

# Homes

## Kitchen cabinets have come a long way

Natural vs painted, traditional vs modern, the choices are many

**LAURA LYNE PAQUET**

Special to Postmedia Network

Choosing new kitchen cabinets can feel like an overwhelming task. Shaker or contemporary? Wood or paint? Shelves or drawers? And what about lighting? Here are some tips to help you weigh the pros and cons.

### CONSIDER THE OVERALL LOOK

If you're seeking a contemporary vibe, consider flat-panel doors. With no raised edges, they are sleek and ultramodern. If you choose doors with no exterior hardware, they may even resemble one continuous wall.

That esthetic often appeals to homeowners with an open-concept kitchen overlooking a living room. In those layouts, "we find it important for our appliances to blend in with the cabinetry, to create the illusion of furniture," says Eugenia Triandos, principal designer and president at Montreal's Hibou Design & Co.

In Ottawa, demand also remains strong for classic cabinetry that creates a warm, homey ambiance. "The shaker door is still the most popular door style," says Corey Laurysen, vice president of sales and service at Stittsville-based Laurysen Kitchens.

### PICK THE RIGHT MATERIALS

He and Triandos agree that natural wood, particularly white oak, is making a big comeback. "It instantly adds warmth to any space and is one of the most durable materials," says Triandos. And Laurysen notes that natural wood is easier to maintain than painted surfaces, as you don't have to repaint the whole surface if a small area is damaged.

If you'd rather have painted cabinets, medium-density fibreboard (MDF) is a common choice. However, the paint may chip easily, so it might not be the best option for families with young children.

As a harder-wearing alternative, Laurysen suggests melamine cabinets with a polyester finish. A relatively new product, this finish can be made to look like either natural wood or a painted surface. "It looks like paint, feels like paint, but it's not paint," he says.

Not to be confused with polyester, a polymer finish works well in contemporary kitchens and resists fingerprints, scratches, heat and humidity. "It's also available in quite a few interesting colours and is highly durable," Triandos says.

### MAKE THE MOST OF THE SPACE

Traditional cupboards with shelves still have their place, but there are lots of other ways to store your dishes, cookware, mixing bowls, utensils and small appliances. "I always steer people toward drawers," says Laurysen, noting that they allow people to reach everything in the storage space easily, without removing items. "How much gets lost at the back of a cabinet?"

If drawers aren't practical, shelves that slide out serve a similar function. Anything that brings items closer to users may be particularly useful for children, persons with disabilities and older adults. "As our population ages, you have to think about ergonomics," Laurysen says.

If you have awkward corners and edges, don't give up on them, he adds. "Dead space is just such a



A glass-fronted cabinet can be an eye-catching focal point at the end of an island. **PHOTOS LAURYSEN KITCHENS LTD.**



It can be easier to move dishes in and out of a microwave installed in a kitchen island than one at eye level.



Metal-framed, glass-fronted doors blend seamlessly with flat-panel cabinets in this contemporary kitchen.

waste of money. Why not try to solve it?" A lazy Susan can make be good away to store cereal, granola bars and peanut butter at kids' eye level in an awkward corner. A narrow pullout shelving unit can hold small spice jars.

### DISPLAY YOUR TREASURES

Open kitchen shelving may be all the rage on Pinterest, but it's not for everyone, cautions Laurysen. While it makes it easy to see and reach what you have, it can be a challenge to keep clean and tidy. "It sometimes becomes a catch-all."

He urges clients to be honest with themselves about how much time and energy they have to keep open shelving at its minimalist best. He usually advises them to include just

a few shelves to display statement or accent items, rather than using open shelves to store everything.

Glass-fronted cabinets can reduce dusting and washing requirements, but they pose the same challenge as open shelves when it comes to keeping them tidy. If you're using them to highlight special items, such as crystal glassware, you could install in-cabinet lighting. It can create a dramatic focal point, but it can also be expensive.

### SPEAKING OF LIGHTING

If practicality rather than drama is your goal, don't forget about under-cabinet lighting. It comes in handy when you're chopping food or reading labels. And at night, switching on a few small lights above

your countertops while leaving the rest of the kitchen dim can create a festive mood for a party.

### JUST ASK

Kitchen cabinets have come a long way in the last few decades. A designer can help you understand how you use your kitchen and what functions are most important to you. Depending on your budget, needs and style, you could install anything from a special shelf for your espresso machine to a pullout rack for your recycling bins.

"Clients are really taking an interest in planning out their kitchens in advance, where every item has a home built for it," Triandos says. "Custom cabinet makers are really capable of incredible things."