

Appliance Envy

Our new survey details what's on the way out and what is to come

By **CHELSIE BUTLER**

IN THE KITCHEN, the must-haves include some form of refrigeration, cooking and cleaning appliance. In smaller spaces and those in which cooking at home is not really a goal, those three usual suspects may be enough. But in larger projects that encompass home chefs and families that really use their kitchens, there is no limit to the number of appliances that can be specified.

Wine aficionados may yearn for a specialized tasting area, which could include wine storage at multiple temperatures. Coffee drinkers may want a built-in appliance that can be programmed to serve their favorite brew each morning. And homeowners who love to cook meals and entertain at home may desire a variety of cooking appliances, and with today's choices, the sky is really the limit.

Our new survey polled more than 170 industry professionals on what their clients are asking for in terms of today's kitchen appliances. We take a deep dive into specialty offerings, the pulse on the desire for smart appliances, favorite hood and refrigeration styles, most popular fuel choices, as well as trends that need to be placed on the back burner (couldn't resist) and those coming down the pike.



PRODUCT PRICE, STYLE & LOYALTY

When asked if the cost of the appliance package in their kitchen projects over the last year had increased, stayed the same or decreased, 78.2% of our survey respondents said it has increased. This rise could be because of raw material and shipping cost increases, but it could also be attributed to more types of appliances being specified in kitchens today, as well as additional amenities.

The most popular appliance style in the last 12 months has been stainless steel, with paneled coming in second, and those in a color finish coming in at 3.7%. Appliance styles will come in later when we talk about upcoming and passe trends.

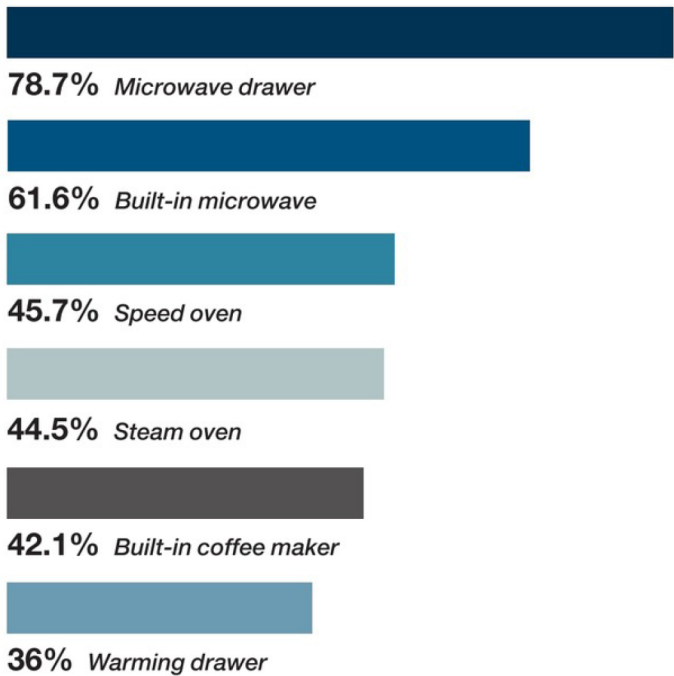
Almost two-thirds of our respondents said they would consider choosing appliance brands outside of their go-to selections, with another third saying they might. Factors that would influence a change include appliances that are well made with a proven track record and brands with a reputation for reliable service.

According to senior interior designer Natalie Erickson, ASID, and senior architect Nicholas Mather, AIA, NCARB, of Deep River Partners in Milwaukee, their concerns in choosing a different appliance brand would be unknown quality, differences in operation and performance and price.

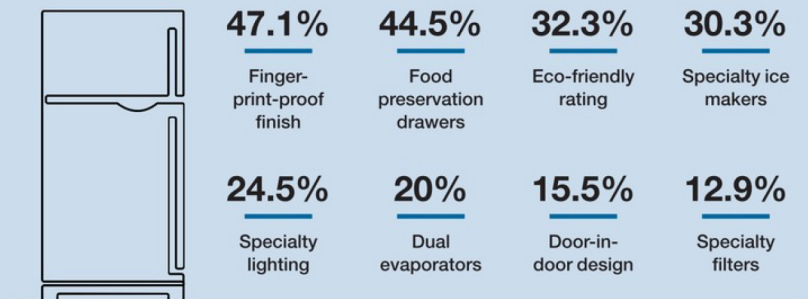
“Consumers are of course tempted by the cool bells and whistles, as well as the price,” said Linda Alvino, customer care consultant at Ridgewood, N.J.-based Ulrich Inc. “However, quality brands with a long-standing reputation often offer the best product support. It is important to keep in mind that appliances are a

LEFT For high-end kitchens with plenty of space like this one designed by Aparna Vijayan of Ulrich Inc., a great feature homeowners are seeking today is a built-in coffee system like the one pictured by Wolf. Also included is a drawer microwave from Sharp, a wine refrigerator from Summit and a Sub-Zero French-door refrigerator. *Photo credit: Dove Photography*

Which of the following specialty cooking appliances have you included in your kitchen projects over the last year?



