

ELIZABETH VALKOVICS, *founder/creative director*
Batten Court Design - Pinehurst, NC
Raggio Di Luna quartzite (island, perimeter)

Finding just the right natural stone to use as a kitchen countertop isn't always an easy undertaking. And when it's your own personal kitchen, it can be even more daunting.

"I never thought I would be my most difficult client," Valkovics quips. "I wanted a natural stone that was really special. It had to be equal parts striking, as well as calming."

With a very personal list of requirements, she also knew she had to be willing to wait for the perfect slab. In fact, during the design phase, she created multiple renderings as she waited for just the right stone. Finally, it presented itself...a Raggio Di Luna quartzite that blends the durability she needed with the aesthetics she wanted.

"We cook in the kitchen two to three times a day," she says. "It takes a beating, but it still needs to feel warm, inviting and undeniably luxurious."

Visually, the quartzite has just enough green to complement the lush vegetation of the landscape while supporting the British-inspired vibe of the kitchen, which nods to her husband's Yorkshire heritage.

"Green is a really bold decision," she stresses. "It's not for everybody, but I adore green. Searching for stone is similar to looking for your wedding dress...when you find it, you know it...and you get goosebumps!"

The stone's veining also ties in with the dark cabinetry and the ventilation hood surround painted with Portola Paints' Roman Clay. Valkovics showcased the veining with a waterfall edge detail on the island and a backsplash with a ledge on the kitchen's perimeter.

"I was never going to have an island without a waterfall edge," she indicates. "It offers a modern touch, and we can see the island as we come into the house from the garage and when we sit in the dining room.

"The stone is also equally stunning as the backsplash," she continues. "Being able to see it on a vertical elevation makes it stand out so it becomes a feature. Adding the shelf gives me an opportunity to make the kitchen feel more approachable, humble, curated and livable. It was just the touch we needed."





Photos: Charlotte Lea Photography

NATURAL STONE - GRANITE

ABBIE NABER, principal designer
A. Naber Design - Cardiff-by-the-Sea, CA
Costa Esmeralda granite (island)
Cosentino Silestone White Zeus quartz (perimeters)

Abbie Naber appreciates that granite is a very durable, cost-effective choice for kitchen countertops. However, she is sometimes hesitant to use it given its somewhat tarnished history in the design world.

"Granite can feel dated, so I don't use it a lot," she says. "But I also think it gets a bit of a bad rap from the 1990s and 2000s. There are some granites, especially those in the brown color family, that still feel outdated, but there are definitely hidden gems, such as some black granites and the Costa Esmeralda that we used on the island in this kitchen. This beautiful green granite definitely hits a sweet spot where it looks fresh and unique, yet is still durable and cost effective. It's always a bonus when we find a surface that people aren't afraid to use. This granite checks all the boxes!"

Naber showcased the Costa Esmeralda in a waterfall edge that turns the island into a focal point and a conversation starter for guests.

"The kitchen is such a nucleus to the house," she relates. "We were able to remove a wall so as soon as people walk in the front door, they see that waterfall edge. It's a pretty special detail."

She also honed the natural stone, which gives it a more tactile, organic sense that makes it feel more updated as well as more usable, especially in warm color palettes such as the one featured in this kitchen.

"How granite is used makes a difference," she indicates. "When it's honed or leathered, depending on the color, it can be a perfect partner for 'earthier' spaces."

In support, Naber included cabinetry painted in a similar green hue with warm yellow undertones that complement tones in the



granite. She accented those cabinets with a 'frame' of white oak that matches the appliance panels, floating shelves and the face of the island, which is also framed with white oak.

Selecting Silestone's White Zeus quartz for the perimeter countertops, which is extended into a mid-height backsplash, maintains a focus on the island.

"This quartz is plain white, without any veining," Naber explains. "I wanted the perimeter countertops to take a backseat so the island could shine."



NATURAL STONE - MARBLE

KELLY RUGGERI, owner/principal designer
 Kelly Ruggeri Design - Ambler, PA
 Calacatta Bettogli marble (island, perimeter)

This kitchen renovation was designed with an emphasis on natural materials and a classic design style. In support, Ruggeri grounded the space with shaker-style white painted cabinetry and a walnut island, the latter of which is finished with a clear stain to preserve its pure beauty. A sculptural ventilation hood showcases a combination of both finishes. However, the pièce de résistance is the Calacatta Bettogli marble countertops and backsplash behind the range. The designer also carried the marble into the adjacent butler's pantry.

"We wanted the countertops to complement the cabinetry," she relates. "Our clients knew they wanted marble. They understand that it does require some maintenance, but they are willing to take that on because they have an appreciation for it and how it can elevate a space.

"As we walked the stone yard, we all fell in love with this Calacatta Bettogli," she continues. "The slabs we selected have a warm veining pattern with some beautiful flecks of gold. They are more unique than a typical marble."

Using it for the island as well as the perimeter promotes continuity.

"With two different cabinetry finishes we felt that bringing in a second countertop material would feel like 'too much,' especially with the drama of the marble's veining pattern," she says.

However, that same dramatic veining pattern makes the marble an ideal choice as the backsplash behind the range, where Ruggeri further emphasized its importance by giving it a scalloped detail that sweeps from the base of the wall cabinet to the base of the ventilation hood.

"We knew early on in the design process that the range wall was going to make a visual statement," Ruggeri relates. "We wanted to draw attention to the beautiful range and ventilation hood so we used the Calacatta Bettogli as the backsplash. The pretty scalloped detail isn't overly complicated. It's just enough detail to highlight the area and give it a finished look."



Photos: Meghan Balcom Photography





Photos: Christy Kosnic

METAL - STAINLESS STEEL

CATHLEEN GRUVER, *lead interior designer*
Gruver Cooley - Purcellville, VA
Stainless steel (island)
Cosentino Dekton Bromo sintered stone (perimeter)

Cathleen Gruver's clients often work with her to gain insight into new ideas, and to challenge themselves to move beyond their own original thoughts. Such was the case with these homeowners.

"They have an historic home where we built an addition as part of its renovation," she relates. "We wanted to find materials and design elements to balance the old with the new, while also trying to tie in some of their connection to Texas."

The countertop selections in the kitchen play perfectly into that design goal, where Gruver included stainless steel for the island top and Cosentino's Dekton Bromo sintered stone for the perimeter. Both materials are durable and easy to maintain, which are important considerations for the couple who like to entertain.

"We wanted to include a stainless steel workstation sink in the island," she relates. "To create a seamless look in the kitchen, it made sense to have a stainless steel countertop so everything blends in and there isn't a focus on a big sink in the middle of the island. Stainless steel also ties into the contemporary look they wanted. And although it can scratch, it takes heat very well."

To promote continuity and easy cleaning within the kitchen, Gruver repeated stainless steel as the backsplash behind the range.

"They loved the idea of using Texas limestone on the cooking wall because it offers a nod to their past," she explains, noting that it reminds them of her Texas heritage and of the time they spent living in San Antonio. "But having rocks behind the range would have been a nightmare to keep clean. Also, using stainless steel as the backsplash pulls the eye around the room, making everything feel more harmonious."



To further support the natural, organic vibe established by the limestone, Gruver chose Dekton Bromo sintered stone for the perimeter worktop surface. Inspired by slate, its dark gray shade and matte finish create an effortless transition between the countertop and wall. And, like stainless steel, the material is very durable.

"It is a great complement to the stainless steel and limestone," Gruver explains. "If we would have used stainless steel for all the countertops, it would have been a harsher transition to the limestone wall. The sintered stone lets that back wall 'speak' for itself."



