

A desktop with a built-in bookcase echoes the kitchen cabinetry in this eating/working space from Schmidt Kitchens.



Black, flat-fronted wall units hide the rangehood in this Impala Kitchen.



This Kitcheners Kitchen links the cooking and living zones.

TREND APPEAL

WE'VE TALKED TO THE EXPERTS TO BRING YOU THE HOTTEST KITCHEN FEATURES AT THE VERY CUTTING EDGE OF STYLE

WORDS *Jane Parbury*

How things have changed in the busiest room in the house. Once the kitchen was purely a working space, dominated by pot racks, an oven the size of a small car and a separate dining room. These days, the kitchen is the multi-tasking hub of the home, serving as a living and dining room, home office, family space and entertainment area all in one.

A PRACTICAL PROSPECT

Naturally, this revolution in kitchen function has had an impact on its form. Noise can't be contained easily in open-plan living, and trying to compete with a dishwasher with the decibel levels of a jet on take-off isn't conducive to conversation. So, alongside efficiency, a pivotal element of appliance development has been noise reduction.

Similarly, cabinet designers have cut the clutter of cupboard doors and drawers with the introduction of soft-closing mechanisms. To fit in with sleek modern schemes, ugly whitegoods and other essentials also had to have a makeover. Boring white boxes were largely superseded by hip design and subtle finishes in stainless steel and brushed aluminium, while line-of-sight items, such as rangehoods, became glass-and-steel devices that would look at home on the bridge of the Starship Enterprise.

Today, that trend has taken another giant step forward. High-tech rangehoods are cleverly hidden, or masquerade as light fittings or exotic steel sculptures; fridges and dishwashers are disappearing behind closed doors, without even a control panel on show to hint at their existence; sinks are sunk out of sight; and cooktops are flattened to virtually nothing on benchtops.

Interior designer Marianna Cseh of A La Carte Design, which specialises in Poggenpohl kitchens, predicts that soon, even taps will be tucked away, integrated into the sink below the work surface.

Easy maintenance is another increasingly important factor in our time-poor lives. Future kitchens are less likely to be over-equipped. "They'll have two ovens, but one will be multifunction, and there won't be huge numbers of gadgets," says Marianna. "People like to live better and more productively, to enjoy a well-designed kitchen with hassle-free storage and cleaning." Hence, new cooktops such as Fisher & Paykel's Izona CookSurface (opposite, bottom right), whose gas burners recede into the cooktop, are very easy to clean.

FUTURE PROOF YOUR KITCHEN

So what's next in the style stakes? According to trend forecaster Marylou Paino of Trendjournal, three main trends have emerged. One of the most popular is the 'Living Room Kitchen', where family, food and friends meet regularly. The 'Workspace Kitchen' – a highly organised, high-tech, functional environment for those with a passion for cooking – is another hot trend. Finally, the 'Gourmet Deli Kitchen' has emerged, with its eco-friendly influence and design roots in restaurant open kitchens, which brings the focus back on food preparation, growth and preservation.

In some respects, these trends overlap. Cabinets are taking on a furniture-like appearance and merging seamlessly into the living space. In the kitchen, floating cabinetry adds to the impression of whole-room space, as do tables and desktops crafted from the same material as the work surface. >

"FUNCTIONAL ELEMENTS AND APPLIANCES ARE CONCEALED BEHIND FURNITURE THAT WOULD LOOK AT HOME IN A LIVING ROOM" - *Marylou Paino of Trendjournal*



This Pedini island bench incorporates handle-free drawers, a fully integrated dishwasher and a pop-up rangehood.



Above: White wonder meets glossy black in this Pedini kitchen. Left: The burners on this Fisher & Paykel CookSurface recede into the ceramic top.



Modular forms and gloss finishes extend beyond the kitchen space in this Made.Living room.

Benchtops come in different widths, keeping their practical edge while adding aesthetic appeal. "Standard benchtops are becoming a design statement, with trends showcasing sizes in either 10mm or 100mm," says Andrew Vidor of Made.Living kitchens. "Think streamlined to chunky."

