

A Brief History of Kitchen and Bathroom Design



It is important for the kitchen and bath designer to understand the historical background of the design of the residential kitchen and bathroom in the United States and how it evolved. These spaces are often taken for granted as being primarily functional, necessary, and convenient rooms that have always been indoors, as they have been in most Western homes for a century or more. Fewer and fewer customers or designers can remember having or using primitive outdoor spaces for these functions, except when hiking or camping or in extremely remote areas. Therefore, giving thought to the actual design of these spaces is a relatively new concept, yet it is an opportunity for the expertise of the kitchen and bath designer.

Learning Objective 1: Describe the development and evolution of the design of the residential kitchen.

Learning Objective 2: Describe the development and evolution of the design of the residential bathroom.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE KITCHEN

For many centuries of recorded history, the kitchen was outside or in a separate building apart from the primary home to protect the family's dwelling from fires. The kitchen eventually became attached to the dwelling but was considered by most to be strictly a separate functional work space rather than one that required designing, aesthetic considerations, or integration into the rest of the house. This was especially true for the wealthy, who often had staff handling the meal preparation and cleanup. Aesthetics, close or convenient location to eating/dining space, or ease of function were not considered, nor were they thought to be important. In Colonial America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and into the nineteenth century, the kitchen became more integrated into the home, more a center of family life with the open flame from the fireplace used to warm the home and family as well as prepare the food. The kitchen of the Rundlet-May House (1807) in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, features an enclosed fireplace—an early forerunner of the modern kitchen stove (see Figure 1.1.)

The idea of a well-planned, well-designed kitchen was first talked about in the 1920s when Hoosier cabinets were introduced by the Hoosier Company. Later, Cornell University and the US Department of Agriculture Research Station in Beltsville, Maryland, began research on



