

## ARCHITECTURE

# New kitchen designs reflect changing roles within family

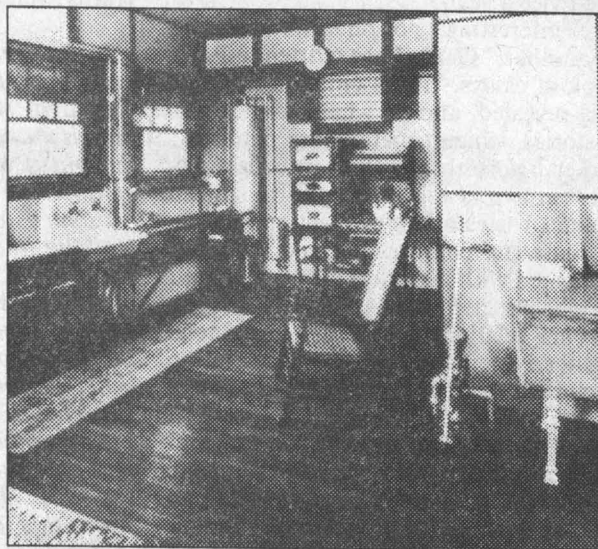
When home economist Catharine Beecher and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe designed their revolutionary "American Woman's Home" in 1869, they intended its tiny kitchen to rationalize and even to professionalize women's labor. An efficient, galley-like space located at the centre of the house, Beecher's kitchen was shockingly modern at a time when middle-class kitchens were typically large rooms at the back of the house, managed by teams of servants.

Illustrating the sisters' equally famous dictum, "a place for everything, and everything in its place," Beecher's kitchen was generally ignored by designers until the 1920s. But since the publication of her house plan, architects have been more aware of the critical relationship between the design of kitchens and women's changing roles within society.

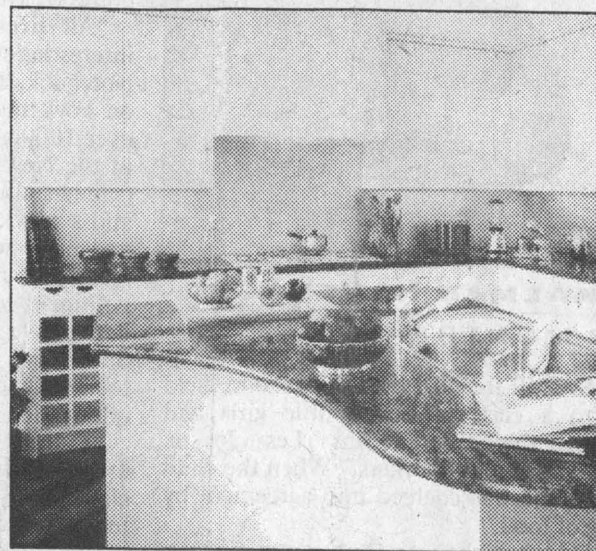
Contemporary trends in kitchen design are equally revealing of the lives of men and women. The growing numbers of women working outside the home, as well as the increased participation of men in the preparation of food, has rendered kitchens of the 1950s and '60s somewhat obsolete. These were used mainly for food preparation, while family life took place in a relatively new space: the family room. Postwar kitchens were intended for Betty Crocker-style cooking and Dr. Spock-style parenting, both of which were the responsibility of stay-at-home moms.

Today's kitchens are larger than ever before — they accommodate two cooks — and they have also become the centre of family togetherness in the house, responding to the busy lives of working parents. In many ways, these new "superkitchens" are a consolidation of the old food-centred kitchen and entertainment-centred family room into a single space.

Westmount architects Wolff, Shapiro and Kuskowski have designed and constructed many of these superkitchens. Recent kitchens by these architects are twice the size of the original rooms and include fireplaces and appli-



THE BATHROOM AND THE KITCHEN (PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS)



The kitchen yesterday and today: a 1909 kitchen and one of Wolff, Shapiro and Kuskowski's latest models.



ANNMARIE ADAMS  
DESIGN

ances for entertainment, such as televisions, stereos and computers.

"The kitchen is no longer just a place for cooking," said Elizabeth Shapiro, "but is now the focus of family living."

She attributes the change in kitchen design to the number of women working outside the home, smaller families (relative to the baby-boom era), and the pressure on working parents to compress food preparation, eating, homework supervision and recreation into the few evening hours they have to spend with their children. "The new kitchen is a critical room," Shapiro said.

