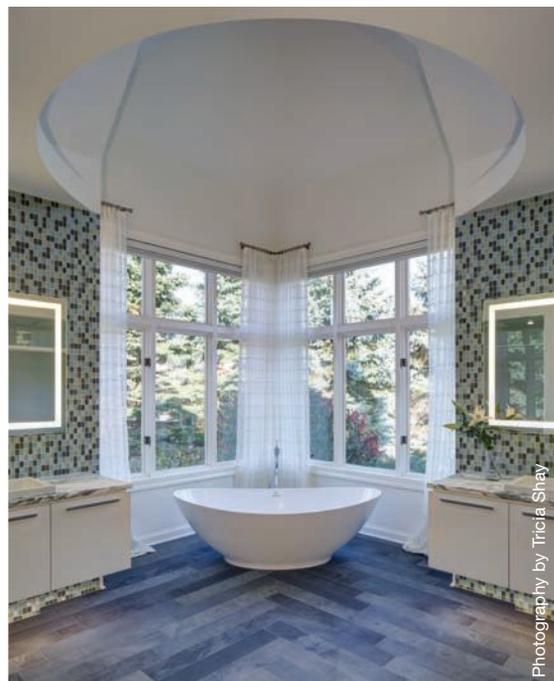


# High-End Home Trends

BY REBECCA KONYA



Photography by Mark Effron



Photography by Tricia Shay

Although open floor plans and clean lines still dominate local home design, Milwaukee area designers are seeing homeowners increasingly embrace design trends that may once have been outside their comfort zone.

For instance, white and gray may still be the primary colors on the home décor palette, but two-tone cabinets are taking over in the kitchen. White and neutral finishes still reign for upper cabinets, but homeowners are more willing to play with color on the lower cabinets and kitchen islands.

“People are venturing into color, especially for islands,” says Samantha Castillo, a designer with Gerhards — The Kitchen and Bath Store in Brookfield.

Even appliances are getting in on the act with the recent introduction of black stainless steel. An alternative to traditional stainless steel, the black matte finish has become a popular option among shoppers of premium-priced appliances, from refrigerators to ranges to dishwashers.

“People really seem to like the black stainless steel,” says Mary Lee Hannan, owner of MLH Consulting, which advises clients on the selection, use and care of major home appliances. “It’s much richer looking with an almost matte feel.”

For homeowners who still shy away from color, texture is an equally interesting option.

“Texture on texture in lieu of bright punchy colors is popular right now,” says Nick Blavat, an architect with Deep River Partners Ltd. “It’s being used everywhere, from countertops to accent walls to floors and ceilings.”

And with more diverse tile shapes and sizes available than ever before, Blavat says there are no boundaries to the looks people can create. Especially popular is porcelain tile that looks like faux wood or marble.

“Porcelain offers the beauty and variation of natural stone, but it’s more durable and easier to maintain,” explains Blavat.

Tiles are also getting bigger. No longer limited to the standard 12-by-12-inch square, homeowners are using large-format tiles to create stunning looks in the kitchen and bath like waterfall countertops.

“The large-format tiles that are available now are so versatile,” says Blavat.

Technology also continues to be integrated into all areas of the home, from touchless faucets to wireless audio systems to smart appliances. Today homeowners can control everything from their thermostat and security systems to their lighting with a tap of their phone.

“People can control their homes from anywhere they want to take their lives,” says Blavat. “It’s hugely liberating.”

As homeowners embrace the transitional kitchen, a blend of traditional and modern styles with a focus on practicality and creativity — clever storage has become essential. Deep drawers, cabinets with dividers and inserts to organize pots and pans and tilt-outs for trash and recycling all help maximize kitchen space and lend greater functionality.

Hannan says the current focus on clean eating has also impacted the modern kitchen, with people adding niche appliances like steam ovens and induction cooktops.

“The desire for fresh food is changing the way people cook,” says Hannan.

Blavat says that convenience is another factor driving the niche appliance craze. He is seeing clients add built-in coffee stations, wet bars and designated beverage centers to spaces reserved for entertaining so hosts don’t have to leave their guests.

At the end of the day though, the home is still considered a respite — especially from today’s increasingly high-tech saturated world. The most restorative environment in the home continues to be the bathroom, with homeowners seeking spa-like conditions.

“The bathroom is a place for relaxation and comfort,” says Castillo.

That means cool tones mingled with natural materials like wood and stone and private indulgences like rain showers and soaking tubs that double as stylish statement pieces. **M**