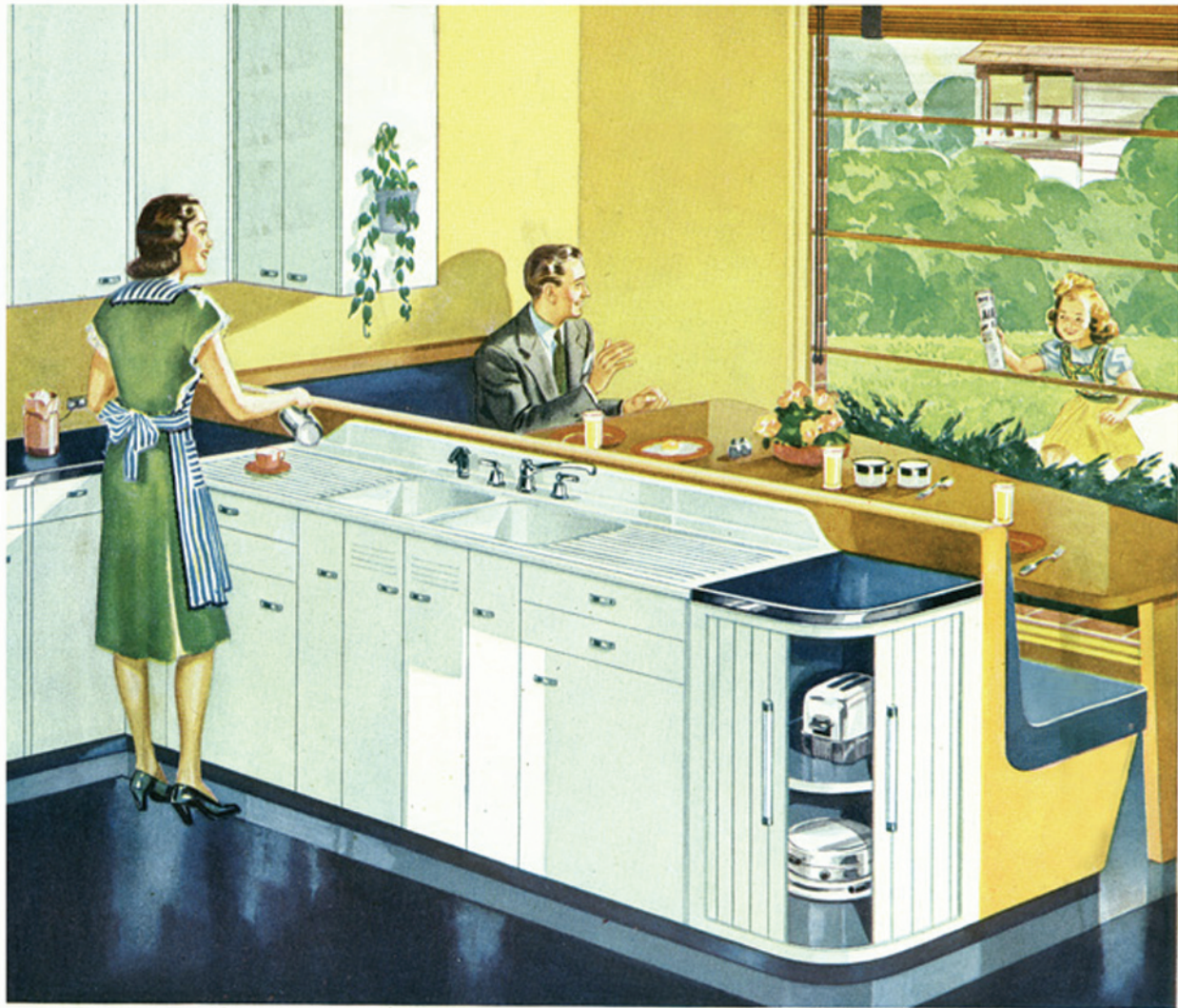
FIGURE 1.1 Historical kitchen

*Courtesy of the Society of Preservation of New England Antiquities
Photo by David Bohl*

functional kitchen planning. This research continued after World War II by the Small Homes Council of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. However, the room still remained primarily a workroom, where function (food preparation, storage, and cleanup), mass production of cabinetry, and ease of cleaning, rather than aesthetics or other uses, were the primary considerations (see Figure 1.2).

Immediately following World War II, several leading midwestern and eastern US cabinet companies introduced color and more wood for cabinetry, which gradually was becoming built in, as well as decorative hardware and a variety of accent cabinet pieces. Built-in appliances and fixtures were introduced in the late 1950s and 1960s, in a myriad of styles and colors. These avant-garde kitchens were widely shown in high-fashion magazines, such as *Town & Country* and *Vogue*, as well as the many home design shelter publications that were popular and widely read by consumers (see Figure 1.3).

In the 1970s, a new design concept was introduced in several well-respected shelter magazines—the great room. Walls were removed between the kitchen and adjacent living spaces, bringing the kitchen out of the strictly separate functional/work-oriented category, to become an integral part of the family public/social space. It also helped to make homes appear to be larger as some walls were removed. The concept of the great room brought mass appeal to the idea of a decorated kitchen—one that was attractive to look at as well as functional to work and entertain in and continues to be popular (see Figure 1.4).



"WHERE OUR WORK IS, THERE LET OUR JOY BE"

A KITCHEN that is pleasant and easy to work in spreads harmony throughout the home. There, where so many important household tasks are performed, first rate plumbing is an essential key to cleanliness, health and convenience. *Kohler quality costs no more and gives the protection of excellence in every detail.*

The Wilshire sink, illustrated above, with its two compartments, double drainboard and handy ledge, typifies the practical design and distinguished appearance of all Kohler fixtures and fittings. The rigid, durable cast iron construction is overlaid with a pure white, lustrous surface, easy to clean, and

acid resisting clear through the enamel. The working parts are designed, constructed and tested with utmost care to assure ease, precision and reliability in performance. Kohler quality is safeguarded by the fact that Kohler products are made in one plant, under one supervision.

