

Inside Influences:

Trends in Home Design

by Paul Spring

Lighting and interior architecture—extra volume, columns, and coffered ceilings—are used to distinguish entry areas even in smaller plans where there isn't a lot of square footage to give to a dramatic foyer.



Craig Buchanan

Changes in room layout and interior finishes reflect changes in the way Americans live

Interior design is unfamiliar ground to many builders. It's full of trends that seem to come and go without reason and practitioners who seem more concerned with fickle styles than with practical realities.

However, the public does pay a lot of attention to current styles. Few contractors are spared the presentation of torn-out pages from trendy decorating magazines by clients who want "something like this."

It helps to keep in mind that interior design is a lot more than just decorating these days. In fact, interior designers are drawing plans for an increasing number of builders—much to the chagrin of architects. And interior design does have a certain logic to it, once you get past the jargon and pretty pictures. Although some trends are based on whim and can be a little hard to swallow, others are spawned by real changes in the way people live (see "Changing Times").

Here are some things to look for in the next few years. Many are strictly high-end because that's where fashion starts. If they're too expensive or too much of a departure for the clients you build for right now, consider scaling them down. Most important is to listen to what your clients want and need.

Foyers

After more than 40 years of ranches that dump you into the living room without ceremony, or colonials with entries that give you 12 square feet of slate, formal entry foyers are becoming popular again. More than just a mudroom or a change from carpeting to tile, some are dramatic, two-story spaces with ridge or gable lights.

Living Rooms

There's little agreement on this room. Lots of people like a separate, formal living room, while others are glad to give the space over to an open-plan "great room." A popular compromise is to use half-height bookcases, columns, and angled walls to separate the kitchen from the social areas just beyond. Even interior windows (borrowed from Victorians) are being used for this purpose.

But whether it's an open or closed plan, light interiors (with as much glaz-

ing as the climate will allow) are the order of the day, and flat ceiling heights are going up to nine or 10 feet or more. Cathedral ceilings are still popular, but they are often combined with soffits, columns, and other elements that add interest to the volume.

The living room is still likely to contain some kind of fireplace despite increasing environmental regulation. Because of this, gas-log pre-fabs are making inroads in one segment of the market. Mantels are going back to a more formal look rather than stones and timbers. Hardwood floors are still very popular, but carpeting is making a strong comeback.

Built-in wall niches and bookshelves are becoming common in both period and contemporary living rooms. So are soft corners (created with rounded corner bead and drywall) and two-coat plaster. For an updated "traditional" look, designers are using wide, high-profile casing, base, and ceiling molding.

Kitchens

This room has gotten a lot of attention in the last few years, and that isn't likely to change. Look for the kitchen itself to grow more efficient in the next few years, and "pod" areas (adjoining breakfast nook, den, living room) to get even larger.

Countertops. Sink tops have become important to the look of kitchens in the '80s with new solid surfacing colors and creative edge treatments. Varying the height of counters (for tall, short, or disabled customers and for writing surfaces, baking centers, etc.) is becoming more common on the custom end.

The use continues to grow for both contemporary and traditional decor along with the umber of grout colors available. But laminates are still the most popular countertop material. There are some interesting new laminate patterns and textures, as well as factory-made edgings in laminate and PVC. Granite and marble will still be the choice for very high-end kitchens (despite a dearth of good stone craftsmen), and butcher-block tops may make some gains with the re-emerging popularity of lighter woods.

Cabinets. In general, cabinets have become more efficient (tilt-out sink cabinet panels and corner bi-fold lazy susans), and helpful (roll-out bottom drawers in base cabinets). The strong influence of Europe in the last 10 years has also contributed. Here are some examples:

- Greater popularity of frameless cabinets with laminate-covered full overlay doors and concealed hinges.
- Open shelving and glazed doors to relieve the "slab" look of upper cabinets.
- Rounded peninsulas with curved doors.
- Space-conserving wire fixtures for interior cabinet storage.
- Some alternatives to the "visor-shaped" range hood.

The backsplash area is getting more decorative attention with lots of shapes, colors, and patterns in ceramic tile. Also designers are making splash areas more functional with built-in shelving, appliance "garages," and under cabinet gadgets.

Ash and maple are back as cabinet woods, and cherry has been very popular in the last couple of years. Oak still has the lion's share of the market. Light stains are still the most popular. The all-white look, in paint or high-gloss lacquer is hot, but the white-washed or "pickled" look is on its way out.



