

FAUCETS GUSHING OVER

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When it comes to kitchen design, forget granite counter tops and cherry cabinets. It's faucets that are turning people on.

Trendy waterworks, says Christine Trauthwein, editor in chief of Kitchen & Bath Business magazine, are taking center stage in home renovations.

"The commercial kitchen look is still very popular. People want their kitchens to look like a professional chef cooks in the space," says Trauthwein. "But the look can be very cookie cutter, very institutional. Accessory pieces are where people's personal style comes through. And the most important accessory these days is the kitchen faucet. It's the jewelry for the room."

Ann Rottinghaus, marketing and communication director for Elkay Plumbing, agrees.

"Faucets are really being viewed as art pieces," says Rottinghaus. "It's the concept of customization. People want things in their homes that they're not going to see in the neighbors."

In response to consumer demand for these unique accents, companies have flooded the market with unexpected finishes, sleek silhouettes and sculptural shapes. Last month, Kohler introduced a dynamic matte black finish designed to complement stainless-steel kitchen sinks and "create an attractive, subtle contrast that draws attention to the faucet."

Triflow Concepts' new futuristic faucet by designer Zaha Hadid merges spout, body and tap handle into one seamless piece. An extra internal tube allows filtered drinking water to be delivered through a separate waterway to avoid contamination by hot and cold tap water. Water temperature is controlled by a discrete handle, and the drinking water function is activated by a touch-sensitive electric button. The faucet,

available in gold, nickel, pewter and chrome finishes, carries a \$7,000 price tag.

Kohler's industrial-inspired wall-mount articulating Karbon kitchen faucet maintains the exact position a user places it (inside or outside the sink), keeping the spray head and water flow where desired.

Other innovations:

Along with the ever popular polished chrome, faucets are now available in polished nickel, brushed nickel, oil-rubbed bronze, stainless steel, white, matte brass and shiny and matte copper finishes.

Traditional arched spouts now share showroom shelf space with angular, jointed and coiled models.

Standard handles are being edged out by toggled joystick controls.

Function Still Key

While interest is running hot for these cool designs, Paula Gordon, design consultant for Plimpton & Hills in Hartford, says function is as important as form.

"Performance is key. Of all the fixtures in your kitchen, your faucet is the one you use the most," says Gordon. "You want to be sure you pick something that not only looks terrific but functions as you need it."

Latest functional features include extra-high, arched spouts that provide easy clearance for filling and cleaning large pots; built-in, pull-down spray heads with pause functions to halt the flow of water; integral filtered-water options and universal design handles, including joysticks that control and regulate flow and temperature with a single touch.

Some customers are opting for additional wall-mounted "pot-fillers" positioned near the stove; separate filtered cold water faucets; instant hot faucets; and "tri-flow" faucets that can switch from regular tap water to filtered water.

One feature not yet found in most kitchen faucets is the electronic — or no-hands — sensor. Although the option is gaining popularity in bathroom hardware,

Nicholas Grohe, director of product planning and development for Hansgrohe North America, says the technology hasn't yet been adapted for typical kitchen usage.

In the company's Spring 2009 trends report, Grohe writes:

"It's important to recognize that we use a kitchen faucet differently than its bathroom counterpart. To activate an electronic faucet, you must stand in front of its sensor. But is a busy cook, professional or amateur, willing to stand in front of the sink, hands outstretched in front of the sensor to fill a pasta pot? Wouldn't he or she prefer to be elsewhere in the kitchen, making other preparations, while the faucet fills the pot unattended? You can't do that with conventional electronic sensor technology, so it probably doesn't make total sense in the kitchen."

Satellite Sinks

Another trend making a splash is the satellite sink, says Rottinghaus.

"Research shows that people are cooking more and entertaining more at home," says Rottinghaus. "As a result, we're seeing the addition of prep sinks, bar sinks and family room sinks, and sometimes even a main kitchen sink coupled with a trough sink, all with specialized faucets."

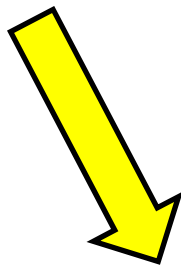
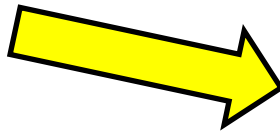
Elkay's newest entry into the secondary sink arena is its Martini bar sink, created in the libation's iconic glassware shape and coupled with matching Martini faucet, which features an olive-topped joystick.

All of this style and technology has its price. High-end faucetry can start at \$500 or more and run into the thousands. But the good news is that more and more companies are offering what Trauthwein calls "affordable style."

"In the past, consumers had the choice between very high-end, expensive products or standard products that sacrificed style," says Trauthwein. "Today we're seeing a middle ground. High-end manufacturers are doing affordable lines. At the same time, standard products have taken a stylish leap forward, providing customers with more options."

And options are what consumers want.

"People want their kitchens to be a reflection of themselves," says Trauthwein. "Even in today's economy, they are willing to spend the money for something that is functional and fully customized to their lifestyle."



IT'S ALWAYS COCKTAIL HOUR with Elkay's MySo Martini undermount bar sink and matching joystick Martini faucet with green olive accent. List price for the sink is \$999; list price for the faucet is \$699. Find dealers at Elkay.com.

THE NEW JANNABELLE faucet from Moen, at far right, available in chrome, \$174, and classic stainless, \$218, features a high-arc, pull-down spout and three spray functions. Available at Lowe's.

