



The New Classicism

Is the open kitchen closing up shop? In a return to proportion and with an emphasis on efficiency, kitchen design is undergoing a sea change, and women are leading the charge

by Rebecca Morse

CHANGE IS COMING TO THE AMERICAN KITCHEN, which has become almost supersized and part and parcel of the family room. A new classicism is emerging: a return to proportion, clearly demarcated spaces, and supporting rooms that serve as hidden storage, sound barriers, and serene retreats for the home chef.

The concept of proportion in the kitchen dates back to the early 20th century, when the kitchen was in dire need of a complete design makeover. A Museum of Modern Art exhibit (“Counter Space: Design and the Modern Kitchen,” through March 14) examines the evolution of today’s kitchen and highlights the iconic 1920s “Frankfurt Kitchen” designed by Grete Schütte-Lihotzky, which emphasized efficiency and workflow, and found new ways to integrate appliances and storage in limited spaces.

Women are again stepping forward with a special insight and sensitivity to size and scale. As designer and historian Sarah Blank, whose own kitchen is featured here, says, “Proportion feels good.” And the kitchens that follow—each designed by women and each exemplifying a shift from open kitchens to scaled spaces—feel nothing short of fabulous.



Sarah Blank
SBD KITCHENS

ACCORDING TO SARAH BLANK, the kitchen of tomorrow might look more like the past than the future. “There’s something really nice about the way a house was built in the past—when it had a definite front of the house and back of the house,” says Blank, who teaches a class on classical architecture for the Institute of Classical Architecture and Classical America. Blank prioritized proportion when designing her own New Canaan kitchen, where a breezeway functions as a mudroom. That supporting room often serves as the active cook’s preparation hideaway when there’s a crowd in the kitchen. Wooden sliding barn doors further close off the kitchen from the dining room and insulate the workspace from the intrusion of sound. “Cooking is like therapy,” Blank says, and requires the attendant serenity. How best to achieve that peace? Proportion. “It feels better to have a kitchen that is smaller and not as massive.” Architecturally, she adds, “a home works a lot better when you delineate the spaces.” Not too delineated though: “I will purposefully put a turkey in the oven at about nine o’clock at night,” says Blank, to lure down her college-aged son and friends.