



Photo by Thomas McConnell. Courtesy of David Wilkes Builders.

Sink Savvy

By Mauri Elbel

Whether you've pondered it or not, the kitchen sink is probably the most used fixture within your kitchen — if not your entire house. Most of us spend a substantial amount of time at our kitchen's main post, either prepping for what soon will become a memorable meal or cleaning up from our most recent satiating experience at the table. So when it comes to planning your kitchen, the sink should be at the forefront of design decisions.

"As with most design decisions, I always ask my clients to really evaluate how they live," says Rose Bartush of Bartush Design. "It's so important to not let aesthetics be the driving force in decision making. It's like finding those perfect pumps but they are a size too small and the wrong shade. You might buy them anyway, but chances are they

will sit in your closet for two years before making their way to Goodwill®."

For architects, builders and designers who deal with the subject on a daily basis, it's all about striking a balance between form and function. From considerations such as single versus double or triple bowls and decisions about depths and under-mounts, to sifting through the multitude of available materials and thinking through the functional side of the equation, Bartush advises her clients not to be hasty when it comes to a fixture that's fairly permanent — and costly — to replace. After all, it's not as easy to drop off your inefficient kitchen sink at Goodwill®.

"The two, form and function, are not mutually exclusive," says Bartush. "A homeowner's biggest mistake would be to choose a fashionable or trendy sink that did not perform as needed. There are plenty of options out there where personal style and function could both be satisfied."

Of course, farmhouse sinks lean toward the country look, blending well with the more traditional styles; cast iron sinks can provide a retro or vintage vibe; stainless steel can help you achieve that clean, modern look; and composite sinks tend to work well in the traditional home of today.

"But in saying that, one can have a very traditionally designed or transitional kitchen

and use a more sleek stainless sink," says Bartush. "There really are no set rules when considering aesthetic other than it needs to work, and quite honestly that is largely subjective."

If you find yourself overwhelmed in the vast sea of sink options, Joni Valouche of KIVA offers some sound advice when it comes to choosing your kitchen sink: think about how the size of the sink relates to the size of your kitchen, how your sink is used to determine the bowl configuration, and what kind of material will stand up to your environment.

But it also boils down to the simple details, which often get overlooked by homeowners, says Christy M. Bowen, Certified Kitchen Designer and proprietor of Twelve Stones Designs, who considers everything from the user's height and dimension of the sink base cabinet to the specific chores that will be taking place at the sink and the overall depth of the counter at the sink area.

Anthropometrics and functionality are key elements Bowen uses when helping her clients decide on the proper sink bowl depth, configuration and material for their sinks.

"Extra deep sink bowls are great for getting oversize pots in to be cleaned but if you are of a tall stature and wash most of your dishes by hand, you could end up straining



Photo by Christopher Davison, AIA. Courtesy of Twelve Stones Designs.

your back and neck leaning over to get small items out of a deep sink. In this case, multi-depth sinks or shallower sinks matched with a taller, gooseneck faucet might be a better option," she says, adding the best depth for most users is 8- to 9-inches. "I also look at how they treat their existing space. Are they fastidious or laissez-faire in their cleaning habits? Are they aging or disabled? Will they be able to see, reach, clean properly and so on."

Bowen most commonly specifies stainless steel, fire clay and granite composite sinks for her clients.

"The great thing about fire clay sinks is that they have the same durable qualities and shock resistance as cast iron but are half the weight," she says. "And because of the glazing process fire clay must go through, it also makes the colors much more brilliant than their cast iron counterparts."

Granite composite sinks are a great option for busy families because they are scratch-, chemical- and stain-resistant, and require little maintenance to keep them looking great; however, they only come in matte finishes and there is a limited color selection.

"Metal sinks such as copper, brass or zinc are beautiful and have a certain warmth some desire in rustic or eclectic kitchens, but unless you're prepared to deal with the constant and careful upkeep to maintain that newly installed look, then I'd shy away," says Bowen.

Stainless steel is unarguably the most popular sink style, says David Wilkes, owner of David Wilkes Builders. For one, it's affordable — some models start at around

\$150. Additionally, stainless steel sinks are durable, available in both under-mount and drop-in styles and they are the most versatile of all sinks when it comes to style, blending well within the most traditional or contemporary kitchens.

"Stainless steel kitchen sinks have broad appeal for their neutral, clean looks and durability," says Valouche. "But it's important to pay attention to the thickness. Better sinks are made from thicker steel, measured by gauge thickness. Higher gauge numbers equate to thinner steels — in other words, 20 gauge steel is thinner than 16 gauge steel."

Cast iron sinks can add a vintage appeal to the kitchen and have a wide variety of colors, says Wilkes. And the builder is noticing that composite sinks are becoming increasingly popular because of their durability and wide variety of finishes. Under-mount sinks have become the norm, offering a much cleaner look — and they are easier to clean too.

Second sinks are a must in any kitchen that is 250 square feet or larger, says Bowen.

"Larger kitchens are typically considered multiple cook kitchens," she says. "Therefore, it's important to have at least two sinks to keep multiple cooks out of each others' way while cooking or cleaning up. This keeps work space efficient and prevents bottlenecks."

But those with smaller kitchens shouldn't overlook the custom accessories and inserts that can make the tightest of cooking quarters extremely efficient.

"Specialized chopping surfaces that completely or partially cover the sink provide additional real estate for prepping

or chopping," says Bowen. "And plastic or stainless steel baskets are useful for washing and peeling fresh vegetables while taking the place of a colander."

Other hot sink trends weaving their way into the kitchen? Bowen says trough sinks are becoming more popular in entertaining and prep zones due to their multipurpose designs and ability to be filled with ice to chill beverages and foods. Bartush is a fan of custom concrete sinks because the forms are unlimited, meaning you can get exactly what you need in terms of basin number and size. Despite all the choices out there, selecting the right kitchen sink really boils down to one thing: the user.

"Ultimately, there is no rule or trend," says Bowen. "Even the bowl distribution the client chooses should be based on how the individual or family uses the kitchen sink." ■

RESOURCES:

Bartush Design
512.415.3787
www.bartushdesign.com

KIVA Kitchen & Bath
210.826.9652
www.kivahome.com

Twelve Stones Designs
512.705.2121
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David Wilkes Builders
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