Your Master Plumber will gladly explain the enduring benefits and built-in values of Kohler plumbing. Consult him for valuable help in selecting fixtures and fittings for a new or remodeled kitchen, bathroom, washroom or laundry. Send for booklet HB-9, "Planned Bathrooms and Kitchens." Kohler Co., Kohler, Wisconsin. Established 1873.

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U. S. War Bonds

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FIGURE 1.2 1940s kitchen
Courtesy of Kohler Company



FIGURE 1.3 1960s kitchen
 Courtesy of Sub Zero

The concept of an aesthetically pleasing kitchen (whether a separate space or part of the great room concept) grew in importance throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and into the 1990s as the English bespoke idea of an unfitted kitchen was coupled with consumer interest in highly stylized, traditionally influenced environments attempting to re-create the warmth of a sundrenched villa in Tuscany, a colonial cottage in New England, or the midcentury modern look. Architectural details from these historic or period settings became more and more popular for consumers planning kitchens that were becoming the center of activity in their homes. A traditional kitchen with Old World design details is still popular today (see Figure 1.5).

The concept of a kitchen outdoors returned in the early 2000s, although it is quite different from the simple fire pits or crude adobe ovens of earlier times. This concept created a new wealth of design opportunities for the kitchen designer. The outdoor kitchens range from simple built-in barbecues to elaborate structures that are as extensive, complete, and well thought-out and designed as typical indoor kitchens (see Figure 1.6).

The interest in such aesthetically pleasing spaces continues today. As a kitchen specialist, one may be asked to plan a room that has a European-influenced sleek, uncluttered, and sophisticated style; a mid-twentieth-century modern renovation, or one that is harmonious and calming, inspired by a Far Eastern interior. The designer's ability to appropriately use the elements and principles of good design as well as understand historic and cultural themes will add great value to functional space planning solutions. Contemporary kitchens today combine convenience, function, and beauty. In the example shown in Figure 1.7, plain, simple



FIGURE 1.4 Great room/kitchen design concept introduced in the 1970s
Design by Carol Swanson-Petterson, CKD; KB Cabinets, Millbrae, CA

cabinets are highlighted with sleek cabinet pulls. Relatively smooth and varied wood-grained countertops and stainless-steel appliances are contrasted with the rough-textured wall treatment.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BATHROOM

For most of recorded history, the bathroom, as it is known today, did not exist. The out-house or any convenient outdoor space was the toilet norm, as were outdoor washing facilities, often a stream or other body of water. However, indoor bath spaces strictly for bathing in some sort of tub or with a pitcher and bowl for washing have been around since ancient Greek and Roman times. It took centuries for these activities to come together in a single space. Although luxury homes featured indoor bathrooms with plumbed fixtures in the late 1800s, it was not until the 1920s that most building codes began mandating indoor plumbing for all new residential construction. These new codes paid little attention to the way the bathroom looked or how much space was required, because the space was perceived primarily as utilitarian. At first for typical bathrooms, few choices existed for fixture styles, colors, or fitting finishes. The primary concerns of



FIGURE 1.5 Traditional 1990s kitchen

Design by Bryan Reiss, CMKBD and Scott Stultz, codesigners Peter Deane and Kelly Stewart, CMKBD

early bathroom planners were providing safe indoor water supply intake and removal and accommodating three basic, usually white, fixtures in the smallest space possible. They also converted a dressing room, nursery, or other small room that had sufficient space for fixtures (see Figure 1.8).

Although many builders, designers, and architects overlooked the potential beauty of the bathroom, American filmmakers and emerging design trendsetters realized how attractive a bathroom could be. Sets in the emerging Hollywood film industry during the 1920s and 1930s suggested the potential beauty and luxury of the bathroom. Major manufacturers expanded their product lines and introduced color in their fixtures. An early Kohler advertisement celebrates this use of color in the bathroom (see Figure 1.9).

In 1929, the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art featured an exhibit devoted to the artistic and aesthetic qualities of a residential household, including the bathroom, using black fixtures to contrast with the light tile (see Figure 1.10).

