

REAL ESTATE | DESIGN

Is the Kitchen the New Man Cave?

Now that cooking has been recoded as a macho pastime, guys are increasingly shaping kitchen design. Here's what the manly version looks like



THE BUTCH-ER BLOCK | Designer James Ramsey of New York's RAAD Studio put burnt oak, steel-mesh-impregnated glass and reclaimed wood in the Manhattan apartment of an outdoorsy client. PHOTO: STEPHEN KENT JOHNSON FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY NIDIA CUEVA

By DEBRA JO IMMERGUT

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22 COMMENTS

MY HUSBAND IS a talented cook. He's also 6 feet tall, so when we set out to renovate our kitchen last year, he lobbied to keep the unusually elevated countertops—2 inches higher than standard—installed by our house's lanky predecessors. He found them ideally ergonomic for slicing his celebrated smoked brisket. Meanwhile, at a little over 5 feet, I stood on my toes to gain leverage while crushing garlic cloves. I couldn't wait to lose those 2 inches.

Our clash over counters—and over who calls the shots on our kitchen’s particulars—put us on the cutting edge of a major, if belated, societal shift. When it comes to designing the home kitchen, say data and industry pros, men increasingly wish to be heard. No wonder: According to a 2012 University of Michigan study of Americans born from 1961 to 1981, married and single men now cook more than their fathers did, an average of about eight meals a week.

“Growing up, I never once saw my dad cook a meal,” recalled Ted Allen, cookbook author and host of the Food Network show “Chopped.” “At a dinner party [I attended] last night, the man of the house not only infused tequila with jalapeño to make the evening’s signature cocktail but drove the bus on the entirely vegetarian pasta.”

The rise of foodie culture has made home-cooking more alluring to everyone, and the [increase in dual-income families means more men are sharing KP duties](#). At the same time, cooking has been “recoded” as a macho pastime, said Casey Ryan Kelly, an associate professor of communications who studies gender and culture at Indianapolis’s Butler University. He pointed to the influence of TV chefs such as the Food Network’s Guy Fieri (the channel’s viewership is 42% male overall) and to open-plan kitchens that are half command station, half performance venue. Food prep, Dr. Kelly added, has evolved from

“feminine-care labor” into an endeavor imbued with “traits of rugged masculinity: competitiveness, self-mastery, individualism and strength.”

“The kitchen is no longer solely the wife’s domain,” agreed Young Huh, a New York designer and member of a new trend-forecasting panel for the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA). And the \$18-billion-a-year kitchen remodeling industry is finally responding to these aproned gentlemen in part because, as customers, they put their money where their mouths are. “If a man is in charge of appliance selection,” said designer Anne Rue of Lake Mary, Fla., “the cost of the indoor and outdoor kitchen will be at least 30% more” than if a woman makes the choices.

Men will spend, it seems, but what sort of aesthetic decisions do they make? When a male client drives the kitchen-design process, there's often an emphasis on "work flow or machinelike efficiency," said architect James Ramsey of New York's RAAD Studio. Female clients, he found, lean toward a nostalgic, raised-panel look. "I hadn't expected it, and I don't want to come across as typifying men and women," he added.

In a new survey of industry pros conducted by the NKBA, clean-lined styling was named the top 2016 kitchen trend. What's in: Flat-front cabinetry, counters with mitered rather than rounded edges, high-contrast palettes and large, simple pulls. What's (relatively) out: the crown molding, corbels, soft hues, ornate hardware and tiling of Tuscan, French provincial and other traditional styles. Kitchens are "more tailored, more masculine, more streamlined," noted Ms. Huh, "and that reflects the male drive and participation in kitchen design."



TOOL TIME | In chef and restaurateur Daniel Boulud's Manhattan home kitchen, New York designer Stephanie Goto forewent a back splash and installed frosted-glass sliding panels that hide shallow storage for utensils. PHOTO: GAGGENAU

Brook Pyhtila, a scientific curator, is currently remodeling her Wayland, Mass., kitchen with her husband, head of analytics for a health-services company. She said she cares more about aesthetics than her husband does, “but only slightly more. John had to see the counter slab in person, and went to the lighting store,” she said. They’ve settled on weathered soapstone countertops and handmade lighting from Vermont firm Hubbardton Forge, including pendants shaped like Erlenmeyer flasks “since we’re both scientists.” Far from seeing his interest as an intrusion, Ms. Pyhtila welcomed her spouse’s input, adding, “I wish he was available to cook more.”

Men tend to go bold and/or Stygian in their color choices, said a number of experts. “We’ve noticed more requests for dark cabinets, such as black and charcoal-gray paint or ebonized wood, and carbon-finish hardware,” said Peter Sallick, CEO of Waterworks, the Danbury, Conn., retailer of kitchen and bath fixtures. “Very masculine, dramatic and interesting.”

