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to the  
Record-Eagle

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## Making your dream kitchen a reality

By SHEILA GARRETT  
Special to the Record-Eagle

Almost every person who cooks has a dream kitchen in mind — where it's a pleasure to spend time planning and preparing meals — and not a nightmare. Since kitchens are so central to homes, it is one of the rooms most likely to need updating.

But whether you're having your current kitchen remodeled, building a new home or doing some renovation work yourself, it's wise to consult a designer whose experience and knowledge of the market can help you achieve your goal.

The most important thing for a kitchen designer is to listen to prospective clients, says Tracy Scott, designer and co-owner of Northwood Kitchen & The Carpet Shoppe of Traverse City for 28 years.

New clients are first given a tour of the showroom.

"If they have plans with them, we go over them together. We set an appointment time for the first consultation, which usually lasts from one-and-a-half to two hours," said Scott. "Then we have lots of questions."

The designer needs to establish:

- How many people are in the family?
- How many cooks be using the kitchen?
- Will the kitchen will be used for other activities besides cooking?

Besides being used for cooking, supervising homework and talking on the phone, said Scott, the main purpose of the kitchen can serve as a gathering spot for family and entertaining.

Providing enough functional space is important. Tiny kitchens are the biggest challenge to the designer. Because of space limitations, function almost has to be foremost, Scott explained, although sometimes walls can be removed or spaces reevaluated to better meet the clients' needs.

The designer will need to look into the number and type of appliances the family has or wants to replace. Appliances play an enormous role in the kitchens being designed today, she said, with many clients going to commercial cookware,

and cooking equipment, built-in refrigeration and coordinating dishwashers.

"In all the high-end kitchens, we're seeing that type of thing," said Scott.

Northwood Kitchen & The Carpet Shoppe carries some KitchenAid and Whirlpool appliances, and also works with Max's Sales and Services and other appliance stores in Traverse City, Scott said.

"We just send our clients there, although we will help them make selections, if they ask us."

The designer will want to assess the amount of available light. Frequently an architect will play an important role in lighting and will make recommendations.

"We don't supply those products, but we can and do specify," said Scott.

Northwood does supply cabinetry, countertops, ceramic tile and granite. There are two different types of wood countertops available. A new type recently introduced in this area is called Spekva. Imported from Denmark, it comes in 22 different wood species, including some exotic African varieties, as well as teak, walnut, cherry and maple, with a large selection of edge details.

"Maple butcher block countertops are not the only thing available by any stretch of the imagination," said Scott.

Spekva countertops can be done in almost any size. For a recent sales meeting, she said, "They imported a 30-foot countertop, and the only reason they had to stop at that length is that that's the size of the belly of the plane they brought it over in."

Besides the all-important food preparation area, a client may choose to include a food storage area, a walk-in pantry or a computer alcove in the kitchen. There may be built in areas for reading where children, or

moms, can curl up and read a good book.

"We need to provide space for people to maneuver. Home offices have been providing message centers and computer space for years. But young families may choose to have these areas located in the kitchen. They may want their children, and their computers, near them while they are in the middle of preparing the evening meal.

"Young people who have grown up with computers may store their recipes on computer, and wish to have them in the kitchen. Or they may choose to have this working space in an area adjacent



Record-Eagle/Elizabeth Conley

Top, Traverse City's Roger and Karen Widing's kitchen. Roger is a builder and this kitchen won the People's Choice award in last year's Parade of Homes. It features an island with two levels. The lower side allows whoever is cooking to work while visiting with those on the opposite side — with the preparation out of view. Above, the cook's side shows two refrigerated drawers, by Sub Zero. Karen said she keeps salad and sandwich fixings handy in the top drawer which has a plastic lid. The bottom drawer is for fruit and veggies to be used later; the island also contains a prep sink.

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## Today's appliances are becoming energy efficient and economical, too

By KRISTEN COUNTS  
Special to the Record-Eagle

Appliance manufacturers are responding to consumers' concerns over the costs of operating large home appliances with the development of new energy-efficient models.

Consumers are not only concerned about the size of their monthly bills; they are also taking into account the cost to the environment and its resources.

