



H O M E

CONTEMPORARY CONVENIENCES

Whole House Cabinetry knows kitchens are no longer just for cooking and designs them for the 21st-century family

BY STEFANIE RYAN

Even more than the den or the bedroom, the kitchen is where families spend most of their time when at home. Ideally, it's a space that is many things to many people. Making it conducive to cooking is obviously the first priority, but it's also a room that should be comfortable enough for congregating before the day begins and ends. Because it's truly "the heart of a home," much care, not to mention money, is expended toward today's kitchens. "The kitchen is where everyone collects—it's a space that is really utilized," says Pam Monaco, owner of and principal designer at Whole House Cabinetry in Glenmoore. As such, Pam designs for her clients with every member of the home considered, from mom and dad, to children—even to the family dog.

Pam did not intend to pursue home design. She earned a degree in fine art from Philadelphia College of Art in 1970, and, shortly thereafter, met her husband Ned

Hackett. Pam started "getting her feet wet" in home design by helping out with her husband's construction company. "I would design the spaces Ned was purchasing," she says. "It was great hands-on experience." When the couple moved to Chester County in 1986 to better accommodate their growing menagerie of stray animals, Pam pursued her craft professionally at various area kitchen companies and through evening courses on architectural design and drafting.

Pam always had an entrepreneurial spirit. In fact, her sights were set on Ludwig's Village, a charming cluster of shops at the intersection of Routes 100 and 401. In the late 1990s, her dream came true when Whole House Cabinetry opened there. "I really hit the ground running," Pam admits. She attributes her immediate success to a loyal base of contractors who have stuck with her through the years. "They are truly my ambassadors out there. And they are all



Pam Monaco, owner of and principal designer at Whole House Cabinetry in Glenmoore.

continued on page 101



multi-talented." Another skilled craftsman lending his expertise to Whole House Cabinetry is Ned, now Pam's project manager. Also employed is Michael Clements, a designer with 10 years of design under his belt.

While Whole House Cabinetry is a full service design/build company that can handle any adaptive reuse of space—from mud rooms to bathrooms and much more—it's best known for its expertise in kitchens. The showroom features a half-dozen staged kitchens, each with an entirely different look and feel.

Kitchens today are light years ahead of what they used to be. If you can dream it, it probably already exists. Cabinet drawers to house cat bowls and a pantry designed to organize children's daily schedules are just two "must haves" in today's kitchen. "I don't think there's a home I've done that didn't have an animal," Pam says. "Food and water bowls can be easily knocked over on the floor, and it looks messy. Why not conceal them in a drawer that can be opened and closed as needed?" she suggests. Another common request is for an area that doubles as a message center for keeping track of the family's busy social calendar, usually hidden from view on the inside of the pantry door.

Then of course, there is the island—a true staple of the contemporary kitchen. Not only do islands offer an expansive space for food preparation or additional appliances, but they are often replacing traditional dining areas altogether. "Kitchens are all about trade-offs," Pam says. As such, many families will forego a standard table and chairs for a beautiful granite island with more casual seating. In addition to dining, islands are convenient for entertaining—friends and family can keep you company while you prep, cook or clean up. They're also a good area for children to do their homework. An island does not have to necessarily be made of stone. A French table is an accent that can also accommodate space for food preparation and high-backed chairs and works well in a country-style kitchen. Nor does an island have to

be one-tiered. Double-tiered islands or drop-down islands of multiple materials add interest to your space and can be used for specialized activities such as fresh pasta rolling.

For all these uses, Pam says good lighting is critical. "If a kitchen designer is not doing a lighting plan, they are not doing a whole job for the client." Lighting should be ambient, bright enough to illuminate task areas but not so strong that it is unwelcoming or harsh on the eyes. Good lighting is on a circuit, Pam says, so that only the areas being utilized are lit. The reflective qualities of the kitchen materials (tile floors, countertops, appliances, etc.) must also be factored in so that shadows are reduced. In addition to recessed lighting set with dimmer switches, Pam is partial to undercabinet lighting. Although halogen is exceedingly popular, Pam recommends super skinny fluorescents, which illuminate evenly, work with a variety of color schemes and don't get as hot as halogen, which can burn you.