Roughed-up finishes also appeal. For a male client in Nashville, designer Jonathan Savage installed cabinets in cerused oak (wood treated with wire brushes to accentuate its grain) and 4¼-inch marble counter tops. “Cerused cabinets have a weathered appearance which can be interpreted as masculine,” said Mr. Savage.

Outfitting the Upper West Side kitchen of a financier whom RAAD’s Mr. Ramsey called, without a hint of exaggeration, a “fly-fishing, buck-hunting, Patagonia-traveling kind of guy,” he and project designer Yuri Miyamoto used elemental materials. The room (shown on D1) features burnt-oak lower cabinets, steel-and-meshed-glass upper cabinets, matte zinc countertops and, on the central island, a 3-inch-thick slab of live-edge reclaimed wood. “He can come home with a salmon and flop it on the counter,” said Mr. Ramsey, “and everyone can gather around.”

Another emerging form of the manly kitchen borrows the aesthetic of high-performance sports cars. Upscale German kitchen manufacturer Poggenpohl has collaborated with Porsche Design Studio (yes, that Porsche) to engineer a modular kitchen with finishes such as black lacquer and gray walnut set in stainless steel frames. Touch-assisted drawer and cabinet closures obviate hardware. “The guys gravitate right to it,” said Poggenpohl’s New York showroom manager and senior designer Roger Zierman. Kitchens start at \$80,000, including appliances but not labor.



TEST KITCHEN | This Weston, Mass., client requested a laboratory-style culinary workspace, complete with compressed air and liquid nitrogen dispensers. LDa Architects, of Cambridge, Mass., and Boston design firm Weena & Spook obliged. PHOTO: GREG PREMURU

LDa Architects, in Cambridge, Mass., and Boston design firm Weena & Spook recently completed a similarly flashy kitchen for a man in Weston, Mass. Finishes are stainless steel, bamboo and glossy Caesarstone countertops in what LDa's Douglas E. Dick dubs "sports-car red." Gadgetry included a commercial-style glass-front refrigerator from Sub-Zero and Wolf, a 48-inch Viking range and multiple flat-screen TVs. The room is anything but soothing.

Neither the woody nor the splashy styles of the masculine kitchen are about discretion. "In my recent designs, I see women looking for wood-panel refrigerators and lots of hidden features, while my male clients want as much stainless visible as possible," said Mr. Savage.

Boys' Must-Have Toys

Essentials for the culinary maestro

K Sabatier 10-Inch Au Carbone LineCooking Knife

"I have about 50 different knives, and they are all amazing," said chef Daniel Boulud of his home-kitchen collection. But he called this carbon-steel model, forged by a 150-year-old company in the French cutlery capital of Thiers, "my all-purpose favorite." K Sabatier 10-Inch Au Carbone LineCooking Knife, about \$72, sabatier-shop.com



F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

littala Cookware

The bulked-up handles on littala's cookware are easy to grab. In addition, aluminum is sandwiched between stainless steel all the way up the sides, so heat conducts evenly throughout the vessel. Casserole with Lid, Sauteuse and Frying Pan, from \$210 each, finnstyle.com



F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

ROK Manual Espresso Maker

Built-in coffee makers top this year's wish lists, but designers say the units are hard to clean and maintain. For a simpler approach, add boiling water and a fine grind to this press, then lower the levers to extract a cup. Satisfying on many levels. ROK Manual Espresso Maker, \$199, trnk-nyc.com



Scotsman SCN60 Nugget Ice Maker

Swanky cocktail bars favor the small cubes made by Scotsman's ice machines for their chewability (they're actually compacted ice flakes). This residential unit, which stands about 33 inches tall, will churn out approximately 80 pounds of ice a day. "I've seen a lot of men now getting excited about ice," said Mr. Gunter.



Scotsman SCN60 Nugget Ice Maker, call 800-726-8762 for pricing and retailers.

End-Grain Butcher Block

"Large platters and big, rough-hewn cutting boards are very popular with our male clientele," said Peter Sallick, CEO of Danbury, Conn., retailer Waterworks. This waxed black-walnut, end-grain slab (about 2 by 9 by 16 inches) doubles as richly woody wall décor. End-Grain Butcher Block, \$300, jacob-may.com



F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

Sub-Zero and Wolf Wine Storage Unit

When you've amassed a collection of covetable vintages, why hide them in a cellar? This glass-front fridge shows it off, with two zones that keep reds and whites at proper temperatures. Refrigerated drawers below hold cheeses or clandestine bottles of Bud Light. 30-Inch Integrated Wine Storage Unit, \$7,995, Sub-Zero and Wolf, 800-222-7820



BlueStar Salamander Broiler

The BlueStar Salamander Broiler uses a pair of 11,000-BTU infrared ceramic burners to put a crunchy finish on steaks or crème brûlée. “It allows you to sear your meat without going out into the cold,” said Theron Gunter, of Atlanta appliance retailer Guy Gunter Home. \$2,868, BlueStar, 610-376-7479



Perpetuating another stereotype, men seem to respond to potency in appliances. BlueStar offers a 25,000-BTU gas burner (a typical home stove rates 5,000 to 15,000 BTUs), which inspires a special ardor, said appliance retailer Theron Gunter, of Atlanta’s Guy Gunter Home. “Men come in asking for it, just because of the power.” Technophiles tend toward induction cooktops, which use magnetic flux for rapid, precise heat and stay cool to the touch.