Alan Goldstein

◀ Built-in niches and bookshelves, formal fireplace surrounds, coffered ceilings, and high windows all lend this interior a strong traditional appeal.



John Rogers

◀ Open plans need low bookcases, columns, angles, individual ceilings, and level changes to give rooms visual boundaries. These layouts let busy families feel connected even while they pursue different activities.

Islands and peninsulas are still very popular. Islands have begun to make the switch from cooking centers to food prep centers, often with a second sink.

Sinks and faucets. This is another area where there's suddenly a tremendous range of choice: triples, hi-lows, sinks with drainboards, and a lot of rounded shapes inside and out. Corner sinks are growing quickly in popularity, but they aren't always as convenient as they appear.

Cast-iron and stainless-steel remain the standards, but the top-mounted, self-rimming look is giving way to tile-ins and undermounting again. Two sink materials to watch are the quartz-resin composite from Europe, and Corian's European-made basins with drainboards. Both currently cost a fortune, but they have some real advantages.

In faucets, the trend on the high end is toward ceramic disk technology on the inside, powder finishes for colorful outsides. Many customers are willing to pay 4300 and more for a kitchen mixer. With these kitchen faucets requiring just one of three or four holes in the sink deck, a lot more soap dispensers and hot water dispensers are being mounted. Look for increased interest in water purifying systems as health concerns continue.

Appliances. There's greater diversity than ever here too. Take burners. While holding on to old technology like open-pan gas and electric coil, most manufacturers are producing stoves with hobs and sealed gas burners, and a few with magnetic induction or halogen. Even with some drawbacks, the sealed units are bound to take over



Mark Boisclair

◀ With built-in features—the refrigerator, a glass-doored pantry, an extended soffit, a peninsula, an island, and a writing desk—open kitchens like this reflect the rest of the house. More traditional kitchens that are partially closed off are preferred by others who want to hide the mess.

Changing Times

Hot Buttons, in the marketing lingo of big builders, are the conspicuous amenities that bring buyers to the closing table. The hot buttons of the '90s are likely to include floorplans, products, and finishes that help these move-up buyers (or prospective remodeling clients) cope with rapid changes in their lives.

It's easy to underestimate how much change has taken place in the past few years in the way we live. Not long ago, women homemakers didn't get a paycheck. They kept the kids and the house scrubbed, and made sure dinner was on the table. Most people were married, and most of them had kids. Even though the living room was only used when guests came over, the house worked pretty well.

But there aren't many of these folks around anymore. Only 4% of American families consist of Dad, Mom, and the two kids; 62% of women work. And meals often don't come from the stove: 38% of a dual-income food budget is spent for restaurant dinners and takeout. Single-person households will have risen more than 120% among 35- to 64-year-olds between 1980 and 2000.

Most houses weren't built for these realities, and that means a lot of people are remodeling or moving up to a home that better fits how they live now. Here are some major influences on homeowners and some of the attitudes and needs stemming from them that will shape homes in the future.

Time crunch. Quite simply, time is becoming more valuable than money; it's a very dominant factor in decision-making about homes. The nature and pace of shopping, cleaning, cooking, entertaining, and family interaction have all been changed by the squeeze on time. Many dual-income homeowners aren't flinching at paying a premium for delivery, or for high-quality products that won't break down and don't require maintenance. Whole-house electronic systems that truly save time will be welcome too.

Changing households. There are more singles and more single parents. Shared custody means kids on weekends. Ailing parents are moving in when time and finances leave no alternative; young adult children are staying longer or coming back home. Floorplans and furnishings have to be extremely flexible to deal with these kinds of "accordion" households.

New economics. It takes two incomes for most homeowners these days, but this also produces a lot of discretionary cash. However, there's less time to spend it, with hours on the job up dramatically. Taking care of the house and kids is often left to outside services. This

translates to things like an extra room for an au pair and a security system that deals with delivery, cleaning, and maintenance people.

Advancing age. The big bulge of homeowners (not to mention the nation's housing stock itself) is reaching middle age. Expected to live well into their eighties and nineties, this generation is becoming aware of aging as their parents require more care. The impact of this influence will build gradually over the next two or three decades.

