The Social Kitchen

Designing Spaces that Bring People Together



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INTRODUCTION

Once a purely functional space reserved for preparing meals, the modern kitchen has transformed into a vibrant, multipurpose hub. It is the place where friends get together, families congregate, and even where remote working finds a home. This evolution reflects a shift in how we live, socialise, and connect, making the kitchen not just a place for cooking but the true centre of our daily lives.

According to the 2019 Global Kitchen study by the Silestone Institute, there is a tendency for users to use the kitchen as a **multifunctional** and **social space** rather than purely a culinary space. This study draws from the insights of respondents in nine different countries and the expert vision of 23 professionals from various disciplines.[1]

Specific to Australia, 74.2% of participants predicted that the kitchen would become a more important space for gathering and activities in the home.[2] In addition, 100% believe it will be used as a space to spend time with family and friends; 90% as a space to eat in; and 58% to work, do homework or surf the internet.[3]

When designing a multifunctional kitchen, designers need to understand the modern kitchen's role in the home and trends in equipment and design. In this paper, we examine the evolution of the "social" kitchen and design elements that will help create a space that brings people together.



FROM COOKING TO CONNECTING

Purely function over design

Historically, kitchens were designed with a focus on practicality and efficiency, primarily serving the purposes of cooking and food storage. These spaces were often hidden away at the back of the house, separated from formal living areas, and equipped with only the basic necessities like stoves, sinks, and refrigerators. With minimal focus on comfort or aesthetics, functionality was prioritised over all else, leading to kitchens that felt isolated from the rest of the house.

In the past, cooking was a labour-intensive task. With kitchens filled with smoke and heat from open fireplaces, the space was not suited for socialising. Instead, the living room served as the social hub of the home, while the kitchen remained largely out of sight.

The kitchen had experienced a tremendous metamorphosis by the late 20th and early 21st centuries, emerging as a focal point of the house. Homeowners began to invest in custom designs, high-end appliances, and luxury materials like granite and marble, creating the concept of the "designer kitchen".

Rise of open living

Over time, the boundary between the kitchen and other living spaces began to blur. The most obvious example of this change is the popularity of open floor plans, in which kitchens are combined with dining rooms and lounges to create a single, flowing living space.

Influenced by the post-war baby boom and an increasing desire for casual lifestyles, the shift towards integrated living spaces started in the 1950s. Australia began to adopt open-plan living in the 1970s, and by the late 1990s, it was ubiquitous in contemporary home designs. With formal dining rooms becoming less common, the kitchen's position as the "heart of the home" has only grown.

Open-plan living has redefined how homeowners use their spaces, fostering a more social and connected environment. Cooking, eating, and relaxing are now done in a shared area rather than in separate rooms, which facilitates communication and interaction between family members and visitors. This design trend is a reflection of a larger cultural movement towards more informal, communal living.

Social trends driving change

The modern kitchen has evolved into a multifunctional space, driven by the demands of busy lifestyles, changing dining habits, and the rise of apartment living. A recent University of Melbourne survey found that chronic time stress affects one-third of Australians.[4] A key component of designing a human-centered space that reduces stress is convenience and efficiency.

As families juggle challenging schedules and embrace more casual meals, the kitchen has become a hub for multitasking. The rise in work-from-home and hybrid work arrangements has contributed to this change by creating a demand for spaces that can serve multiple purposes at different times of the day.

The largest shift in kitchen design has resulted from working from home; modern families now want a place to sit, use a laptop, and conduct business meetings while keeping an eye on the kids, replacing the traditional “work triangle” of cooktop, sink, and refrigerator. During the day, it could be used for cooking and eating, and in the evenings, it could be used for studying. Home offices are encroaching into kitchen areas too as people search for ways to maximise their living space.

DESIGN ELEMENTS FOR A SOCIAL KITCHEN

Multifunctional appliances

Multifunctional appliances are an important consideration when designing a kitchen that promotes social interaction. In addition to saving space, these appliances increase the kitchen's versatility, which makes it simpler for people to multitask.

For example, multi-functional taps and water systems offer versatility by combining multiple water functions, such as filtered drinking water and regular tap water, in a single fixture, reducing the need for separate faucets. This convenience enhances both everyday use and meal prep, streamlining tasks like switching between hot, cold, and filtered water with ease.

Kitchen island

A kitchen island is another useful design feature that promotes social interaction. By providing a natural gathering spot, kitchen islands became the place where everyone can be involved in kitchen activities, whether that is cooking, eating, cleaning or entertaining guests.

Islands can be equipped with extra features to increase their functionality, such as cooktops, sinks, or storage. The additional benchtop space provided by an island can be used for multiple purposes, such as studying or working.

Social seating

Incorporating social seating significantly impacts the kitchen’s social dynamic. For example, adding bar stools around a kitchen island provides a comfortable seating arrangement when friends and family gather for meals. More intimate conversations can be supported by corner nook seating. A small breakfast bar with two high chairs provides a casual place for quick chats over coffee.

