

KITCHENS & BATHROOMS

If we think of our kitchens and bathrooms as a mirror of the times, then it makes sense that many areas are now saving on space and becoming multi-functional: think real-estate price hikes, an increase in apartment living, and land shortages.

Trend watch

STORY CARLA CARUSO



These factors impact on trends; hence, these spaces are becoming increasingly open plan with kitchens flowing into lounge rooms and bathrooms into bedrooms.

Michael Kitchener, director of Kitcheners Kitchens, says the wall that used to separate a kitchen and lounge has come down. “But elements flowing throughout each space can bring them together,” he says, “such as chunky, floating shelving for the kitchen’s herb and spice racks and the lounge’s bookcases. Subtle differences can also create a crossover, like benchtops with varying heights to make a distinction between eating and entertaining areas.”

And, while not a look for everyone, bathroom supplier Reece reveals one of the hottest trends to emerge has been the shared bedroom and bathroom. “It seems

Australians are looking past an adjoining ensuite and moving the bath into the heart of the bedroom, creating the ultimate relaxation zone,” it says.

Open-plan living aside, other tricks are also being employed in interior design to increase the feeling of space. Natalie Bristow, the retail sales manager for Parisi Bathware, maintains that in bathrooms this includes wall-hung basins, which help to create empty zones. “Instead of a vanity,” she says, “a homeowner may also have a linen cupboard with a mirror front, which can make a room feel more spacious. Free-standing baths are popular as well.”

Cleaner lines also add to a sense of space in bathrooms, according to Sydney kitchen and bathroom designer Karl Noonan. “Elongated tiles and shapes create the impression of length and breadth,” he explains. “You can

also minimise grout lines with larger tiles, and more recently we’ve seen full-glass wall panels, which are much easier to keep clean.”

Kitchens too are becoming more streamlined with overhead cupboards making way for floor-to-ceiling cabinets, and rangehoods being made into a feature or else concealed or retractable.

“Appliances can almost disappear to permit the look of a lounge room,” Noonan says. “The distinctive look of kitchen furniture is being blurred by drawing on designs for living-room furniture.”

This blurring allows for it to become more of an entertaining space too, Kitchener says. “Influenced by TV shows like *MasterChef*, people are now using cooking as entertaining. Friends are coming over and you won’t be ready and prepared – you will do the cooking with them.”



MONOCHROMATIC

Trend-wise, neutral hues – particularly white – remain in vogue in both kitchens and bathrooms. And, Kitchener says, there's a reason Australian homeowners err on the conservative side. "We value our property so much that we want to know we can re-sell if need be."

In bathrooms, Parisi's Natalie Bristow says it also makes sense budget-wise: "If you stick with neutral tiles, you can change such things as your vanity without having to pull out the waterproofing."

She also says white is increasingly being combined with black. "Looks include a black basin with white sides or a black toilet with a white seat."



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SIGHT UNSEEN

What's unseen can also have an effect. "The buzz is all about soft-closing doors and drawers – things you don't even see that make the kitchen experience much nicer. You don't have the banging doors and drawers," Kitchener says. "About seven years ago, we also saw a lot of people wanting cabinets without handles, and they had to go for a bevel edge that they'd have to get their hand behind. Now Blum has a product where you can touch the face of a drawer and it will open." This includes Tip-on – a mechanical opening system for pull-outs, doors and lift systems – and Servo-Drive – an electric opening system for pull-outs.



SPLASH OF COLOUR

Lou Farrugia, director of Kellyville Kitchens, holds that glass splashbacks remain a strong look in kitchens. "If you go for a tiled splashback, you usually keep it the same colour as the cabinet doors," he says. "But, when it comes to glass splashbacks, people are going for a total contrast, including colours like red, burgundy, metallic grey, silver and green. It's amazing what an impact it can have." Still, he concedes tiled splashbacks are generally cheaper – about \$500 – while glass splashbacks can start from \$1500.



ECO CHIC

The fashion world's eco-chic ethos has flowed into homewares, Michael Kitchener says. "The whites aren't as white and there are also warm greys, linen and textured looks. In kitchen benchtops, we're going back to natural marbles and granites, and it's more of a honed look – a satin or matt finish, as opposed to polished. The doors may have natural timber veneers or be laminated to have a timber look, with a textured feel."

Also in benchtops, Lou Farrugia says, "CaesarStone and quartz-based products are becoming quite popular and are pretty much maintenance-free. There's also a new laminate, which has a stone-like, high-gloss, scratch-resistant top."