PORCELAIN

MARCELLE JENAY TIMONEN,
co-owner/principal designer
Haus of Rowe Interiors - MN-based
Moderno Porcelain Works Extreme Calacatta
(island, perimeter)

Organic, elevated and quietly luxurious sums up the vision that Marcelle Jenay Timonen’s clients had for their kitchen.

“They wanted the space to feel warm and grounded, yet refined,” she says. “They wanted a kitchen that felt calm, intentional and seamlessly connected to the rest of the home.”

That warmth started with a foundation of white oak cabinetry with additional defining characteristics supported via clean lines and a restrained palette that is complemented by the abundant use of Moderno Porcelain Works porcelain as the countertop surfaces throughout the kitchen. Timonen also carried it seamlessly into the scullery. Sited just off of the kitchen, this workhorse space extends the functionality of the kitchen while maintaining a cohesive design language.

Visually, the Calacatta Extreme colorway features a soft, stone-inspired surface with subtle movement, offering the warmth and character of natural stone while providing exceptional durability for daily living.

“The porcelain countertops play a key role in balancing beauty and performance,” Timonen relates. “Their subtle veining and natural stone appearance complement the white oak cabinetry beautifully, enhancing the organic feel of the space. At the same time, porcelain’s durability allows the kitchen to function effortlessly for a busy family. It’s that blend of form and function that makes the space feel truly special.”

Finished with a polished surface, the porcelain softly reflects light and adds depth and refinement without feeling overly glossy.

“It elevates the space while remaining timeless and highly functional, which is ideal for a hardworking kitchen and scullery,” she says.



Photos: Chelsie Lopez

Around the kitchen’s perimeter, Timonen extended the porcelain as the backsplash behind a secondary sink as well as behind the range where she incorporated a shallow shelf that her clients can use for display or to keep cooking supplies close at hand.

One of the kitchen’s two islands features dramatic waterfall edges that showcase the porcelain’s veining pattern and provides plenty of seating for the family as well as for friends. A second island, which is also topped with the porcelain, includes a 6’ Galley workstation sink with dual faucets to support everyday use and entertaining. Hidden storage at the back allows the space to remain visually calm and uncluttered.

QUARTZ

JENNI JACOBS, *designer*

McGuire + Co. Kitchen & Bath - Wakefield, MA

Emerstone Bellissima quartz (island, perimeter)

Raging River Counterworks butcher block (island insert)

Quartz is a beloved surface selection for many of Jenni Jacobs' clients who appreciate that several of its patterns resemble natural stone without the care requirements associated with it.

"We work with a lot of clients who have young kids, and who are hardworking cooks in the kitchen," she says. "They like the foolproof nature of quartz. And, from a convenience factor, it's easier to select quartz because the manufacturing process creates consistency between slabs. You don't have to go from stone yard to stone yard to look at individual slabs that are each unique."

Of those benefits, these clients, who have kids in elementary school, were particularly drawn to the durability of quartz, which they used throughout their renovated kitchen. They also liked that the soft gray color and cloudy pattern of Emerstone Bellissima quartz offer a subtle nod to concrete, which supports an industrial, modern vibe they were seeking for their mid-century modern home.

"This countertop is definitely more unique than most since it isn't a white Carrara marble-look quartz or a stark white quartz," she says. "Its color is still light and it has a soft pattern that offers some dimension."

These clients are also big cooks who previously had a freestanding/rolling butcher block island they used as a chopping block. They wanted a more permanent wood cutting surface, so Jacobs incorporated a 2"-thick cherry end-grain butcher block from Raging River Counterworks into the island.

"With the sink in the island, we didn't want the entire countertop to be wood, so we carved out a section of the island for the butcher block to butt up against the quartz," she relates. "It was designed to be intentionally thicker than the stone and to extend beyond the stone on either side of the island for greater definition and dimension."

"The natural cherry wood also feels like teak, and it fits very well with the mid-century aesthetic," she continues. "Both the quartz and butcher block aren't too 'loud' and they help elevate the entire space to a level that feels very bespoke to this home and this family."



Photos: Regina Mallory Photography



SINTERED STONE

KATE DICKSON, *principal/creative director*
The Dickson Design Group - Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Cosentino Dekton Lucid sintered stone (island, perimeter)

With a toddler and a baby on the way, this young couple needed their kitchen to work for them for many years to come.

“They wanted a kitchen that wasn’t going to date itself or be too trendy,” says Dickson. “They wanted it to be warm, modern and timeless...and grow with their family.”

To accommodate, the designer expanded the kitchen into the previous dining room and created more areas for the family to function without being on top of each other. For example, the island includes seating and an adjacent bar serves as a place to fill a cup of coffee or water bottle.

Both areas are well-appointed with warm walnut cabinetry, painted appliance panels and durable work surfaces such as the Cosentino Dekton sintered stone countertops and backsplashes. The marble-look Lucid colorway features a soft cream foundation with veining that includes a mix of golden and blue tones amidst various other shades, reflections and colors.

“When they walk in their front door, the island is the first thing they see,” she explains. “It is the centerpiece of the space, and it is visible from every angle, so they wanted it to be a showstopper. This slab has soft veining that adds elegance, yet it is impactful enough to give some ‘wow,’ without being overpowering.”

Although Dickson expanded the kitchen, it is still a relatively small space. As such, extending the countertop material as the backsplashes for both the kitchen perimeter and bar – where the material stretches all the way to the ceiling – provides uniformity and consistency.



Photos: Valerie Wilcox Photography

“There is less of a visual break, so the eye continues to flow through the space more easily,” she explains. “And because the backsplashes are slabs, there aren’t any grout lines like there would be with tile.”

The sintered stone’s polished finish is also a benefit for the petite room.

“The kitchen only gets light at certain times of the day, so we wanted to make sure there was as much lighting bouncing around the room as possible,” Dickson says. “And, the extra shine gives it a bit more glam!”

SINTERED STONE

EB MIN, owner/principal designer
Min Design - San Francisco, CA
Lapitec Nero Anthracite sintered stone
(island and perimeter)

Given this kitchen's relatively restrained color palette of dark and light with touches of wood, Min had to carefully curate each representative element within the space.

"The focus on this apartment is the daylight and our clients' own artwork, books and collectibles," she says, noting that with its open concept design, the kitchen, dining area and living space all flow into each other. "They really wanted to bring all of that to the foreground, so we kept the palette amongst the spaces pretty simple."

However, simplicity needn't lack interest, so Min focused on emphasizing contrast with a dark porcelain tile backsplash and Lapitec Nero Anthracite sintered stone countertops against the white cabinetry and walls.

"We could have designed an all-white kitchen, which could have been beautiful," she relates, "but these clients didn't envision white cabinetry and white countertops. They wanted more contrast."

To keep the contrast from being too severe, Min selected a colorway that was dark, but not completely black.

"The countertops are very dark gray," she explains. "They are almost black, but I think there is something special about them not being the blackest black. The gray isn't a solid, monolithic color, either. It does have some movement and life to it."

Min increased the percentage of dark tones in the space by incorporating waterfall edges on each end of the island, which help

to differentiate it more completely from its white surroundings.

"There is a lot of white in the kitchen, so having the dark waterfall edges - rather than only as the top surface - sets the island apart and makes it feel like it is a separate object," she says.

As well, the sintered stone's satin finish minimizes glare from the abundant ambient light that flows into the space. It also adds 'softness' and texture, the latter of which becomes more important with a more restrained color palette.