Dwindling resources. This is a matter of dealing with declining supplies: the astronomical cost of land, the availability of water, the cost of heating and air conditioning, the waste crisis, etc. These are becoming global problems, but as they worsen, the solutions will fall on individuals and the homes they live in. Technology is important here, but it's not a cure-all. Many homeowners are trying to position themselves for the future, and these factors will become more and more important in decisions about location and products.

Health concerns. Aerobics may not outlast the '80s, but awareness of radon, asbestos, pesticides, and indoor air quality (right on down to molds and dust mites) is widespread and playing a growing part in consumer decisions and worries.

Looking for old roots. There is a new "traditionalism" reflected in architecture and furnishings. It's not just a fondness for chintz or Victorian gingerbread, there's a nostalgia for family and neighborhood values that is very strong and has yet to be fully expressed.

Retreat to home. People are looking more to their home as an oasis in an unrelenting world of competitive pressure, information overload, congestion, and crime. With advanced electronics supplying entertainment and information, and a growing number of businesses delivering goods and services, leaving home will be less necessary.

Work is another subject for the home—23 million people are doing it at least part-time now, and that number will continue to grow as baby boomers look for more flexibility in their lives and develop the expertise to break away. For those that can, a bedroom wall and a couple of outlets will not satisfy the need for an office.

Need for privacy. With time spent in the home being compressed and the functions it serves expanding, the need for a spatial and acoustic haven within the house is strong for all ages. The differences between weeknights and weekends further complicates how the interior spaces are used. Look for more kids' playrooms, dens, and master suites.—P.S.

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New basin shapes, combinations, and materials can dress up the sink area. Corner sinks and triple-basin models are being used in a lot of upper-end kitchens.



Alan Goldstein

because they look good and they are faster and easier to clean.

Most manufacturers have made the commitment to white appliances, although few are shipping their entire lines in white. It appears that the "commercial looking" trend has slowed considerably. For clients who still want a big restaurant range, the best-known commercial manufacturers

now make safer residential versions.

One of the major differences in new kitchens is the trend to building everything in (even small appliances like microwaves). Similarly, cooktop and range ventilation is getting less conspicuous. Most manufacturers have developed lower profile units (tilt-up, European thin-line, etc.) in updraft, and a rash of new downdraft units are available that can be mounted at the back of the counter behind a cooktop.

Another factor that is getting some attention in kitchens is noise. Dishwasher noise is currently the subject of several marketing campaigns, but range hoods, microwave ovens, and refrigerators are also subjects for this kind of scrutiny.

A consumer demand that is being heard by manufacturers is for flexibility in kitchen appliances. On large high-end kitchens, some designers are doubling up on some appliances, using two microwaves, sinks, or refrigerators, but for most folks it's combination appli-



Scott Francis

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Breakfast nooks and casual eating areas aren't replacing dining rooms, but they are immensely popular because they accommodate a quicker pace of life and make meals for one or two seem cozy.

ances that are growing in popularity. These include microwave/convection ovens, and modular ranges and cooktops with a choice of plug-in burners, griddle, and grill.

Eating Areas

The fact that fewer households are sitting down to eat together means more varied eating locations.

Dining rooms. Formal dining rooms

are still popular and getting more use these days. This room doesn't have to be completely isolated, but can be separated visually by half-height walls, hardwood floor or carpet borders, and ceiling treatments like coffering or stenciling. French doors are also being used a lot to make the separation.

For dining rooms that do have four walls, period wainscoting is back in vogue. Better lighting than the typical centered chandelier is also becoming more important.

Breakfast bars and eat-in islands. These cantilevered counters are typically deeper and matched better to seating heights than the '60s versions. As a result, they get serious use.

Breakfast nooks. These are on everybody's "hot buttons" list. They lend themselves to both contemporary and traditional decor, and often incorporate a good deal of glass (skylights, bays, and glazed porches) and small garden spaces. Built-in seating is a traditional touch that is growing in popularity.

Bedrooms

Proportionately, bedrooms are getting more and more of our time at home. Master suites have encouraged the notion of luxury in the bedroom as well as privacy. It's a good place to build in furniture, and lighting should be very flexible to fit different uses and moods.

Suites. Although you can eat up tremendous square footage with a master suite, what's most important is making it feel like a private "get-away." Microwaves and undercounter refrigerators are showing up in some suites. Features like an entertainment center, a fireplace, library shelves, a small private patio or garden, or a built-in chaise also help create this atmosphere.