Natural light, wherever it can be added, is essential. Kitchens generally include at least one window, usually over the kitchen sink. This is a hold-over from the 1950s, when women needed to be able to view their children playing outside while they were in the kitchen. Keeping the kitchen open to adjacent rooms is also desirable—whether by removing walls altogether or building arches that bring light and conversation, from room to room.

Eliminating clutter in the kitchen is one of Pam's primary challenges. The best solution to this universal problem is cabinetry. Cabinetry can hide anything today—from telephones to TVs to ovens. Pam showed me an example of the latter, where pocket doors slid away to reveal an oven. A neat safety feature of this style: the doors are automatically locked into place until the oven is sufficiently cooled down. "We have several levels of cabinetry, which are all custom," Pam says. For example, the Betch line has more than 20,000 possibilities when you multiply style by wood by finishes.

Home

continued from page 101

Styles include a lip door, which sits half in its frame and half out of it—great for an older home and a smaller budget. Currently, the full overlay door is most popular, which covers the face frame completely.

As for wood, cherry still reigns supreme, although red alder and maple are gaining in favor. According to Pam, “mixing cabinetry styles, wood species and finishes make a kitchen more interesting and beautiful.” Likewise, using a variety of handles and knobs—“the jewelry of cabinetry”—is also acceptable. “You don’t need to use original appliance handles anymore,” Pam notes. Instead, covering up a dishwasher with wood panels then adorning it with selected handles integrates appliances into the overall kitchen design. Regarding dishwashers, Pam said a current trend is “drawer dishwashers,” half-sized appliances that eliminate stooping.

Other appliances now found in multiple are sinks. The double-bowl sink is out of vogue. Instead, a large sink built into the countertop is often complemented by a smaller one set into an island. This new set up symbolizes the 21st-century family, which is either eating its meals at different times or sharing more in the culinary process.

It’s not just two dishwashers and two sinks though. Warming drawers are replacing the oven as a place to heat food at a steady temperature. More than one refrigeration unit is very commonplace too—icemakers, separate bar areas, wine coolers and miniature refrigerators for storing excess beverages. In fashion right now are refrigerators with French doors at the top and a freezer drawer at bottom. These units fall into the counterdepth trend, where refrigerators are made taller or wider so they do not protrude into the kitchen as much.

Another key element of a kitchen is ventilation, which “goes hand in hand” with a remodel, Pam says. Contemporary glass and steel ventilation hoods are quiet and because they feature glass as a functional element, less obtrusive. Hearth hoods that sit on countertops are a personal favorite

of Pam’s, though she says she’s hearing that their usage is waning. Pam is constantly keeping up with trends via seminars and conferences devoted to kitchen design. A current favorite is the induction cooktop.

Designing a kitchen can be overwhelming. They’re the second-most expensive room in the home to redesign (with bathrooms leading the way), but they bring the most value at resale. Pam says clients are more educated today than ever, with so many television shows and magazines devoted to design. Other clients know only what they don’t like and can be overwhelmed by the number of decisions that must be made.

Once your kitchen is remodeled, Pam says it should last at least 25 years, with updates only needed to “bring it up” to changing personal tastes. “You could just be tired of looking at something. All you have to do is add drop lighting or new chairs, or just change the hardware or the color. It’s as simple as that.” Another tip: It’s easier to upgrade appliances than cabinetry, so make sure you love what you purchase.

As for her own kitchen, Pam says that she has had a “dream kitchen” in her mind for more than three years now. Her hope is to do as much as the space permits so that she can use it as a showcase for her skills. Her reticence is a result of her insider’s knowledge, the awareness of the time and energy that would be expended on it when she is otherwise extremely busy making others’ kitchen fantasies reality.

Kitchen design—whether partial, bump out or full—takes approximately three months from start to finish, once all the materials, styles and finishes are selected, Pam says. Although it’s typically a messy job, Whole House Cabinetry tries to ease the disruption via clear storage boxes, temporary sinks and relocation of the microwave and refrigerator.

Whole House Cabinetry is located at 2948 Conestoga Road in Glenmoore. To learn more, call 610-458-4428 or visit (www.wholehousecabinetry.com). ❖

Stefanie Ryan is a contributing writer with Chester County Town & Country Living and an area freelance writer.