"When a surface is polished it can feel 'cold' and slick, and a bit commercial," she relates. "We preferred this satin finish because it feels more like a honed natural stone. It has a tactile feeling so when you touch it it feels much more sensory, with a bit of 'tooth' so your hand lingers as you brush it across the surface." ■



Photos: Brooke Holm





Photos: Peter Rymwid

Ease of maintenance was a top concern for this hard-working summer home kitchen designed by Sharon Sherman.

Inspired Getaways

From vacation homes to investment properties, second homes offer unique opportunities for personalization.

BY AUTUMN MCGARR

These days, in residential design there's a great deal of focus on the "forever home" – that one and only landing place that, ideally, should accommodate its occupants through all the seasons of their lives. But not everyone calls just one place home. For a fortunate few, the concept of home might also encompass a seasonal abode elsewhere, whether it be a private, luxurious vacation spot, a shared gathering space for family and friends, or a solitary woodland retreat.

Kitchen and bath designers working in these second homes may encounter a host of unique client requests and challenges. Often, square footage is at a premium, necessitating some creative space-saving and storage solutions. In other instances, the kitchens and baths of vacation homes need to be able to handle a heavier load of friends and family than the average home. This month, *KBDN* chatted with a few designers who have helped their clients create their dream home-away-from-home.

HERE AND THERE

For Sharon Sherman's expat clients, the home nestled among the rolling hills and woods of northern New Jersey served as both a landing place for summers spent stateside and a gathering spot for their large family. Sherman, ASID, CKD, CID, owner and principal designer of Thyme and Place Design in Wyckoff, NJ, took on the challenge of remodeling the kitchen in her clients' scenic second home, along with the dining room and several bathrooms.

"Since the property was very heavily treed and shaded, we needed a light and bright feeling to all of the spaces," Sherman says. "The client was also a natural light aficionado, so it was all about the windows and not so much about artificial lighting. That can be a tricky situation, but by using bright colors, sparse window treatments, strategically placed task lighting with undercabinet lights, and glass door accents, we were able to keep a light-filled feeling."



■ Sherman utilized airy and bright finishes, along with some strategic task lighting, to allow natural light to be the star of the space.

■ The muted veining on the quartz countertops supports the platinum-colored subway tile backsplash.

Above all, the kitchen needed to be able to keep up with the cheerful chaos of summertime fun. “The theme of the kitchen is entertaining, and this space is truly built for that mission,” Sherman notes. To accommodate the homeowner’s love of baking – and distinct distaste for large oven doors – Sherman selected an easily accessible French door wall oven. With the family often engaged in different outdoor activities such as hiking and lounging poolside, meal schedules are frequently unpredictable or staggered, and a warming drawer provides a handy solution.

Ease of cleaning and upkeep was another paramount concern for such a high-traffic kitchen. “There are very few floor coverings in the home due to allergy sufferers. All of the materials in the home had to be low maintenance and easy to spot spills and dust on,” Sherman says, pointing to the softly patterned quartz countertops as an example. Stainless steel features prominently as a finish across the appliances, range hood and cabinet hardware.

The process of creating the bright and highly functional new kitchen wasn’t without its challenges, not the least of which was timing: the clients were living abroad and wanted the home ready by the time they arrived for summer. “All of the selections were done while the client was halfway across the world,” Sherman explains. “Communication was key throughout the project.”

PART-TIME CITY SLICKERS

In preparation for the next phase of their lives as empty nesters, Cynthia Masters’ clients sold the family home and purchased a condo in a new-construction downtown Greenville, SC high rise. They planned to split their time between this new pied-a-terre and their lake house, located an hour from the city. “They wanted to be within walking distance to all the great dining and entertainment the city has to offer,” explains Masters, founder and creative director of interior design firm Panageries in Greenville, SC. “They are very social and wanted this to be a place to entertain their adult friends.”

According to Masters, because the building was brand new, the unit was “an empty shell” when she began the whole-home project, allowing her to start with an empty canvas and endless possibilities. Settling on an overarching aesthetic for the design, however, required a bit of mediation: “The lobby and public spaces are contemporary, and I felt creating something very traditional would feel out of place. The wife wholeheartedly agreed, but it was a tougher sell for the husband as his tastes lean very traditional,” she explains. “We satisfied both with a soft modern aesthetic.”



Kelly Blackmon for Emily Followill Photography

■ This downtown condo kitchen by Cynthia Masters nods to its urban setting with custom iron upper cabinets with frosted glass inserts.



❏ A cluster of five hand-blown glass pendant lights above the island deliver texture without distracting from the cabinets and hood.

❏ A door disguised as cabinetry between the wall ovens and fridge leads to a mixed use laundry, pantry and storage room.



Photos: Kelly Blackmon for Emily Followill Photography

In particular, storage was one of the main concerns for the kitchen design, as the condo was substantially smaller than the couple's former home and the kitchen measured only 366 square feet. "We spent a lot of time on the front-end inventorying and measuring the items they would need, to ensure everything had a place," says Masters. "There is a door camouflaged as cabinetry between the wall ovens and fridge that leads to a mixed use space and serves as a laundry, pantry and storage room for appliances such as the toaster, Vitamix, mixer, etc. This helps provide for their much-needed storage, while keeping clutter out of view."

A palette of warm neutrals and a specific shade of blue beloved by the wife ("a cross between indigo and peacock"), as well as abundant texture, informed Masters' selections for the new kitchen. "Our selections began with the flooring, since that would flow throughout almost every room in the residence. We chose a lovely engineered wide plank European white oak. It has wonderful character and rich gray tones with notes of cognac, which keep it from getting too cool," she says. (This flooring can be glimpsed in another project that has been featured in *KBDN* – in fact, the powder room for this upfit took home Bronze in the Best Powder Room category of the 2025 Kitchen & Bath Design Awards!)

The alder base and wall cabinetry is stained in a warm honey hue that is echoed in the dropped header. Indigo-veined White Macubus quartzite is featured on the counters, backsplash and range hood. Custom iron upper cabinets with frosted glass inserts serve as a nod to the building's urban surroundings, while cabinet hardware in Dark Bronze from Ashley Norton "marries beautifully with the metal cabinets and adds depth to the space." Five hand-blown seeded glass pendants hang from the header, providing additional texture without crowding the upper cabinetry and hood.

FLEXIBLE AND FLAWLESS

Two years after Megan Siason worked on her clients' primary home, the property across the street – a huge lot with a tiny house that had seen better days – went up for sale. The clients, who had purchased their home mainly because of its gorgeous views, did not want to risk losing their panoramic vista to a potential new, taller build.

"With that being the main goal, the use of the new space was somewhat undecided as project progress was being made," shares Siason, CKBD, owner and interior designer at m studio interior design in Seal Beach, CA. "Initially, they were thinking of selling the home and went back and forth from that to renting it out as either a short- or long-term rental to professionals."

The new two-level structure measures approximately 5,000 square feet, with a main home on the upper level and a downstairs junior unit accessible from the exterior. "A few adjustments were made during construction to give the clients some flexibility of having three total close-off points if they wanted to rent out three separate spaces, or just the upstairs and downstairs," Siason explains.

With the space's use uncertain, Siason was faced with the additional challenge of creating a design that would be unique and highly functional, with finishes that offer a measure of universal appeal. "Since this was not their primary home, and also since we were assuming this place would be either rented or sold, we were incredibly mindful of the material costs and durability and longevity of finish selections," she says. "I presented a palette that embraced more neutral tones throughout, finding a balance of contrasting colors for depth that not only felt appropriate for a coastal location but performed well for any household situation – families, pets, young professionals, etc. Some of the materials include quartz countertops, porcelain tile flooring and TFL cabinetry."



