Spring Home and Garden

Making the kitchen attractive as well as functional

Forget the white box, the walls lined with identical built-in cabinets and everything hidden behind sterile closed doors. Today, we want storage that's attractive and varied a mix of shelves, plate racks and antique dressers, as well as closed storage.

Colorful pottery, ceramics and glassware are being brought out in the open for visual interest.

√ To relieve the monotony of a wall of closed cabinets, simply remove a door and you'll create open shelves. Then show off handmade pottery, ceramic pitchers, salt and pepper shakers - whatever you collect and love. Today, we all have nicer things to show. Even everyday mixing bowls are now more colorful and better designed.

√ To evoke kitchens past, bring in an antique like a chimney cupboard - tall and narrow - or a Welsh dresser. Who says kitchen storage has to be built in? These freestanding pieces add new shapes plus the warmth of wood.

√ With wall space at a premium, finding room for display sometimes takes ingenuity. Build shelves over kitchen windows or the upper cabinets - perfect for large platters or bowls.

√ Glass-front cabinets are back - they offer both storage and display. Glasses and china seen through the windows add color and interest. But do you really want to stare at the cereal boxes and soup cans? Stick to solid doors for the food pantry. Or, if you want glass-front units all around, hang shirred curtains inside the doors. An opaque glass, such as sandblasted glass, will conceal clutter but keep the open feeling.

The facts of light

In the kitchen, two kinds of light are needed - a work light for cooking and an overall wash for general illumination or mood.

√ Strip fixtures hidden under upper cabinets provide task light - they shine right onto the countertops. Use warm-white or halogen bulbs, which don't heat up the way incandescents do.

√ For overall lighting, many designers recommend recessed ceiling fixtures with incandescent bulbs - they're the closest thing to natural light. Mounting the fixtures 20 to 25 inches from the wall puts light on the counter - not the back of your head. For a 10- to 12-foot length of counter, three evenly spaced lights should do. A rheostat (dimmer) lets you adjust the level if light.

√ Hanging pendants provide task light and mood too. But don't install too many - they can make a room look cluttered.

√ If you serve meals here, add a special fixture over the table - maybe a reproduction chandelier. This puts the spotlight on the table - and the dirty pots piled in the sink fade into the background.

√ Candles can change the mood instantly. They recall the old ritual of lighting the hearth.

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