"The biggest push in the industry is the resurgence of the front-loading washing machine," said Cass Szalkowski, sales consultant at ABC Appliance Warehouse in Traverse City.

The "front-loader" was once popular in the 1930s and 1940s. The machines can wash a large load of laundry with less detergent and half the amount of water of top-loading washers, according to Szalkowski.

And using only 14 to 22 gallons of water per load means that there's less water to heat up, requiring less electricity than the top-loaders. Front-loaders also spin faster in the spin cycle, which means that there is less water left on the fabric and therefore less time needed in the dryer, converting to savings overall.

Szalkowski referred to a national study conducted in homes with average electricity rates that did about eight warm-water loads of laundry per week. It was found that front-loader use was \$83 less per year than top-loader use, in consideration of electricity and detergent costs.

"Based on today's cost of energy, a front-loading washer saves about \$1,000 dollars over the life-span of the machine," said Szalkowski. "It doubles the wear time of clothing, so you save money on clothing."

Clothing is spared the rough

ride of the agitator found in the top-loaders. In the front-loading washer, agitation is achieved via gravity — the clothes are tossed in and out of the water in a vertical rotation.

The most obvious question remains — What's the price difference between front-loaders and top-loaders?

"Front-loaders are twice as much," said Szalkowski.

They run from \$600 to \$1,300. To complement the efficiency of the front-loading washer, dryers are also being manufactured to be more energy-efficient. They are larger, allowing more air to circulate, and they operate at lower temperatures. They cost about \$100 to \$150 more than the average dryer.

Szalkowski added, "Gas dryers cost about 40 percent of electric to run."

In fact, all types of energy-efficient appliance models cost more at the initial purchase than the less efficient models.

"Energy-efficient appliances cost you more up front, but cost you less in the long run. You get what you pay for," commented Gary Nelson, a salesperson at Best Buy in Traverse City.

Consumers look to save money in the kitchen as well as the laundry room.

Chris and Heather Sack of Glen Arbor recently purchased an energy-efficient range, refrigerator, and dishwasher for the kitchen in their newly built home.

"There has most definitely been a significant amount of money that we have saved on bills. We've never had an electric bill over \$45, and never had a gas bill over \$85," said Chris.

Dishwashers are available with energy-efficient qualities such as a shorter drying time, automatic temperature control, and non-heat air dry, according to Nelson.

"Energy-efficient dishwashers operate at a higher temperature so you can use less detergent," said Szalkowski.

They have high-pressure pumps and use half the amount of water, leading to savings on the electric bill.

In refrigerators, efficiency has been increased through the adding of a rear panel that covers the coils, according to Nelson. "Some refrigerators have twin cooling units," said Nelson, who explained that the models have one cooling unit for the refrigerator and one for the freezer. This feature cuts down on the overall electrical pull when a door is opened.

Szalkowski added, "About seven years ago, manufacturers started to get rid of freon use, so it's costing much less to operate a refrigerator than it used to."

With ovens, one type that is more energy efficient is a "double-duty oven," which is composed of one large oven with a small oven immediately above it, according to Szalkowski.

The ovens can be heated at two different temperatures off of the same heat source.

Sack explained that their gas range is more energy efficient than its electric counterparts.

"I know that we've saved a lot of money by not using an electric stove that has to heat up, which wastes energy; and the cool down time also puts off wasted energy."

By a variety of means, these appliances need less power, so they consume less natural energy resources. By using less water, energy-efficient dishwashers and laundry washers contribute to the preservation of it. By decreasing the amount of detergent needed in the same appliances, there is less of this waste material released.

"There are a lot of energy-efficient appliances that are energy star compliant. These are energy-efficiency standards that are put



Record-Eagle/John L. Russell

Above and right: Traverse City's ABC Warehouse carries several brands of frontloading washers and dryers which are touted to be energy-efficient. Right: Whirlpool's Duet washers claim to be easier on your clothes and your pocketbook.

out by the government," said Nelson.

Both salesmen agreed that large appliance manufacturers will continue to develop their products to meet the standards of the government and the needs of the consumer.

Szalkowski said, "Science will give us better and better products as time goes on."

Kristen Counts is a local freelance writer.