Photos: Natalia Robert Photo

- 📌 Megan Siason's clients purchased the property across the street to avoid potentially losing their exquisite view.
- 📌 The new space had to be universally appealing but with a coastal flavor, as the owners were uncertain of its future use.

(VACATION) HOME ON THE RANGE

A cozy bungalow is just one of three residences designed by Ginger Rabe, MSD, M-Arch, on a Carlsbad, CA property presided over by a century-old pine tree.

"This vacation home exists because of a story that began decades ago," says the owner of Ginger Rabe Designs, LLC in Carlsbad, CA. "As a child, the client walked past this property on her way to school, always drawn to the land, the home, and especially the tree. Years later, with her twins grown, she and her husband purchased the entire property to preserve it, saving the tree and the land from redevelopment and transforming it into a place others could enjoy for generations."

Rabe's clients had a vision of a vacation retreat full of light and personality, but the little bungalow's interior was dark and awkward despite its charming barn-like exterior. A family of equestrians, the clients wanted to "honor the character of the original ranch-style property while embracing a more modern, elevated interior," Rabe explains.

To create an open and inviting kitchen on such a small scale, Rabe leveraged the capabilities of her own cabinet shop to craft custom cabinetry with "meticulous grain matching by Jason, our finish carpenter, ensuring a continuous and intentional flow throughout the space." She adds, "The client wanted a light wood that was natural, and we picked each piece of wood by hand and made sure the grain flowed seamlessly." She also sourced and repurposed a wood beam to accent the custom sculptural plaster hood, which serves as a focal point in the space. A white cast-iron Kohler apron-front sink lends a sense of timelessness to the design.

Rabe points to another space in the bungalow, the bathroom, as one of the client's favorite rooms. It's "a moody, calming retreat designed to evoke serenity," with a wall covering that mimics the night sky opposite handcrafted Japanese tiles from European Tile. A custom walnut vanity by Rabe's own GR Studio serves as a piece of functional art, topped by a custom curved and backlit mirror. ■



Photos: Preview First Photography



- 📌 Ginger Rabe sourced a reclaimed wood beam to accent the focal point plaster hood in this vacation bungalow's kitchen.
- 📌 A wall covering evoking the night sky and a custom walnut vanity from Rabe's cabinet shop pack a punch in a small space.

Practical Luxury

Cooking appliance trends center around flexibility, convenience, efficiency and quality performance.

BY ELIZABETH RICHARDS

COOKING IS A highly personal experience with widely varied preferences. Thus, cooking appliances must offer elevated function and versatility, along with time-saving features and attention to sustainability.

“High-quality, design-forward, professional features are sought after as consumers want to invest in appliances that outlast design trends that seem to move faster with each passing year,” stresses Mattia Sala, product manager at SMEG US, based in New York, NY.

“We’re seeing a continued interest in entertaining and cooking at home, preparing nostalgic meals and comfort foods, as well as exploration with bolder flavors and global cuisines,” he adds. “This translates to a desire for features that offer a wide array of cooking temperatures for precision, a variety of cooking modes that make mastering recipes easier, and surfaces that are easy to clean.”

“The biggest trends we’re seeing are driven by practical benefits rather than reinvention,” remarks Grace Dolan, senior v.p. of Montvale, NJ-based Sharp Electronics’ consumer business. “Consumers continue to prioritize speed, versatility and convenience. They want cooking appliances that simply work while saving time and money. The next phase of kitchen innovation isn’t about more features; it’s about greater relevance. The focus has shifted to appliances that adapt to real life, including smaller spaces and evolving household dynamics.”



Dacor's 30" Induction Range can bake multiple dishes simultaneously with its Dual Four-Part Pure Convection System. The range features Anti-Scratch Matte Glass, Dual Noise Cancellation technology, LCD Control Panel with SmartThings Wi-Fi connectivity and Air Fry and Air Sous Vide modes. dacor.com/us



KitchenAid induction ovens are available in three finishes – Juniper, a nature-inspired neutral that shifts between green and blue; Black Ore, a deep Matte Black, and Stainless Steel. The handle and knob hardware is available in Brass, Bronze, Black Ore and Stainless Steel. kitchenaid.com



The **FOTILE** FreshBake Range is equipped with a catalysis deodorizing system that neutralizes lingering smells and grease smoke, states the firm. It includes a 5-burner cooktop, as well as a smoke management system that automatically activates the range hood when the cooktop is in use. us.fotileglobal.com



Crafted with 304 stainless steel, the Quest Grill from **Summerset Grills** includes 18,000 BTU U-tube burners and a 13,000 BTU angled infrared back burner. It comes equipped with heat zone separators, a drop-in griddle plate and a rotisserie kit, as well as interior and exterior lighting. summersetgrills.com

Appliances that heighten performance while providing an opulent feel are on the rise. “Most trends we’re seeing are evolutions rather than complete shifts,” offers Matt Abbruzzese, director of marketing at Verona Appliances, imported by EuroChef LLC, in Edgewater, NY. “Homeowners continue to prioritize performance upgrades during renovations, but with a growing emphasis on practical luxury: appliances that feel elevated and design-forward while remaining accessible and renovation-friendly.”

Other top trends include increased interest in induction cooking, timeless finishes, and connectivity and other technology that makes a true difference. So say manufacturers surveyed by *Kitchen & Bath Design News*.

HIGH-PERFORMANCE VERSATILITY

Manufacturers agree that cooking appliances that deliver flexibility and convenience are top demands in cooking appliances, but features must maintain top performance standards. Quality appliances that last are the expectation.

“High efficiency and ease-of-use are must haves when choosing an appliance – purposeful innovation that will offer more convenience in your kitchen,” says Dirk Sappok, director of category management, kitchen appliances, for Princeton, NJ-based Miele’s North American Region.

“The historical ‘kitchen work triangle’ is becoming a thing of the past. It’s all about flexibility and work zones based on your lifestyle and unique



The **Miele** 36" Induction Range with M Touch features two PowerFlex Zones and one large round induction zone. The Wireless Precision Probe allows for precise cooking temperature, while the Moisture Plus feature increases humidity for optimal cooking and baking results, the company states. mieleusa.com



Designed with top-mounted controls, **Fire Magic's** new Echelon Drop-In Grill from **RH Peterson** is designed to drop into an island or countertop cutout. The grill is available with or without a hood, offering flexible options to match the look and function of any outdoor space, states the firm. firemagicgrills.com



This 18" ceramic Lynx Kamado Grill, the latest product in **Lynx Grills'** charcoal cooking platform, features 250 square inches of cooking surface, 3-tier Stainless Steel racks, Ceramic Deflector Plates and a double-thick gasket. It is available in two finishes - Gloss Black and Matte Gray. lynxgrills.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



Crafted from marine-grade 316 stainless steel, the **Emberhaus** Fire Oven is a charcoal-cooking appliance engineered for integration into custom outdoor kitchens. It features intuitive Emberflow air controls and delivers oven-level heat for grilling, roasting, baking and smoking in a single built-in-ready unit. emberhaus.com



Verona's Prima Series 36" Dual Fuel Range has five sealed SABAF burners that provide up to 57,000 BTUs across several cooking zones, covered with continuous cast-iron grates. A 5.0-cu.-ft. oven with European convection and dual fans ensure consistent results, states the company. veronaappliances.com



The **SMEG** 30" Combi Steam Oven features a 4" touchscreen TFT display that allows for one-touch operations, including adjustment of settings and temperature as well as selecting from over 50 automatic recipes and 12-15 cooking functions. It is available in a Neptune Gray finish or Stainless Steel. smegstore.us



The **Hisense** stainless steel freestanding electric range is a 5.8-cu.-ft. true convection oven. Five cooktop elements range from a rapid 3300W power boil to a 100W simmer, and built-in modes include air fry, pizza bake, dehydrate, bread proof, frozen bake and more. It has self-clean and steam-clean options. hisense-usa.com

needs," explains Jordan DeCosmo, senior brand manager at JennAir in Benton Harbor, MI.