During and immediately after World War II, the use of American-made fixtures was emphasized, and pastel colors were introduced. The advertisement in Figure 1.11 from the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1948 illustrates this use of color.

In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, along with an explosion of the use of color for bathroom fixtures, greater use of color for floor and surrounding wall materials also occurred. The



FIGURE 1.6 Outdoor kitchen

Courtesy of Lynx Grills, Inc.

customer (and designer) had many choices, beyond white or the pastels of the era through the 1940s. These colors changed from decade to decade, as the three advertisements in Figures 1.12, 1.13, and 1.14 illustrate with different versions of green.

The fantasies of trendsetters and the explosion in the use of color all those years ago are the reality for well-planned bathrooms today. No longer is the bathroom a room reserved for simple personal hygiene. Today, people spend more time in the space. Some gather in a family group to enjoy the therapeutic pleasure of a hydromassage bath, sauna, soaking tub, or steam shower; others use the bathroom as a secluded spot, a place to relax and unwind, away from hectic family and job responsibilities.

As a bathroom specialist, you may be asked to plan a room that is part of a major luxury master bedroom suite or one that is a separate, compartmentalized, multifunctional room. Your client may request a dramatic powder room reserved primarily for guests, a shower space squeezed off the utility room, or an outdoor cabana by the swimming pool.

In all of these situations, the ability to use the elements and principles of good design adds great aesthetic value to the functional space planning solution for today's client (see Figure 1.15).



FIGURE 1.7 Contemporary European-influenced kitchen
*Design by German Brun, LEED, AP, codesigner Lizmarie Esparza; Den Architecture, Miami, FL
Photo by Greg Clark*



FIGURE 1.8 Historical bathroom, early twentieth century
Courtesy of Kohler Company



For bathrooms *glorious* in color

America discovered the bathroom—and glorified it! And now comes Kohler Colorware, bestowing upon this room an added charm and dignity. Now bathrooms may be glorious in color. With fixtures in beautiful shades of lavender, blue, ivory, brown, green, gray—delicate yet everlastingly permanent . . .

Different bathrooms, you will perceive, may be done in different color schemes, each with its individual charm and character. Truly,

lavatory, toilet—all contribute to the harmonious ensemble, for Kohler fixtures in both enameled and vitreous ware are now made in color. Kohler fittings in softly lustrous chromium plate add the final touch of perfection.

Color means Kohler. To appreciate this new beauty you must see Kohler fixtures. Visit a Kohler showroom if you can—for a true aesthetic thrill. And consult your plumber. He will tell you that a bathroom

in Kohler Colorware costs little more than one in white. . . Mail the coupon for glimpses of bathrooms in all the Kohler Colors.

KOHLER CO., Kohler, Wis. 18-12-20
Gentlemen: Please send me your booklet of plumbing fixtures in color—“Color Charm Enters the Bathroom.”

Name _____
Street Address _____
City _____ State _____

KOHLER CO. Founded 1873, KOHLER, WIS. • Shipping Point, Sheboygan, Wis. • Branches in Principal Cities

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Plumbing Fixtures
LOOK FOR THE KOHLER TRADE MARK ON EACH FIXTURE

FIGURE 1.9 Historical bathroom, 1920s, introducing color
Courtesy of Kohler Company



In the Metropolitan Museum of Art
—Exhibition of a modern bath and dressing room

THE new importance of the bathroom as a place of beauty in the modern home could hardly be more strikingly emphasized than it is by this room by Mr. Ely Jacques Kahn in the current Exhibition of American Industrial Art at the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

That the bathroom was chosen as one of the typical rooms to be shown in this internationally important exhibition is in itself an eloquent fact. The manner in which this room unites artistry with logical simplicity demonstrates the wisdom of the choice.

The walls are of glass. The floors are of special yielding rubber. Radiators are recessed behind tiled grilles, and over their warmth

hang the towels. Such thoughtful details throughout illustrate how comfort parallels beauty.