The bath and dressing areas are important too. Closets and vanities are now typically "his" and "hers." Wardrobes should be well-lit (daylighting with glass block or a skylight can really make a difference), and fitted with closet organizers or built-in shelves, poles, and bureaus.

Consider using carpeting in the bathroom and throughout the suite. This will unify the rooms visually, which will help if you've had to carve out some odd spaces to remodel a bedroom into a suite.

Children's rooms. Not much new here. Built-ins (desk, bed, and dressers) are much more common than they used to be and should be done in bright colors. A common playroom is also worth considering.

Spare room/den. This room is more important than ever before with aging parents, joint-custody kids, live-in nannies, and the like. It should have a bath nearby and shouldn't be clustered with the other bedrooms. A separate, private entrance is ideal.

Bathrooms

These rooms are now expected to have some style of their own. What is often ignored is storage and good lighting.

Tubs. Although jetted tubs are probably here to stay, they don't need to be huge, nor should they command a throne-like view of the room as long as you can find a way to leave the service panel accessible. Just as important is safety; both step-up and sunken tubs carry a lot of potential liability without proper placement, solid grab bars (not a bad idea for any tub or shower), and non-skid textured tile.

Showers. The size and shape of

showers are changing with the realization that the bathtub isn't where Americans head in the morning to get clean. Showers "for two" with two and even four heads are becoming more common, and shower doors are going much more to the "frameless" type or being dispensed with altogether. Shower seats, either built-in or in fold-up plastic versions from Europe, are being used a good deal as well.

Toilets. Ultra low-flush (ULF), 1.6-gallon toilets have been mandated by a number of municipalities, and there is national legislation pending. ULF technology is still emerging, and there are several different approaches. These toilets may be in sort supply in some areas.

Although toilets are coming out in some surprising colors and finishes, they are also being tucked away in separate rooms in master suites. This is a variation on old-fashioned water closets.

Vanities/basins. Pedestal sinks are still popular because of their "period" appeal, but it's easy to forget how much storage a bathroom needs. So vanities are often more practical.

Vanity tops, basins and faucets are being used to bring more color and style to bathrooms. Consider using marble, solid surfacing, or tile instead of an integral top, and fixtures that complement that color.

Home Offices

Although you may want to label this room a "spare bedroom" or "den" and include a closet so as not to limit your market, it's important that it be wired for serious work. Ideally, this means a separate circuit for the computer, and enough outlets to accommodate a printer, a copier, a fax, an answering machine, etc. In prewiring for telephone, at least double the usual number of jacks and figure a minimum of two lines.

This room should be as distant as possible from the core of the house if it will be used seriously. In relatively mild climates, existing outbuildings, detached garages, potting sheds, shops, and backyard studios are increasingly being tapped as home office space because they help enforce the discipline that's needed.

When more casual working space is required, "his" and "her" built-in desks at one end of the bedroom are common. This really works best if the room is laid out in an "L" so that the one member of the couple can sleep while the other is still working.

Laundry Areas

Dirty clothes are moving closer to the core of the house, often right into the kitchen. The garage or basement can seem pretty far away for homeowners putting their first load in at 10:00 p.m. and trying to catch the news at the same time. Second-story laundry areas near bedrooms and dressing areas are also becoming more common. Many of these make use of excellent full-size stacking units from both European and American manufacturers that will literally fit in a closet.

But laundry rooms are also back in fashion in larger homes. These tend to be tiled (often with a floor drain), and contain all the tools—soaking tub, ironing board, folding table, clothes line, sweater racks, and ventilating fan. ■

Paul Spring is editor of the Western edition of *The Journal of Light Construction*.



Fieldstone Cabinetry, Inc.

Both contemporary and traditional cabinets are being made to work harder with wire storage fixtures, slide-out pan drawers, tilt-out sink fronts, and built-in appliances that used to sit on the counter.



John Rogers

Master suites are private retreats with amenities—fireplaces, small enclosed gardens, separate media systems. Writing desks or even serious home offices are often located here to get them away from the busier core of the house.



Gabrielle Benzur

Jetted tubs don't have to be huge like outdoor spas, or raised up like thrones to dominate the room. One bath feature that is getting bigger and more thoughtfully designed is the shower—where most Americans bathe.