"What this means is freedom in kitchen design. No longer are you constrained to having the refrigerator, sink and cooktop all operating within the triangle," she continues. "We've also seen the need for tech experiences and features that enhance cooking but are simple and don't detract from the experience."

With so many ways to prepare food, and a desire for appliances that cater to the unique lifestyle of the user, cooking appliances must be versatile and flexible.

Abbruzzese notes that demand is strongest for features that deliver flexibility and everyday usability, including large-capacity ovens, high-powered burners with precise controls, multi-function cooking, especially air frying, and sizing that allows for easy replacement during renovations. "Designers and homeowners alike are gravitating toward appliances that offer professional-style performance without added complexity," he says.

"Versatility is the top priority," Abbruzzese adds. "Buyers want a single range that can comfortably support everyday family meals while also handling more ambitious cooking when needed."

"Consumers are drawn to appliances that replace multiple

single-function products that can overcrowd kitchen space," reports Dolan. "Ovens that combine convection baking, microwave speed, grilling and more in one unit not only save space but also support cleaner, more efficient kitchen designs that work for a wide range of lifestyles and living situations."

"Combination steam and convection ovens are providing more flexibility in cooking capabilities, making healthy meals easier and quicker to prepare, supporting clean eating, sous vide, and fermentation perfectly aligned with consumers' growing interest in plant-based alternatives," states Sappok. "Air fry modes continue to provide convenience and [the] results of traditional deep frying without the oily mess."

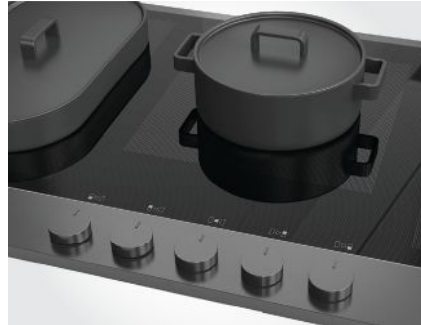
Stacey Sonbert, senior product manager for Costa Mesa, CA-based Fisher & Paykel USA agrees that multifunctional products, like combination ovens with both a convection oven and either steam or speed capabilities, are popular.

Shae Wilder, manager of designer relations at BlueStar in Blandon, PA stresses, "There is also demand for greater size versatility; no kitchen is the same, and the standard range size changes depending on the home's layout. But for many, size is a factor, and they want to do so without sacrificing performance."

Briana Ryan, director, A&D development at Miele USA remarks, "Overall, the U.S. market shows a dual trend where both compact,



Wolf's Professional Induction Range features the company's Dual VertiFlow convection oven, multiple size options, and customizable finishes. It combines the efficiency and precision of induction cooking with the familiar feel of Wolf's iconic knob controls, the company states. subzero-wolf.com



Available in both 36" and 48" models, the Enova line of contemporary induction cooktops from **Fulgor Milano** has five cooking zones, including one 11" max power zone and two bridge zones, and digital knob controls. Enova is available in Matte Black, Brushed Brass or Satin Aluminum. fulgor-milano.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 SILKEN mat enhances cooking stability, simplifies cleanup and protects the surface, notes **Kenyon International**. cookwithkenyon.com



The **JennAir** NextGen Induction Downdraft Cooktop, developed in partnership with Bora, offers hood-free styling alongside downward extraction that removes cooking vapors and odors with a 345 CFM Motor Class extraction. Running as low as 30 dBA, its sound-reducing technology minimizes the noise of the ventilation system. jennair.com



GE Profile's 30" Smart Slide-In Induction and Convection Range includes four burners, two of which feature Power Boil, as well as a Griddle Zone that unites two burners and auto shut-off. The oven includes No Preheat Air Fry and EasyWash Oven Tray. Built-in WiFi allows the range to be controlled offsite. geappliances.com



Gas and induction cooktop systems from **Tulip Cooking** are made for seamless integration into virtually any countertop. 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 Combi-Steam Oven, part of the Expressive series from **Gaggenau**, offers 14 heating methods, including sous vide at controlled low temperatures, a new Keep Warm mode, and a full-surface hidden broiler that pairs with steam functions. An intuitive animated wizard and automatic cleaning are also featured. gaggenau.com/us



Sharp USA's 24" Microwave Drawer has top-mounted controls to allow for easy access, while advanced sensor technology ensures precise cooking performance, states the company. The accessible drawer configuration supports aging-in-place, the firm adds. sharpusa.com

space-saving appliances and larger, high-capacity appliances are being specified, reflecting the diverse needs of different consumer segments."

PURPOSEFUL ADVANCEMENTS

Technology changes continually, but in cooking appliances, new features must also be practical, manufacturers say. "Technology has become more refined, and purpose driven. Advances are focused on improving consistency, temperature accuracy, airflow and overall reliability rather than introducing novelty features," offers Abbruzzese.

"Many consumers still prefer tactile controls and straightforward interfaces, especially primary cooking appliances. The expectation is that technology quietly enhances performance without distracting from the cooking experience," he observes.

"Improved technology has empowered consumers to expect their cooking appliance to do more with less effort," adds Sala. "This means they expect automatic cooking modes in their ovens, burner settings that can accommodate powerful output and low warming temperatures, and induction cooktops that offer flexible cooking zones with fast response."

"We've deliberately shifted the question from 'What can technology do?' to 'How do people actually live?'" says Dolan. "That reframing has made ease of use, speed and a versatile, accessible design non-negotiable.

Technology has the power to transform daily life, but the most meaningful advances are those that feel seamless, intuitive and respond to real consumer needs."

SMART CONNECTIONS

Smart technology is in demand throughout consumers' lives. Here, too, manufacturers say, there must be practical benefits.

"Connectivity is also becoming increasingly important in appliances. Consumers are looking to have unrestricted access to their homes and appliances, no matter their location," Sappok believes. "Most new products offer connectivity with coinciding features like recipe assistance, cameras and appliance monitoring. The 'must have' feature is the one that reflects the customers' own lifestyle and cooking habits to make their everyday lives more convenient."

"Consumers are increasingly adopting smart technology that delivers clear, everyday value," adds Dolan. "Appliances are being designed to guide users, anticipate needs and just make cooking easier through intuitive touch interfaces, mobile apps, voice activation and automated cooking functions that reduce friction and remove guesswork, rather than add complexity. As AI and emerging technologies continue to evolve, the focus remains on thoughtful integration, so consumers never have to ask, 'Why do I need this?'"