A further consequence of the way families with young children are using kitchens is a return to the old concept of the formal parlor. As nearly all social activities are accommodated in the new, enlarged kitchen, the dining, liv-

ing, and former family rooms are reserved for special occasions.

Although the tradition of a formal parlor has persisted among some well-off homeowners throughout the century, the concept of a little-used parlor fell from middle-class favor in the late 19th-century when American architects like H.H. Richardson and Frank Lloyd Wright popularized more open floor plans and "living halls," rather than parlors.

Virginia Bambara of Patella, an international company based in Ville LaSalle which specializes in top-of-the-line kitchens, says the new superkitchens are more open and less "fitted" than those of the 1980s. Both the "tunnel" effect of the long and narrow kitchen and the peninsula layout of counters have fallen in popularity. According to Bambara, island arrangements of counters, which allow more than one cook access to a work surface, and mobile units, which can be moved around the kitchen, are the latest trends. The ideal kitchen of the 1990s has at least 48 inches between counters, again, to allow more cooks to work comfortably.

These superkitchens do not come cheap. Many of those undertaking renovations spend a high percentage of the project budget on the kitchen. Bambara estimates that the average Patella client

spends \$25,000 to renovate their kitchens. Some spend as much as \$200,000.

The trend to multi-function kitchens is also affecting new, less expensive houses. Typical suburban developer-built houses in the Montreal area, for example, are incorporating open kitchens with multiple uses. A typical kitchen of about 120 square feet will often include a built-in desk for telephones, computers, or fax machines, as well as counter space that works for eating, storage, and entertaining.

Architect Larry O'Shaughnessy, who has designed a number of starter homes for Les Habitations Avie, a local developer, says "the multi-purpose kitchen, a major selling point for builders, is a place for cooking, childcare, paying the household bills, and entertaining." Developers typically spend \$3,000-\$5,000 on the kitchens of their most affordable homes.

Although the women's movement has been a major force behind the enlargement and multi-functional character of the new 1990s kitchen, the health movement has also been significant. Perhaps the careful selection of food suggested by medical professionals since the 1970s is now reflected in the care and investment people are placing in kitchen design.

Likewise, the popular enlarge-

ment and renovation of bathrooms to include jacuzzis, bidets and multiple sinks, reflects the new emphasis society has placed on exercise and stress-management. As health considerations have informed the kitchen, so fitness and hygiene have influenced the bathroom.

Surprisingly, the environmental movement has had relatively little impact on kitchen design. Few Quebec kitchens have special places for the sorting and storing of recycling, for example, nor have garbage compactors become standard equipment in kitchens.

Two American designers, David Goldbeck and William Stumpf, proposed environmentally informed kitchens as early as 1989. Stumpf's "Metabolic House," which was published in the New York Times and included in a major exhibition last year at MIT on kitchens and bathrooms, features a kitchen at the building's centre which functions as a garbage centre. Stumpf's kitchen has chutes for recycling, a heating system fuelled by burning paper waste, and a "paperless toilet," an appliance similar to a bidet.

Because the real kitchen of the 1990s functions as so much more than the technological centre anticipated in these designs, the materials and colors used are often soft and restful. Wood, for example, has enjoyed a considerable renaissance in the kitchen, for both cabinets and floors.

Bambara attributes the diverse use of materials and the experi-

mental spirit of Quebec kitchen designers to European influence. Kitchens in Europe, however, are much smaller than in North America. Also, European homeowners often take their cabinets, sinks, appliances — everything but the walls — with them when they move. Quebec kitchens, nonetheless, are hailed by experts as both modern and sophisticated.

Would Catharine Beecher approve? Probably not. She saw the rational kitchen as a way of improving women's lives within the home, rather than as a means to liberate housewives to pursue careers outside the home.

Political reformer Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the grandniece of Catharine Beecher, proposed kitchenless houses as early as 1898 as a solution to what she perceived as women's unnecessary confinement in the home. Although Gilman's radical ideas, like Beecher's, were largely ignored, they were in a way prophetic. Gilman correctly perceived the need to rethink the typical kitchen of her day in order to permit women's involvement in the labor force; but rather than disappear, as Gilman suggested, the kitchen has pilfered space from the rest of the house.

Had Gilman imagined the possibility of men cooking family meals or participating in childcare, she may well have suggested larger, multi-use kitchens. Let's hope she's watching.

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## Education

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