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How Islands Make Kitchens More Versatile

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But just as families grow up, so have our tastes in kitchens and dining rooms.

butler's pantries are getting an update.

Kitchen and dining rooms have always been popular spaces for people to gather, whether they're eating or not. Over the years, kitchens have gotten larger to accommodate busy families who wanted to use the room for more than just prepping dinner. White cabinetry became de rigueur. Restaurant-grade appliances became status symbols. But just as families grow up, so have our tastes in kitchens and dining rooms.

Rebekah Zaveloff from KitchenLab Design gets some of her inspiration from bohemian-style hotel lobbies when it comes to beautiful yet practical kitchen designs. They often have the perfect height arm chairs and sofas mixed with tables, the right height for eating or for working on your laptop or curling up with a magazine or iPad.

Zaveloff's clients are veering away from the "great room" concept. "Most people don't want their family room television in the same space as the kitchen," she says, although she admits that they do want hang out space in the kitchen. To meet their needs, her firm does a lot of upholstered furniture-style benches and comfortable seating around breakfast tables that double as hang out spaces.

"Islands are still a must for most clients, and we focus on work stations rather than the work triangle," she says, citing clean up station versus prep station as an example. "Prep sinks aren't necessarily small little things anymore - we've been doing larger prep sinks, sometimes even bigger than the main clean up sink. Examples are the Kohler Stages or the Galley sink line.

Lauren Coburn, owner of Lauren Coburn, LLC, agrees that clients still love their islands. "My clients who are building homes or renovating existing high-end kitchens always want certain things: big, sprawling spaces with large islands, double appliances, flexible furnishings, beautiful spaces - making kitchens feel like living rooms, family rooms, dining rooms, all-in-one."



Within kitchen designs, Alyssa Bockman, Design Consultant with Stoneshop, is noticing that... [+]

Details Matter

A trend Brock Metz, owner and lead designer at Brock Lane Metz Design, is seeing in kitchens is the use of matte black fixtures and brushed brass as well as the combination mixing the two finishes in the same room.

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"White cabinets and versions of white are the mainstay, but we love to adorn the lower cabinets in deep tones of gray, blue and dark green," Metz notes. "Dining rooms have always been an opportunity to embellish and we are doing this through contrasting elements of black and white, or with deep moody painted walls and textured wall coverings."

Zaveloff agrees. "Black and navy have become the new 'white kitchen' for us, which is very refreshing," she admits. "That said, we still do lots of white kitchens, but people are more interested in mixing materials and going for luxe finishes to distinguish themselves from their neighbors."

Within kitchen designs, Alyssa Bockman, Design Consultant with Stoneshop, is noticing that homeowners are wanting more elaborate finish details. "We have had an increased demand for waterfall panels and box mitre edges," she says. "Many homeowners love their [natural] stone so much that they want to show it off and use it even more."

Even butler's pantries are getting an update.

Butler's pantries and walk-in pantries that are more finished looking with countertops and beautiful brackets and lights are something we try to bring into a lot of our designs," says Zaveloff. She's using cabinetry base cabinets, marble or wood counters, and open shelving above with wallpaper or tile walls for some walk-in pantry designs.

Dining Rooms Are Growing Up

Zaveloff has been noticing dining rooms getting more attention, no longer relegated to just beautiful rooms that we just walk through like a glorified hallway. Rather, they're becoming rooms that clients want to use more. They're also choosing to mix materials and styles such as modern and traditional or formal and casual.

"Maybe we have a beautiful antique table, but we mix it with more modern chairs, and a traditional chandelier, fun artwork or wallpaper, or maybe even bookshelves," she suggests. "Many of our clients want their dining rooms more open to the living space so they're inspired to use them more. One way to do this is by not having a huge table in the kitchen, that way people are encouraged to use the dining room when there are more than four or five people for dinner."

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