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Voting Kitchen Contestants Off (And On) The Island

*–Top Trends in Kitchen Design for 2005 from Houston-based
Custom Homebuilder **Allegro Builders**–*

HOUSTON (March 4, 2005) - Do you have an island in your kitchen? If you could vote things off and on the island, what would make the list? Cooktops? Chopping blocks? Electrical outlets? A wine refrigerator?

How about three massive circles of honed granite, overlapping each other on three different levels, with a built-in grill and a refrigerator drawer for wine? That's the kind of island many people vote on themselves, says Lambert Arceneaux, President and CEO of Allegro Builders, the Houston-based period and custom homebuilders.

"Innovative, useful, out-of-the-ordinary islands are one of the hottest trends in kitchens," says Arceneaux. "Our clients want their kitchens to have the ultimate fusion of form and function, and a well-designed island is one of the most important components."

The increased significance of the island matches another major trend – more cooks in the kitchen requiring multiple work centers.

"People use their kitchens so differently these days," says Arceneaux. "Both partners cook together, multiple housemates collaborate on meals, and there is a definite need for simultaneous access to basic functions such as sinks, cook tops and prep stations."

Arceneaux and Allegro's renowned specialty kitchen designer, Baroque Fineberg, have compiled a list of the top trends in kitchens for 2005, based on client interviews and industry activity.

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“Our clients look to us to provide the expertise that translates the needs and patterns of their lives into intelligent, beautiful homes,” says Arceneaux. “When it comes to the kitchen, we take extra time to interview them about cooking habits, their family’s needs, and their lifestyle.”

Fineberg is a design consultant who serves high-end appliance makers such as Wolf and Sub-Zero, as well as clients from around the country. Combining his knowledge of the latest products available with a practical understanding of what actually works in a home, Baroque leads clients through the important design phase and selection criteria.

Allegro has an internal design studio, where new homes are conceptualized on a client by client basis. Additionally, Allegro’s team can review existing floor plans, bringing insight to the kitchen’s features, its traffic flow and appliance choices.

One trend Fineberg makes great use of is specialty drawers – refrigerated drawers for fruits and vegetables, for example, or to keep seafood or meat separated from an overall unit. Specialized appliances also show up as warming drawers for meals about to be served; single-purpose pot washers or dishwashers created for a specific kind of cleaning; and multiple cook tops that allow one person to sauté and grill at an island unit, while another person is baking or boiling at a side counter nearby.

In addition to innovative islands and multiple workspaces for multiple cooks, Arceneaux and Fineberg list more popular trends: the use of vibrant color; unique backsplashes; professional-grade appliances; wine amenities; appliance garages; stainless steel as a color of choice; honed or matte granite; “great rooms” encompassing the kitchen; and butler’s pantries.

Some of Allegro Builders’ clients even delete traditional living rooms from floor plans in favor of larger “great rooms” that encompass the kitchen. With people entertaining more frequently, having multiple access points through the kitchen helps with the flow of guests and food.

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“Today, more people bring the ‘restaurant experience’ home,” says Arceneaux. “Since the average person’s kitchen sophistication has risen dramatically in recent years, professional-grade equipment has basically become standard.”

Fineberg agrees. “The preparation and presentation of home-cooked meals is at an all-time high. Furthermore, because beauty and functionality are best combined, home owners are seeking kitchens that look as great as they work.”

The team at Allegro Builders describes 2005’s top kitchen trends as follows:

- Islands – creative, useful shapes with variable heights, custom-designed details such as refrigerated wine drawers, creative storage areas, and replicated work stations for multiple cooks;
- Cooking with gas – not only does gas far outweigh electricity as the power of choice for ranges and oven, clients enjoy enhanced 6-burner ranges with options such as grill cartridges;
- Innovative backsplashes – with clients choosing unique materials such as glass tile, natural stone, metals and mosaics, Allegro finds creative ways to remove backsplash clutter by relocating and camouflaging plugs and switches;
- Professional-grade equipment – mirroring the continued sophistication of home cooks;
- Colors – stainless steel remains the appliance “color” of choice, but many people are choosing tile and other components with vivid accents of bright blue or yellow for other kitchen elements;
- Granite countertops – polished stone is still popular, but honed natural granite with a matte finish is gaining strength;
- Appliance garages – clever, recessed “hiding places” for small appliances are on the upswing, complete with electrical sockets and deeper countertop and cabinet spaces. Fineberg even designs some appliance garages to showcase artwork;
- Wine accessories – Americans are increasing their knowledge and enjoyment of wine, resulting in a wave of custom home features from underground wine cellars to custom-made wine racks and refrigerated drawers;
- Butler’s pantries – these become the staging areas between the kitchen and the living room. Butler’s pantries often feature refrigerated drawers, small icemakers,

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counter space for assembling each course of the meal, and glass-fronted cabinets to showcase specialty wine glasses;

- Spice racks and pantry spaces – more cause and effect with sophisticated cooks – pantry spaces and highly specific spice storage areas are common, with additional single-use drawers and cabinets for specific pieces of cooking utensils and equipment; and
- Larger kitchens – reflecting their identity as the heart of the house, as well as their increased use by more sophisticated owners with more sophisticated tools, kitchen spaces are much larger than in previous generations.

“Ultimately, kitchen design reflects the lifestyle of the owners and their families,” says Arceneaux. “The most important items for our clients are not ‘what’s popular?’ – the most important items are the ones that work best for the way they live. It’s a tremendous feeling of satisfaction to know you’ve created the right kitchen, the right plan, the right home, for your client.”

Available upon request is a photo CD showcasing Allegro-designed kitchens and various elements discussed in this article.

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Allegro Builders is a rapidly growing, privately held, single-family homebuilder that specializes in the development of \$500,000 to \$2 million period and custom homes. With unit production doubling every year for the past four years, Allegro constructs distinctive custom and spec homes that blend in and compliment streetscapes while preserving the history and architectural styles of Houston’s most established Inner Loop neighborhoods. For more information, please visit: www.allegrobldrs.com.