Chromium-plated Kohler fixtures in the center picture selected for the exhibition by the 30 best Kohler fitters



Into this setting are introduced a Kohler bath and lavatory of gleaming black, with chromium-plated fittings—faucets, handles, and escutcheons—also of Kohler make, in the graceful *Globin* design. These Kohler contributions are in patterns available to all.

Kohler fixtures of modern style and beauty—in lovely color or lustrous white—are made for simplest bathrooms as well as costly ones. Write to Kohler Co., Kohler, Wis., for a free 72-page book, in color, showing fixtures for bathrooms, kitchens, and laundries, with color schemes, floor plans, and prices.

KOHLER CO. Founded 1873 • Branches in Principal Cities • Shipping Point, Sheboygan, Wis.

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Plumbing Fixtures

© 1929, Kohler Co.

FIGURE 1.10 1929 MMA bathroom exhibit by Kohler
Courtesy of Kohler Company



FIGURE 1.11 1940s historical bathroom ad
Courtesy of Kohler Company



FIGURE 1.12 1950s spruce green
bathroom ad
Courtesy of Kohler Company

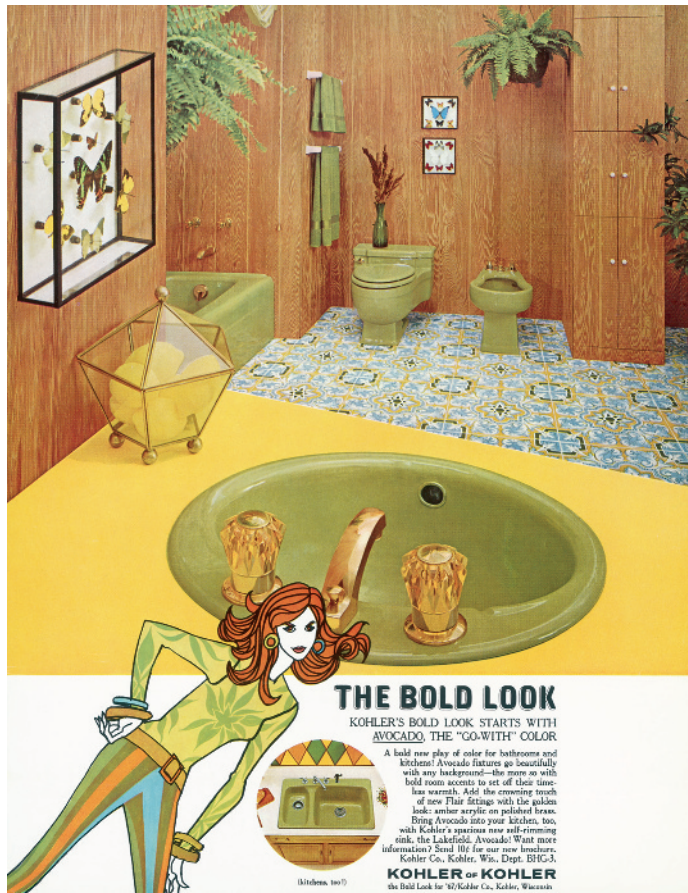


FIGURE 1.13 1960s bathroom ad
 Courtesy of Kohler Company



FIGURE 1.14 1970s avocado bathroom fixtures ad
 Courtesy of Kohler Company



FIGURE 1.15 Bathroom from today

*Design by Elizabeth A. Rosensteel; Elizabeth A. Rosensteel Design/Studio, Phoenix, AZ.
Photo by Robert Reck*

SUMMARY

This chapter presents a brief history of the design of kitchens and bathrooms in the United States and how they changed, providing the background to assist the designer when working with these spaces with clients.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe the development of design in the kitchen over the last 50 years. (See “Brief History of the Kitchen” pages 1–5)
2. What are some of the important milestones in the evolution of bathroom design? (See “Brief History of the Bathroom” pages 5–7)