THE TECH EFFECT

Sophisticated appliances are positioned horizontally to appear almost as technological artworks, or alternatively, can be concealed behind tall doors – an added bonus for untidy cooks! The high-tech aspects of the Workspace Kitchen, such as pop-up cupboards and gadgets, touch-opening drawers and fully integrated appliances, help conceal the functional elements that might distract from the kitchen as inviting living space.

The newest cupboard and drawer designs – flat-fronted, handle-free styles with rounded edges and glossy finishes – hark back to a passion for the simple, modular furniture of the 1950s. It's an uncluttered, clean look that suits the 21st-century desire to meld workroom and living space, and works well in open-plan zones. "The absence of handles and the pure aesthetic form of the base units accentuate the uncluttered flow of the Living Room Kitchen," explains Trendjournal's Marylou.

MATERIAL MATTERS

Nature and the environment have provided the inspiration for the resurgence of natural and faux-natural materials, such as wood, as a key look for kitchens. They are also a practical choice, as their subtle tones

work well with virtually any decorating scheme. Timber and timber veneers are back with a vengeance, both for cabinet doors and benchtops, mimicking the look of traditional pieces of stand-alone furniture and providing a link between the kitchen and living room.

Stone, marble and granite are also in vogue, while glass, which found favour in the kitchen as a splashback alternative to tiles, has worked its way onto benchtops and now cupboard doors. Glass has the added advantage of versatility. Already available in a broad range of colours, etched patterns inspired by the revival of wallpaper are appearing on cupboard doors as a pretty decorating element and individual touch.

COLOUR CONSIDERATION

Black as a colourway is enjoying a return to centre stage, particularly when it comes in a luxurious, high-shine finish. At the other end of the spectrum, white in its myriad shades from snow to cream is a perennial favourite. The bonus for style aficionados, as Michael Kitchener of Kitcheners Kitchens explains, is that this not-quite-a-colour already fits with Australians' existing design preferences. "We value property here, and tend to think ahead to what happens when we sell, and the value that the kitchen adds. White's popular because it is a safe choice."

That's not to say colour is yesterday's hero. Retro shades such as lime, yellow and burnt orange create a colour sensation. These vibrant hues on a run of cupboards, the splashback or introduced under cabinets via an LED light show, for example, create interest and give a room personality.

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT MADE.LIVING, IKEA, SCHMIDT KITCHENS, MADE.LIVING, SYDNEY KITCHENS, DAN KITCHENS



A tilt wall-mounted rangehood provides form and function in this room from Ikea.



An extra-thick benchtop from Dan Kitchens accommodates hidden drawers.



Open shelves and timber veneer link the working and living elements in this Sydney Kitchens design.



In this room from Schmidt Kitchens, Japanese-inspired sliding doors hide away appliances and provisions.

It's all about the inside

The enemy of the 'disappearing' kitchen is clutter; cue the rise of clever, organiser interiors. Where once the corner carousel and pantry pull-out held court, super-functional cabinetry has come to the fore. Improved design means drawers can extend fully, displaying everything inside, and pack in lots of objects – certain Blum drawers, for example, can bear a load of up to 80 kilograms. Organiser inserts can be found for virtually anything, from cutlery and crockery to pots and potato peelers. Benchtop essentials which instantly identify your kitchen space, such as oil and spices, disappear into specially made slots, leaving a single sculptural tap and an artfully placed fruit bowl as the only clue to the area's function. Open shelves house books, ornaments and personal items, blurring the distinction between kitchen and living space.



Living room sideboard or kitchen cabinetry? The only clues are in the mixer and the cooktop, which sits below a chandelier doubling as a functional exhaust fan in Made.Living's green dream.

"FORM VERSUS FUNCTION VERSUS BUDGET IS THE HARDEST BALANCE TO ACHIEVE" - *Michael Kitchener of Kitcheners Kitchens*