



How crucial components find their way into today's kitchens is a matter of personal style. In the most striking examples, individuality is the guiding theme.

An appreciation for handcrafting and other examples of fine workmanship is a recurring theme that weaves its way through many of today's most elegant cooking areas. In that vein, Boston-area kitchen designer Thomas Huth says he savors the creativeness fueled by high-quality ceramic tile. "There are so many choices out there right now—gorgeous materials—and you can make real design statements with backsplashes or even whole walls," he says, pointing to the work of Louis Sullivan and others who are prized for their ability to express their art through tile design. "They can be quite beautiful."

Another element in the evolution of the kitchen is the growing demand for high-end appliances. Manufacturers are responding to consumers' requests with appliances that perform like professional models. Names such as Vulcan and Wolf, which not so long ago were associated only with restaurant kitchens, are finding their way into well-equipped residences, often in more attractive packages.

Most high-end kitchens being designed and built today have at their center a high-BTU five- or six-burner range with a grill, in addition to two ovens, one of them convection. Hoods that perform at new levels are logical partners—and in homes across the country, these mechanical necessities have become vehicles for color and style. Wrought metals, as well as woods, tile, and custom concrete, all offer variety

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between those who favor a contemporary look, complete with such features as pull-out spray nozzles (some of the top names include JADO, KWC, and Hansa), and those whose sense of tradition guides them toward choices that hark back to the past, says Jim Conen, owner of Splash, New England's largest bath and kitchen showroom.

Among the more popular innovations today are under-sink filtration devices or systems that provide instant boiling water. Franke, for example, offers an ingenious Triflow kitchen faucet system that allows users to access hot, cold, and filtered water from one tap.

A range of faucets and sinks for both the bar and primary clean-up areas is available through Harrington Brass Works and other select companies, including Waterworks and Herbeau. Most striking in terms of their evolution is the development of stunning nickel and aged copper finishes, which provide a softer, more weathered option to the traditional stainless and brass.

CABINETRY. In the area of fine custom cabinetry, the work of industry maestros such as William Ohs, Mark Wilkinson, and Smallbone lead the way, with whimsical detailing, quality craftsmanship, and marvelous stains.

For kitchen surfaces, fine granites share the stage with slightly softer marble and other natural materials such as kirkstone and limestone. Blue bahia, the most expensive granite, can cost around \$300 a foot, some 30 percent more than any other stone in the granite family. Quality tile can command similar financial commitments, but the fine craftsmanship and harmonious colors can truly bring a cooking space to life.

LIGHTING. Among other important components, lighting should never be underestimated. Some of today's more dramatic examples are made by companies such as Artemide and George Kovacs, although the choices are endless and often include customized originals. "With lighting you need a flexible system that allows you great work light, some drama, and some real coziness," says restaurant and residential kitchen designer Thomas Huth. —R.L.



Hand-painted floral borders, bright wall tiles, and cabinetry of bird's-eye maple and mahogany breathe life into this kitchen, which was originally a series of small service rooms. A two-level island (left) is topped with mahogany on the upper level and bard granite on the bottom.