The surface of **Officine Gullo's** Fiorentina 48" has six cooking positions, each with a 5-in-1 professional burner beneath continuous cast iron grates and a Trilaminate Stainless Steel griddle. As an alternative to gas, the latter is also available in induction. Fiorentina is shown here in Cloud Dancer, Pantone's 2026 Color of the Year, with gunmetal trim. officinegullo.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



BlueStar has introduced the X-8 burner, offered in 30" and 36" sizes. The 8-point star-shaped burners feature a 20" circumference and 152 precision-control heat ports that ensures even heat across cookware of any style or size, notes the firm. The burners reach an ultra-high sear at 25,000 BTUs and an ultra-low of 500 BTUs. bluestarcooking.com



The L-Series from **American Outdoor Grill** features interior halogen lighting, a multi-color LED light bar, backlit ADA-friendly controls, and an integrated backburner with rotisserie. It also has precision heat control and 304 stainless steel burners. americanoutdoorgrillshop.com



ZLINE Kitchen and Bath has launched freestanding Paramount Induction ranges that feature nano-technology-reinforced anti-scratch matte cooktops. The line includes six 30" models with three, four or five adaptable cooking zones, along with dual-fuel ovens. They are offered in stainless steel and Satin Stainless Steel with decorative trim. zlinekitchen.com



The Heritage Series from **Bertazzoni** includes a 36" range with a six-burner brass cooktop, including two 19,000 BTU dual-ring power burners and a removable cast-iron griddle. The 5.7-cu.-ft. self-cleaning oven offers dual convection, an electric broiler and air-fry mode. Shown in Ivory, it includes gold-plated knobs and oven door finials. us.bertazzoni.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 Fahrenheit, mimicking the performance of traditional wood-fired ovens. WiFi functionality integrates with smart home systems and mobile apps. monogram.com



The **Forza 48"** Professional Induction Range combines induction cooking with a True Euro Convection oven. It features a single cavity oven and seven high-powered zones, as well as a MassimoRED double broiler. It is available in Matte Black and metal finishes. forzacucina.com

"Guided cooking and connected/smart technology have really taken the guesswork out of cooking, and made cooking something a bit less daunting for those who might find it overwhelming," observes Sonbert.

QUICK PRECISION

Features that enhance both speed and accuracy are in high demand, manufacturers say. "Faster, more precise, energy-efficient cooking continues to be in demand," states Wilder. "Customers today are looking for the ability to cook quickly and efficiently, with features that make the experience easy and deliver exceptional results."

"Whether it's an oven or a cooktop, we've found people naturally want consistency and speed in heating things up," agrees DeCosmo.

"Speed is a critical factor, with busy households valuing appliances that significantly shorten cooking times without sacrificing results," Dolan stresses. "There is also strong demand for precision and consistency, whether that means even browning, controlled moisture retention or reliable, repeatable results."

"Ultimately, people want appliances that help them cook with confidence, from quick, nutritious weeknight meals to moments of connection when entertaining family and friends," she adds. "Increasingly, the kitchen is viewed as a wellness hub, where smart design supports healthier habits and more meaningful time together."

CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION

Cooking appliances that promote energy efficiency and reduce environmental impact are a top priority for many consumers. Quality appliances with longevity go a long way toward meeting this demand, they add.

"Sustainability is continuing to remain important to manufacturers and consumers who are looking for ways to reduce their environmental impact and energy consumption," says Sappok. "Consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of the lifespan of their appliances so they are choosing products that are built with a long service life and future-proof technology."

"Consumers want to invest in quality – buy once, and buy well," Sala reports. "They're looking for timeless pieces that won't go out of style with the next shift in trends, appliances that will stand the test of time, and that offer a variety of cooking features that make everyday cooking more enjoyable and convenient."

This attention to sustainability is one reason manufacturers say they continue to see growing interest in induction cooking.

"Energy efficiency is top of mind. Induction cooking has remained in demand as customers seek products that are energy-efficient, safe and easy to use – and feature innovative designs that blend seamlessly into their space," stresses Wilder.



ILVE's new Majestic III includes performance upgrades of dual-function burners that reach up to 25,000 BTUs. All 30" models now have a built-in warming drawer, and induction ranges now expand up to 48". Dual-fuel models now offer French top options in 48" and 60. us.ilve.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



The Series 9 15" Gas on Glass Cooktop from **Fisher & Paykel Appliances** offers precise heat control from a single burner with 17,000 BTUs. Part of the company's Modular Cooktop Family, the cooktop can pair with various induction modules in the series or be installed independently for single-zone cooking. fisherpaykel.com/us



The **SKS 36"** Pro Induction Range pairs a cooktop with a 7,000-watt induction burner with a large steam-combi oven that features ProHeat Convection and air fry modes. Smart Knobs and ThinQ UP software upgrades are included. A Cookware Compatibility Indicator confirms if cookware is induction ready. sksappliances.com



The **Viking RVL** Collection features black glass and stainless finishes, and intuitive touch controls. RVL blends minimalist style with professional-grade performance across ovens, cooktops, warming drawers and more, the company states. Connected cooking is available via the Viking Cloud app. vikingrange.com



Envisioned by designer David Rockwell, **True Caliber's** 360-degree, walk-around griddle features a fully retractable 'disappearing lid' for seamless transitions when opening or closing. The griddle is available in two sizes (42" and 48"), propane or natural gas, and True's curated color and hardware solutions. true-caliber.com



The streamlined ceramic glass cooktop of **Empava's** 36" electric range features five cooking elements, including a flexible bridge option and Power Boost. The 5.2-cu.-ft. oven offers multiple cooking modes. empava.com



From **LG Electronics**, the 6.3-cu.-ft. Smart Gas Slide-in Range includes InstaView ProBake Convection, Air Fry and Sous Vide modes. The UltraHeat 22K BTU burner provides rapid heat and the ThinQ app allows users to manage controls remotely. It has voice assistant compatibility. lg.com/us

"Induction technology, which is continuing to grow in popularity in the U.S., is much more sustainable, performs faster and is safer and more efficient than gas or electric technology," Sappok adds.

"Induction cooking appliances also remain popular as consumers seek out more efficient appliances that also offer flexibility and performance like the gas ranges they've become accustomed to using over the years," agrees Sala.

TIMELESS FINISH

Cooking appliances are an investment, so finishes that stand the test of time are consistent selections. Stainless steel, matte black and matte white finishes are most popular, manufacturers note, with mixed metals and playful color adding personality and a touch of fun.

"We see that the traditional staples of stainless steel, matte white and matte black are continuing to remain the most sought-after options," reports Sala. "These timeless finishes/colors enable homeowners to play with trending colors and styles in other ways that are easier to swap in/out – such as pops of colors with countertop appliances, cabinet and wall colors, and other items like window coverings, décor, etc."

Sonbert reports that finish trends differ regionally, but stainless steel and black remain strong. They also see interest in integrated, flush and handleless installations, she adds.

"Stainless steel continues to be the most popular finish," Dolan says. "At the same time, there is growing interest in matte black and graphite finishes, which offer a sleek, modern aesthetic and pair especially well with contemporary and minimalist designs."

"These finishes reflect a broader trend toward technology that not only performs beautifully but also enhances the overall look and feel of the kitchen," Dolan continues. "Consumers want appliances that integrate seamlessly into their space, adding to the aesthetic rather than overpowering it, so the kitchen retains its personality while benefiting from advanced functionality."

"Stainless steel remains the dominant finish, valued for its longevity, versatility and seamless integration across virtually all kitchen styles," Abbruzzese agrees. "It continues to anchor both new builds and renovation projects where timelessness and performance are priorities."

"At the same time, demand is expanding for finishes that add intentional character," he adds. "Richer colors are emerging as deliberate focal points, particularly in kitchens where the range serves as a visual centerpiece."

Wilder expects to see more matte black heading into 2026, but says they've also seen a lot of mixing metals happening. "Mixed metals can also offer relief to the specifier, since it is often very challenging to 'match' finishes from different manufacturers. We see these mixes happen a lot with brass and copper," she says. ■

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Ground Floor

THE FIFTH WALL is becoming increasingly important in the world of interior design, with designers and homeowners alike taking a fresh look at ceiling treatments and flooring options that make a statement. With regard to flooring, especially in the kitchen and bath, selections are as varied as the personal taste of the individual.

