

your home

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Tips and trends for homeowners, buyers and sellers

SAVE ME, SUPER KITCHEN

↘ Kitchens have come a long way from linoleum floors and olive-colored appliances that our grandparents had. Today's kitchens are super-sized and designed for multiple purposes. Sixty-nine percent of owners use their kitchen space for dining, while 49 percent use it for entertaining and 43 percent for socializing, according to a recent survey of homeowners by Houzz. The kitchen has become the hub for family activities, such as doing homework, watching TV and reading. Nearly two-thirds of homeowners spend more than three hours a day in their kitchens.

Therefore, today's homeowners are not skimping on renovations. Nearly one-third of homeowners surveyed spent between \$25,000 and \$50,000 on kitchen renovations and another third spent more than \$50,000.

Features that are typically part of living and dining rooms, such as dining tables, chandeliers, TVs and workspaces, are being added to kitchens. Wine refrigerators and built-in coffee stations are popular for entertaining, while

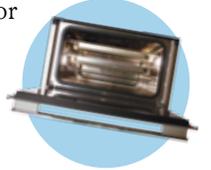


custom cabinetry and hardwood floors integrate more seamlessly with the home's overall design.

As the modern kitchen has continued to evolve, several design trends have emerged:

- ➔ Two-tone kitchen cabinets that mix colors and styles.
- ➔ Black and bronze finishes on stainless steel appliances contribute a sleek, modern look.
- ➔ Deep kitchen drawers help organize dishes and pans.
- ➔ Niche appliances, from steam ovens, warming drawers and induction cooktops, add luxury and practicality.
- ➔ Kitchen islands with more workspace and storage, prep sinks and seating are the workhorse of the home.
- ➔ Unexpected combinations of backsplash and countertop finishes can spice up kitchen décor — for example, a brick backsplash with concrete countertops or yellow ceramic tile with butcher block.

The modern "super kitchen" not only improves flow, storage and aesthetics, it also supports family life with style and substance.



RENTAL PATIENCE

Homeowners who need to move but are struggling to sell their homes are turning to rent-to-own agreements to find prospective buyers. Under these leasing options, which can last from two to five years, owners allow a prospective buyer to move into the home and pay monthly rent. A portion of the rent is set aside to be used as a down payment on the house

at a later date.

Financial experts at Bankrate.com say credit-challenged renters have the chance to try out the house and neighborhood, while saving for a down payment and building up good credit. They can also lock in a sales price and terms upfront.

The set-up helps homeowners find an eager buyer and long-term renter who

can provide a steady income while caring for the house on the owner's behalf. The downside is the possibility that the renter could change their mind and opt out of the agreement, which means the owner must start the process over again.

Rent-to-own arrangements are complex and every state has its own regulations, so it's advisable for renters to

meet with an attorney and a real estate agent to understand financial implications. Renters should also meet with a mortgage broker so they know how much they need to qualify for a loan.

Financial experts say both parties should treat the deal the same way as a home purchase. Obtain an appraisal and a home inspection, and owners should require a

security deposit and reserve the right to evict renters if they fail to make payments. The contract should also spell out how funds will be held by owners, under what conditions the sale will take place, and who is responsible for maintenance and repairs.

With proper planning and due diligence, rent-to-own arrangements can be a viable option for buyers and sellers.





WALK on wood

Hardwood flooring is one of the most sought-after features in new and existing homes. This eco-friendly feature can turn your home into a warm and inviting space to relax and entertain. Selecting the right flooring can be a challenge, however, depending on your design style, budget and personal preference. Before choosing a wood floor for your home, here are a few things to keep in mind, courtesy of the National Wood Flooring Association:

There are two basic types of wood flooring. Solid wood flooring can be sanded and refinished many times and can be used in all rooms, including kitchens and powder rooms. Engineered wood is manufactured with multiple layers of wood veneers, so it expands and contracts less than solid wood flooring when temperatures and humidity fluctuate. Engineered wood is a better alternative for basements and other below-ground living areas.

Hardwood floors come in different finishes. Satin gloss offers the most shine and reflects the most light,

so scratches and normal wear and tear are less noticeable, while matte finishes offer the least shine.

Light woods like ash or maple help make a room appear more open and airy, while darker woods like walnut or mahogany can give a room a more stately and refined appearance.

To keep floors looking new, clean them frequently using a dust mop or vacuum. Avoid using a wet mop as water can dull the finish or damage the wood over time. To prevent scratches, place scatter rugs at all entrances and floor protector pads on the bottom of furniture legs.

When spills occur, wipe them immediately with a dry or slightly damp cloth. When floors begin to look dull, use a wood flooring cleaner to renew the luster. Use only products that are compatible with your wood floor type. The wrong cleaning product can damage the finish and possibly the wood itself.

With these simple tips in mind, hardwood floors can provide comfort and enjoyment for many years.

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