Which of the following refrigeration attributes have you specified in your kitchen projects over the last 12 months?



functional aspect of a kitchen and if/when there may be issues, your clients will be grateful for not having to deal with sub-par support.”

COOKING APPLIANCES

When it comes to specialty offerings in this category, microwave drawers take the top spot, and built-in microwaves come in second. Speed and steam ovens, built-in coffee makers and warming drawers rounded out the list. Write-in answers included air fryers and double microwaves.

Fuel choice remains a mixed bag across the industry, with dual-fuel and gas almost tying for most popular fuel choice for kitchen projects in the last year. Induction came in at 22.7%, with electric at 15.3%.

Although Erickson and Mather have been seeing an increase in requests for induction, they feel there will always be a market for gas cooking appliances. For the Ulrich team, their clients still predominantly want gas, and they feel that in northern New Jersey, gas is what the homeowners grew up with. According to Ryan Austin Hagood, principal designer with Atlanta-based r.a.d. Interiors, his projects in New York and California do not allow natural gas, so he is exploring induction cooking and cooktops hidden under porcelain solid surfaces.

CHILLING CHOICES

The most popular refrigeration style in the last 12 months has hands down been the French-door unit. Those with a bottom freezer and the column



style came in second and third, and the side-by-side style came in at 10.3%.

In terms of preferred refrigeration attributes in the last year, a fingerprint-proof finish and food preservation were the top choices. An eco-friendly rating, specialty ice makers and specialty lighting came in at three, four and

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ABOVE This kitchen by Deep River Partners features fully integrated Sub-Zero refrigerator and freezer columns, a 60-inch Wolf dual-fuel range with a dual griddle, a custom nickel range hood by Texas Lightsmith and a Wolf microwave drawer. Photo credit: Ryan Hainey Photography

Passé Appliance Trends

Exterior water/ice dispensers

Stainless-steel finishes

**Built-in
appliances**

OTR microwaves

Gas ranges

Appliance drawers

**Large touchscreens
on the fridge**

**Matching
appliance
packages**

five. Rounding out the list were dual evaporators, door-in-door designs and specialty filters. Write-in answers included convertible temperature drawers, black interiors and undercounter refrigeration drawers.

ANTIQUATED APPLIANCE TRENDS

Perhaps the most outdated item in the kitchen today is the over-the-range microwave, which some say is a health and safety risk.

“At first glance, this location would seem to be a good solution for space concerns, but it is not ideal since one cannot be cooking at the cook-top while another accesses the microwave,” said Alvino. “Also, the ventilation from the over-the-range microwaves is typically not very effective.”

Microwave drawers were also noted for their design shortcomings; they are great for freeing up precious counterspace, but they are not always user friendly. According to designer Aparna Vijayan of Ulrich Inc., the convection steam oven is starting to replace the microwave, and it can be stacked neatly with a wall oven.

Some respondents are growing weary of stainless-steel appliance finishes, but Erickson and Mather say this is a classic option that will never go out of style. According to Rob Elfers, president of Ulrich Inc., other color options may come and go, but stainless is a great neutral that will never disappear. Hagood feels stainless steel provides a professional, restaurant-grade look to a kitchen, and it is easy to clean.

Instead of exterior water/ice dispensers, the Deep River team is specifying filtered drinking water faucets and either internal ice dispensers or dedicated/integrated ice makers. These designers also want to see downdraft ventilation updated to improve operation and provide better concealment.

Respondents were on the fence when it comes to smart technology in the kitchen. Almost 15% said they did not include it in their projects in the last year, and only 11% said they included it in 75-100% of their projects. One reason behind the lack of smart tech is that homeowners don't want to deal with the upkeep; they want their appliances to be simple to use. One respondent said that brands keep increasing the price for these offerings without increasing their functionality. Still another said that the integration of smart cooking into ranges and ovens has been a game changer for many of their clients – like hitting the easy button.

NOTEWORTHY INNOVATIONS

Answers to our survey ran the gamut and included the French-door wall oven, a dual microwave, air fry built into the oven, speed ovens and ceiling ventilation. Multiple functions in one oven have been gaining in popularity, with steam and sous vide topping the list.

“My personal favorite is the speed oven,” said Alvino. “It is a microwave/convection oven combo, so it allows you to cook food faster with the same results as you would get from a convection-only oven.”

Other innovations our design professional respondents noted were induction cooktops integrated into countertops, temperature probes and AI cameras built into the oven, flush-mount coffee machines, vacuum-seal drawers, blast chillers and shock freezers and a recirculating cooking filter.

Some of the most outdated appliance trends don't necessarily need to be canceled; some simple updates could be the answer. Whatever the outcome, the possibilities for innovation in today's kitchen appliances are endless.

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Noteworthy Appliance Innovations

**French-door
wall oven**

Built-in air fry capability

Door-in-door refrigeration

Flush-mount coffee machines

Sous vide ovens

**Ceiling-mounted
ventilation**

**Convertible
fridge/freezer
drawers**