Traditionally a space for ceramic and porcelain tile as well as marble, today's open floor plans and the desire for a uniform look are dictating a trend toward one surface for all rooms. Designers are expanding beyond tile to incorporate wide-plank woods in staggered and herringbone patterns, as well as luxury vinyl and plank flooring for durability and easy care.

This surge in wood looks doesn't signal the demise of stone and ceramic tile, however. From solids to intricate patterns and even those that mimic wood, these tiles are delivering beauty and durability in everything from mosaics to large-scale options. Concrete tiles continue to be popular, as are neutral tones with minimal movement. Drawing on nature, biophilic design is nodding toward colors in the green, brown, blue and gray families.

On this and the next two pages, *Kitchen & Bath Design News* delivers a selection of flooring options for the kitchen, bath, outdoor kitchen and other spaces.

1. Defined by an imperfect, fluid graphic design with Zen-inspired references, Ink, the new collection from **Ceramiche Refin**, is offered in three neutrals, three warm tones and two deep hues. The lustre-enhanced surface is available in 32"x32" format.

refin-ceramic-tiles.com

2. The Elite Flooring collection from **Devon&Devon** is a combination of fine marble in contrasting colors. The Elite 3 collection of marble floors is available in the variants Bianco Carrara + Nero Marquina, Crema Marfil + Nero Marquina, Emperador Dark + Crema Marfil or Nero Marquina + Crema Marfil.

devon-devon.com/int

3. Inspired by the grandeur of historic museum floors, the Musea collection from **AKDO** features two mosaic patterns, Circle and Diamond, crafted from hand-chopped stone fragments and then honed. Musea is offered in four curated colorways – Moss Green with Verde Laguna and Tulip Black, Odeon Beige with French Vanilla and Dolemite, Rossa Mundi with Rosso Verona and Tulip Black, and Tiger Skin with Ash Gray and Dolemite.

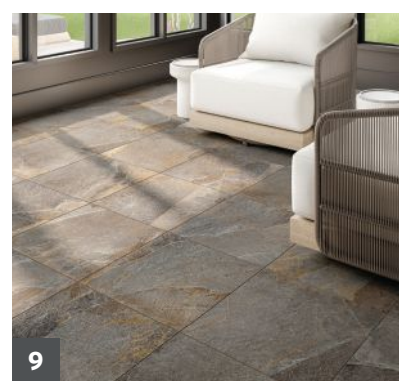
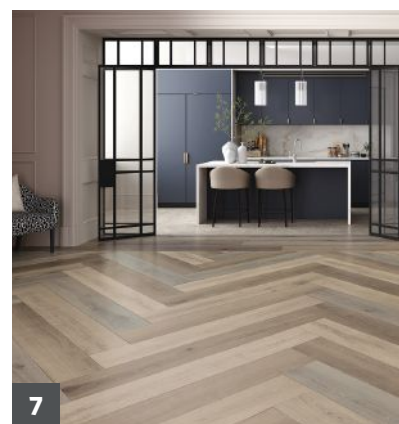
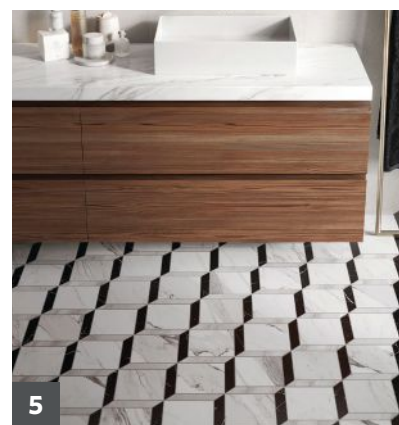
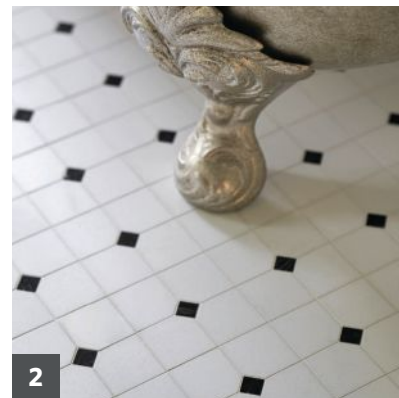
akdo.com

4. Featuring innovative Woodura technology and the 5G floor locking system, Woodura Herringbone 3.0 from **Bjelin** is available in two formats: Classic (3"×13") and Modern (3.5"×21.5"). Offered in Powder White, Misty White, Natural and Terra Brown, the square edges are crafted without a bevel to create a clean, seamless look while enhancing the feel of traditional herringbone.

us.bjelin.com/en

5. The Shapes collection from **MILE®stone** features square, circular, rectangular, rhombus and hexagon forms combined in color combinations and patterns. All of the designs in the Shapes collections are suitable for both interior and exterior use, in both floor and wall applications. The collection reflects MILE®stone's commitment to sustainability, manufactured using environmentally responsible processes that minimize impact, notes the firm.

milestonetiles.com





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Photo: Mark Roskams

6. Crafted from natural white oak, Low Tide is part of **Stuga's** Rebels family of anti-plastic wood floors. Low Tide's 8" wide, 7' long planks feature a Brushed Matte finish. The Rebels collection is waterproof, nontoxic and provides strength and durability, according to the company. stugastudio.com

7. **LX Hausys'** CraftedConnections is a new HFLOR LVT collection featuring ultra-realistic wood and stone visuals in CraftedWood and CraftedClay, notes the firm. It is enhanced with TrueMatte technology for soft-touch texture, reduced glare, and stain, scratch and scuff resistance. The flooring is available in 2.5mm or 5mm with a 20 mil wear layer. lxhausys.com/us

8. Lotus from **Florida Tile** is a geometric wood-look porcelain tile that creates a kaleidoscopic effect – an optical illusion formed through varied wood tones and directional design, states the firm. Lotus is available in an 8" leaf format in four palettes: Fusion Smoke, Fusion Natural, Fusion Honey and Fusion Walnut. floridatile.com

9. Constant from **American Olean** is a contemporary stone aesthetic available in four neutral colors. Birch is a calming shade of white, Charred Gray and Willow are warm gray tones, and Mahogany is a richly variegated option, blending deep browns with subtle rust tones. Constant is offered in matte 15"x30" sizes and a mosaic. americanolean.com

10. From **Porcelanosa** comes ceramic tiles with the look of limestone, suitable for use on interior, exterior and shower walls and floors. Available in 120x120 cm size, the tiles are presented in Bone and Marfil, including Fiume Bone and Marfil with wide line textures and Metro Bone and Marfil with thin line textures. porcelanosa.com

11. Oasis is **Cancos Tile's** newest premium porcelain wood-look flooring, designed with Italian craftsmanship. Available in 8"x48" and 12"x65" planks, this line features advanced 3D texture technology and four refined colors, Clay, Oak, Sand and White. cancostileandstone.com

12. Each **Carlisle Wide Plank Floors** crafted wide-plank hardwood floor is made to order by skilled craftspeople at the company's mill in New Hampshire. The flooring is created by following the natural grain and variation of each tree. The room design shown is by Enda Donagher, architect and Alphacraft Construction of NY. wideplankflooring.com

13. Each 9"x72" UltraMatte plank in the Wayne Parc Reserve Collection from **MSI** features grain-aligned embossed-in-register texture, pressed natural bevels, and a waterproof WPC core. A 30MIL CrystaLux Ultra protection layer resists scratches and wear, according to the company, while the attached cork backing adds sound insulation and subfloor coverage. msisurfaces.com

14. The new carbon-neutral Dekton Nara from **Cosentino** takes its inspiration from Taj Mahal quartzite. Its subtle veining, set against a beige background, conveys harmony while its ultra-durability is designed for flooring in high-traffic indoor and outdoor spaces, states the firm. cosentino.com