These places to sit make it easier for guests to linger, transforming the kitchen into a warm social gathering place.

Smart appliances

Integrating smart appliances makes regular kitchen tasks easier, which supports the social experience. Smart ovens and cooktops, for instance, can be operated remotely, giving hosts the freedom to leave the kitchen to mingle without having to worry about overcooking or forgetting to set the timer.

Additionally, by fostering an environment that is more efficient and well-organised, smart appliances can reduce stress and improve the kitchen's appeal as a place to gather with friends.



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ROLE OF MULTIFUNCTIONAL TAPS IN THE MODERN SOCIAL KITCHEN

Multifunctional taps contribute to a social kitchen space by combining practicality with style, making the kitchen more efficient and inviting. These taps often offer features like filtered water, boiling water, or even sparkling water on demand, which simplifies meal preparation and entertaining and supports health and sustainability outcomes.

With more people working remotely, the desire for convenience in the kitchen has only grown. Multifunctional taps tie into this by giving users access to the drinking options they would normally expect at an office or would otherwise buy bottled water for.

Designed with purpose

The Celsius Plus All-In-One Pull-Out from Zip Water offers the convenience of instant, pure-tasting water at the press of a button. With filtered boiling, chilled and sparkling water, plus hot and cold water instantly, this home filtered water system offers the widest choice of water options on the market.

The Celsius Plus All-In-One Pull-Out is ideal for those who want appliances that save time, reduce energy, are straightforward to use, simple to maintain and make life in the kitchen a whole lot easier. Beyond just providing drinking water, this pull-out tap enhances the cooking process by providing flexibility for tasks like filling large pots for boiling pasta or precisely rinsing vegetables when blanching. Its extendable hose offers greater control and ease during meal prep. In addition, the intuitive touchpad includes continuous flow for bottle-fill, a safety lock for boiling water and is embedded with antimicrobial protection for enhanced hygiene.

As Australians shift away from sugary soft drinks, the demand for healthier alternatives like sparkling water has surged in popularity. Having sparkling water on tap at home not only makes staying hydrated more convenient but also serves as a conversation starter among guests.

With an optimised aerator in the beautifully designed outlet spout, the Celsius Plus All-In-One Pull-Out enhances the ease of entertaining, offering a refreshing, health-conscious option that appeals to today’s more mindful consumers.

Enhanced water filtration

The Celsius Plus All-In-One Pull-Out comes equipped with an advanced MicroPurity 6-in1 filtration system proven to remove 99.8% of the 6 most harmful contaminants, including the ones you can’t see, smell or taste.

Tap water can occasionally have an off taste or smell due to chlorine, sulfur, or other impurities. A filtered dispensing tap removes these contaminants, providing clean, fresh-tasting water that is free from unpleasant odours, making it more enjoyable to drink. A lot of people prefer the flavour of filtered water, which may motivate them to stay hydrated and help reduce the dependence on bottled water.

In addition, by filtering out substances, the tap ensures the water is clean and safe to consume. Tap water contamination can occur for a number of reasons. It might be the result of issues with the plumbing systems within a building, issues with the water source itself, or infrequent inspection of water sources.

The ultimate design statement in the kitchen

The Celsius Plus range features modern, stylish designs and seven ultra-modern finish options, any one of which can serve as a striking centerpiece in the kitchen. These taps blend seamlessly with the sink and countertops, contributing to a clean, organised appearance that is especially appealing in a social setting.

The Celsius Plus All-In-One Pull-Out features a retractable pull-out sprayer for added flexibility and convenience. Enjoy the ease and versatility, whether it is preparing food, cleaning dishes or washing down and cleaning your sink at all angles and corners.



ABOUT ZIP WATER

Zip Water is a world-leading designer and manufacturer of instant boiling, chilled and sparkling filtered water solutions. Zip Water invests in Australian-based innovation design and world-class manufacturing to continually enhance water quality, functionality, energy efficiency and aesthetic appeal. Recognised as a global innovator for over 75 years, Zip Water’s products are sought after and installed in over 75 countries worldwide, providing homes and workplaces with the purest-tasting, safest and cleanest water possible.



REFERENCES

1 Silestone Institute. “The kitchen is now more than ever the heart of the home, becoming a multifunctional and social space.“ Silestone Institute. https://silestoneinstitute.com/en/the-kitchen-is-now-more-than-ever-the-heart-of-the-home-becoming-a-multifunctional-and-social-space (accessed 19 August 2024).

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3 Ibid.

4 Botha, Ferdi. “A third of Australians under chronic time stress.” University of Melbourne. https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/a-third-of-australians-under-chronic-time-stress (accessed 19 August 2024).

All information provided correct as of September 2024. The term “Zip” is a trademark of Zip Heaters (Aust).