Some men incorporate a staggering amount of entertainment and data-access into their schemes. A guy planning a kitchen “wants a 50-inch television and surround sound,” said Bob Schwartz of interior design firm St. Charles of New York, who often recommends the Sonos wireless system for kitchen use. Mr. Savage reported specifying an iPad holder for a current project. Men prefer finding recipes online to using cookbooks, he said.

Mr. Schwartz shared his theory on men and the tricked-out kitchen: “Women have been cooking a long time and tend to take the kitchen for granted,” he said. Guys, on the other hand, view the kitchen as a new adventure. “They ask for things women would never think of: Salamanders [broiler units ideal for searing steaks], deep fryers and other professional equipment. And two sinks are almost mandatory.”

The two-sink “requirement,” while indicative of men’s agendas, reflects a broader trend in kitchen dynamics. “Whether it’s male-female, male-male or female-female, couples seem to be cooking together,” said Mr. Zierman, of Poggenpohl. Even the classic sink-fridge-stove triangle is waning, he said. “It’s more cooking zones, maybe two sinks or two stoves—multiple stations that accommodate more than one person working.”

‘If a man is in charge of appliance selection, cost will be at least 30% more.’

Ergonomic issues in the kitchen, like all matters matrimonial, call for compromise. My husband and I made our central island 38 inches tall and the perimeter counter’s height 36 inches. But even accommodating guy chefs sometimes insist on a macho indulgence. For my husband, it was the roaring BlueStar gas range. For Wellesley, Mass., residents Elijah White and his wife, who recently remodeled with Boston designer Melissa Hammond, it was a Sub-Zero undercounter refrigerator. “It’s officially called a beverage center,” Mr. White said. “I call it a beer fridge.”

The Elements of Guy-Galley Style

Interior designers share the strategies that satisfied their male clients’ kitchen demands.

Potent color. Predictably enough, a lot of men like dark and bold hues, [offset with black](#) or white. Designer Lisa Steinbach Schecter of Kitchens on Montana in Santa Monica, Calif., recently used a “very crisp and clean” palette of charcoal gray, dark woods, and white to revamp a Los Angeles bachelor’s condo kitchen. (He doesn’t really cook much, she noted, but wanted a set-up that might inspire him to.)

Beefed-up hardware. Big paws need big pulls, so male cooks should do hands-on testing. New York designer Young Huh likes warmer metals for a masculine look: “Brass and bronze are very popular—a little different from the typical chrome.”

Gadget pride. Men, designers find, have no interest in concealing equipment. Colorful appliances are trending, too; HGTV's John Colaneri, co-host of "Kitchen Cousins" and "America's Most Desperate Kitchens," chose a bright-red Bertazzoni range for his own kitchen ("sprayed in the same factory that does Ferraris!").

A second sink. Including suitably straightforward hardware. In his client's Upper West Side kitchen, New York architect James Ramsey installed the industrial Dornbracht Tara Classic Single-Lever Mixer, with a spray-faucet attachment worthy of the local firehouse.

Elevated counters. Or at least one of them. Elijah and Kelty White, a Wellesley, Mass., couple who recently remodeled their kitchen, opted to raise their central island to 38 inches, 2 inches over standard. (Thicker countertops are one way to manage this.) Perimeter counters remained the standard 36 inches high.

Ample entertainment. A [wireless sound system](#) and smart TV can be controlled with a smartphone. New York designer Bob Schwartz prizes the Sonos system for its compactness and crystalline sound. "I tuck it on a high shelf in the pantry," he said.

Super-tough surfaces. For counters, Ms. Huh recommended low-maintenance quartz and other engineered stone products, which are resistant to stains and scratches, "in uniform colors—not a lot of speckled stone." Caesarstone and Silestone are the big names in this category.

Power to spare. Ranges, exhaust systems and dishwashers should be heavy-duty. With a powerful stove, choose a hood designed for high BTUs, advised Ms. Huh. (It will also do a better job Hoovering all the smoke you create as you learn to train your dragon.)

Vent hood clearance. To avoid headbanging when tasting the pistou, hang the hood high, but not so high it's ineffective; follow manufacturers' guidelines.

Scope for performance. Outfit the island with seats and space for socializing. Avid home cook Howard Kurtzman, from L.A., who worked with Kitchens on Montana, made sure his 6-by-5½-foot center island was wide enough that "guests can share the space with me but not get in the way."