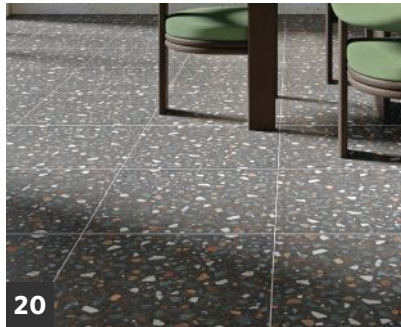
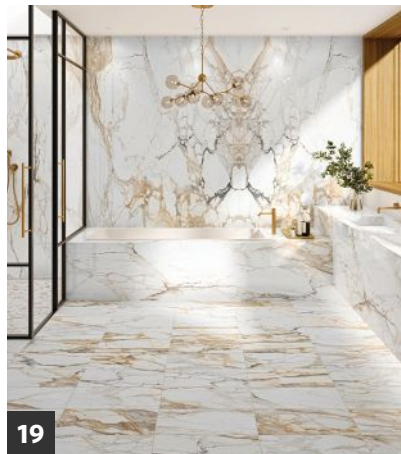
15. The Coretech collection from **Florim** reinterprets Piasentina stone with enhanced technical performance for contemporary architecture, notes the company. Coretech offers versatile surface finishes (on large slabs) and is part of Florim's CarbonZero range of Carbon Neutral products. florim.com/en

16. **Louisville Tile** has launched the Checkmate series, an exclusive addition to its Wilcox Fifty Five house brand. Checkmate is designed to meet the demand for checkerboard tile with a premium 12"x12" format. The color body porcelain is offered in five shades and available in both matte and polished finishes. louisville-tile.com

17. Crossville's Portland Cliff is a new tile collection that features Visual Touch Technology, a glazing that mimics the intricate veining, linear patterns and tonal variations of true Portland stone, notes the firm. Available in two field tile sizes - 12"x24" and an expansive 24"x48" - Portland Cliff supports both intimate and large-scale applications.
crossville.com



18. A collaboration between New York designer Alison Rose and Artistic Tile, Artifact draws inspiration from ancient Roman mosaics. In her signature style, Rose infuses a historic pattern with a modern sensibility, evoking an ancient yet timeless aesthetic, notes the firm. A mix of tumbled shapes and honed tesserae mosaics, Artifact is stocked in three colorways: Bianco Dolomiti, Bianco Antico and Belgian Bluestone.
artistictile.com



19. Panoramic Duet is a new tile series from Daltile crafted to complement the company's Panoramic Porcelain Surfaces. Available in multiple standard floor sizes, including expansive large-format options, and a coordinating mosaic, Panoramic Duet is suitable for floors, shower floors, walls, backsplashes and countertops.
daltile.com

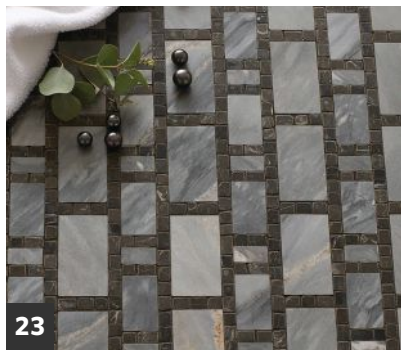
20. Curation is a terrazzo-inspired series from Marazzi available in a 2"x9" brick or a retro terrazzo design in large formats and mosaics. Designed for floors, shower floors, backsplashes, walls or countertops, the tile is offered in a selection of colors, an assortment of sizes and styles and both polished and matte finishes.
marazziusa.com



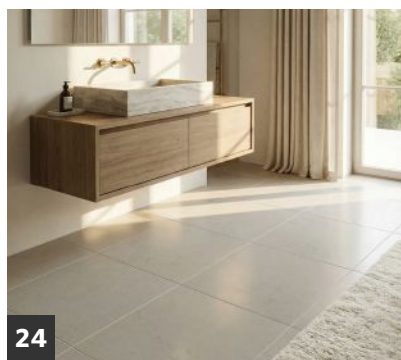
21. Orin is a honed mosaic collection from Ann Sacks that is reminiscent of Italian poured terrazzo. Marbles sourced from around the world were selected to create the singular stone and multi-stone blends. The solo stone combinations feature creamy Bianca or ruby-shaded Rosso Levanto. The contrasting multi-stone designs include a greige blend and the verde blend.
annsacks.kohler.com



22. Each tile in Tesselle's Ipanema Campos Terrazzo Cement Tile collection features a hand-poured ¼" layer of genuine stone aggregate, providing lasting color depth with a smooth matte finish, the company states. This artisanal construction provides slip resistance in wet areas.
tesselle.com



23. Old Castle is a guest designer collection by Jacquelyn Bizzoto for New Ravenna. Inspired by the Eastern Shore of Virginia, Old Castle is available in eight mosaics - Atlantic, Barlow, Bayside, Cape Wisteria, Corisa, Evans, Greenbrier, Lankford (shown) and Sweetbay - each with its own story.
newravenna.com



24. Opustone's new Portuguese Marble tile collection is available in elevated field tile formats (12"x24", 18"x36", 24"x48", and 36"x36") with honed, sandblasted and polished finishes. The collection is available in Strata, Ravello Beige, Supernova, Aspar White and Botticino Superlight.
opustone.com



25. Created using 3D Digital Print Technology, Arizona Tile's Fluida is an Italian-made rectified color body porcelain that mimics a natural stone with layers accumulated over time. Fluida is offered in a wide variety of sizes with a matte finish in all sizes and an R11 anti-slip finish in the 24"x48" size.
arizonatile.com



26. Available in White Oak and Honey Oak, Tile Club's Solstrand Collection is offered in 2"x12" subway tiles, 8"x48" planks and 40"x40" patterned parquet squares. The geometric parquet format allows for multiple configurations.
tileclub.com



27. Mohawk's RevWood Plus tier is being enhanced with two new styles, Madison Aisle and Lacy Highlands. Madison Aisle showcases chestnut looks in hues ranging from light to deep brown, while Lacy Highlands highlights light to medium-dark tones inspired by nature. RevWood provides waterproof performance, pet stain and scratch protection and fade resistance.
mohawkflooring.com

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Multigenerational Bath Honors Its Roots

BEFORE

Matthew Daby and Angela Mechaley of Portland, OR-based M.O.Daby Design tackled the whole-house renovation of a midcentury home that had seen three generations of family use. The current owner, whose grandfather built the home in 1955, had a great deal of nostalgia and respect for the home's history, and this informed the design team's approach to the renovation.

Part of the scope of work was the primary bath, which just didn't meet the needs of the growing family. The M.O.Daby team was tasked with transforming an awkward ensuite that shared a shower with the guest bath into a private primary bath and hallway-accessed powder room that would be in keeping with the home's historic character and Pacific Northwest modernist aesthetic.



AFTER

A reconfiguration of the existing layout separated the primary from the guest bath, allowing for the creation of a private retreat featuring a spacious walk-in shower, freestanding Native Trails tub, sauna and water closet. The remodel also takes the bathroom back to a previous (though not original) iteration that features expansive windows, creating a sunroom-like experience with views of the property and plenty of natural light.

Custom full overlay slab walnut cabinetry, paired with walnut pulls from Manzoni, nods to the era and style of the home. Plumbing and lighting fixtures finished in chrome, along with cool blue-gray Heath Tile backsplash tile, complete the historic-yet-fresh aesthetic.



After photos: Keriton Waltz/KLIK Concepts

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