



The Evolution Of A Modern Kitchen

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More than fifty years ago, the “Futurist” predicted what our future would bring jetpacks, mile-high cities and vacations on Mars. The kitchen of this brave new world that would be laid out and function much like a medical laboratory—it would become a place where actual food and food preparation would be banned and where we would pop “food pills” and consume “radar-ranged” freeze-dried dinners. Thankfully, these visions are still the stuff of science fiction.

As we enter this brave new world, we realize that the kitchen of the new millennium hasn’t really evolved that far from the kitchen of the last century or the century before that. Today, for all our technological advances, we still face many of the same quandaries that plagued our predecessors in ancient times.

We find that the kitchen is one of those rare universals inventions which can be found around the world. The kitchen you find in Los Angeles is almost identical to one in Venice or Bangladesh. As a matter of fact, you will find the traditional layout of any kitchen can be found in a range of homes, from a mud-hut in the Amazon to a 5th Avenue penthouse.

We find the same pattern in archeological excavations from Taos, N. M. to the ruins of Pompeii. At the core of the “primal” kitchen we find three basic elements, fire, water and storage.

The only real evolution that we find is in the appearance and technology—from the hearth to the wood-burning stove to the “induction cook top”, from the water-bucket to the hand-pump to the integrated dishwasher and from the “apple-caller” to the “icebox” to the “Integrated Refrigerator.”

It is not about how the kitchen has changed but more about how we have changed the usage of this once purely functional space.

At the turn of the last century, the kitchen was designed to be out of the way, a place for servants, the cook and the help to gather and prepare the day’s meals all while staying astray from the main household.

By post-war America, the kitchen was designed as a functional laboratory for a single participant, the woman of the house, the little lady, mom. It was laid out with assembly-line efficiency with a window centered on the sink so she could watch the little ones in the backyard.

The evolution of the modern kitchen has progressed significantly since the days when its primary function was of food preparation to that of the social center of the home. It is now a place where the family, both nuclear as well as tribal, still gather to share, rejuvenate and commune together.

Today, the kitchen is still the gathering place of the tribe, but the walls have come down. This once hidden and secluded place is now part of a larger social arena. It serves as a meeting place, a dining room, a home-office, a place to do homework; it can even serve as a hideaway for quiet reflection or a place to gather for fun and entertainment.

The kitchen has become a place that defines the home and those who live in it. This once private domain of the feminine world has now given way to the new social order and reflects the world that we live in.

In this day, everyone is welcome in the kitchen. More and more family members and friends are invited, if not encouraged, to participate in the ritual of preparation.

With the increased activity in the kitchen and additional bodies communing in a high-traffic area amid boiling water and sharp pointy things, we find that the assembly-line kitchen—with its uniform horizon of sink, dishwasher, cook-top, oven and refrigerator, forever locked in

its limited one-person “work-triangle”—must give way to a new way of thinking.

In our recent past, the collective thought of modern kitchen design was to create the “illusion of order.” This was accomplished by hiding the true function of the kitchen. By hiding the food, the waste and the appliances, we create the illusion of productivity and efficiency by hiding the process.

In the new school of thought, the belief is that the kitchen must be efficient to be productive, an environment that is conducive to the task at hand. It is about changing the way we think about this space we call “kitchen” and our individual relationships to it.

It’s about creating an environment that allows us to experience new ideas and to rediscover aspects of our lives that have been lost in the daily rush of life.

The purpose of this new approach is to think first about the fundamental aspects of the kitchen such as what we want from it and how this space can be utilized to its full potential. We must view this space as a whole and understand the relevance and position of every item in order to detail it, from the largest stewpot to the tiniest teaspoon.

Previously, appliances dictated the form and flow of the kitchen—the sink under the window, the dishwasher to the right or left of the sink, the cook-top with its 12 inches on either side, the double oven that is used only for holidays and special occasions and the refrigerator, this monolith of modern technology that dominates the space.

Today, we must place the individual or individuals and the primary task first followed by the appliances and the space needed to fulfill the task.

With a variety of people and activities, we must create a fluid, interactive and multifunctional arena where tools and materials are close at hand and within a given task boundary.

Free and easy, open and inviting—these are the adjectives that describe today’s kitchen. A kitchen without boundaries or barriers, a kitchen free from conventional thought and restrictions, a kitchen created to reflect the times we live in, this is the kitchen of today.

The modern kitchen is open to the rest of the home, and as such, the kitchen now must function on several levels, from food preparation to social interaction, from entertainment center to living room. By adding furniture, this new matrix blends seamlessly into the living and family areas of the home, successfully achieving the delicate balance between form and function.

In its new domestic role, today’s kitchen reflects a family style based on the sharing of traditional roles and function. The living area embraces the kitchen as a multifunctional arena where food is prepared, people talk, homework is finished and guests are entertained.

Of all the items we will choose for our home, the kitchen provides us with an outlet for creation and self-expression. The kitchen of this millennium will continue to be the heart of the home. It is an essential element of our daily lives and one which touches and affects us both physically and emotionally. This is a place where we seek communion, rejuvenation, and sanctuary.

If there’s one thing that has not changed, no matter the style, design or location, it is that the kitchen is a mainstay that has endured the ages and will remain at the heart of every home for years to come. ■RELAX

