

HOMES & GARDENS

OCTOBER 2006 £3.30

NEW SEASON NEW LOOKS



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KITCHEN SPECIAL

**12-PAGE GUIDE TO THE
KITCHEN OF THE FUTURE**

**PLUS
TREAT YOUR FEET
UNDERFLOOR
HEATING MADE EASY**



Plan for the future

A new kitchen is the perfect opportunity to update your home with the latest "intelligent" appliances and interactive network systems

The big decisions in kitchen design are no longer the finish of the units or the choice of worktop. The questions kitchen designers now ask are more concerned with lifestyle. Who will entertain? What do you like to cook? How do you entertain? And as more aspects of the kitchen become computerised, it is only natural that the kitchen follows suit. Not only are kitchen appliances for cooking, refrigeration and washing continually being updated, the range of appliances is expanding. Wine coolers, espresso machines, steam ovens and induction hotplates, inspired by chic restaurants, bars and cafes, now offer professional results in your own home. The move toward open-plan kitchen-diners and expanding kitchen services – music systems for entertainment, TV so you don't miss your favourite programmes and a computer for helping with children's homework are now becoming

standard. The modern kitchen is designed to provide the whole package along with flexible lighting and extraction and air-conditioning for optimum air quality.

GETTING CONNECTED

If the thought of all this technology is a little daunting, rest assured that it is designed to be user-friendly and easy to install. Most computer and audio visual equipment uses Plug and Play technology that you can install yourself although kitchen appliances should always be fitted by a registered professional. The most important aspect of planning is ensuring that you have sufficient power points and computer connections as additional services need to be catered for without unsightly cables and overloaded sockets. There are two options for connecting to the internet: cabling or wireless (see box left). Cable connections require more thought as you will need to plot where the wiring will run before kitchen units and appliances are installed – a good electrician will be able to draw up plans which you should keep for future reference. Iain Brown, co-founder of Kensington Home Technology, suggests doubling up on cable to ensure there is enough for future products. "It takes seconds to install twice the cable before plastering, compared to the time, disruption and expense of chasing in cables later on," he says. Even if you are not planning a major refit, you can bring your kitchen into the 21st century using Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity). Wi-Fi uses high-frequency radio signals to transmit and receive data without the need for cables. Look to hi-tech companies such as Sonos to install wireless audio systems that include speakers fed by a remote music system, and Rako which specialises in wireless control systems that let you operate lighting, blinds and audio remotely.

This is an ideal time to lay the groundwork for your household and future buyers as well

View of the future

Televisions are playing a major role in the kitchen these days. A wall-mounted flat screen is a good choice. Plasma screens, just 4 in deep, range from 32-60 in wide and beyond. The best sets support high-definition video, and a wealth of digital and analogue connectivity. But, they are heavy and large screens need to be fixed to a strong wall. Expect to pay between £2,000 to £3,000 for a 42-in set. A cheaper option is an LCD monitor. Picture quality isn't great on the larger monitors, but you can get a 27-in set with clear definition for less than £1,000. Rear-projection screens also offer a slim-line design. If you want a big screen on a budget, this offers an unbeatable picture for the price, at under £2,000 for a 50-in screen.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Audio-visual and computer technology is advancing faster than most so when buying equipment check that it can be updated to keep pace with developments. New TVs should bear the digital-ready and HD-ready marques. The Bluetooth wireless technology is already available to let you communicate remotely with your dishwasher or washing machine via your PC or mobile phone and this is gradually filtering into the mainstream. There will be a greater move toward one central control centre in the home. The Home Hub, from Beyond, is a portable, wireless "organisation centre" with a colour screen which provides a household planner and can communicate with other Beyond appliances; it will even let you know your coffee is ready while you're still in bed. ▶ For more information, see our glossary on page 203.

Good networking

Two ways to connect your kitchen to the internet:

• A world standardised cable for data and, particularly when combined with a Local Area Network (LAN), offers high speed. A Cat 5 cable transports data from audio to video, supporting speeds of up to 100 Mbps (millions of bits per second), rising to 1,000 Mbps for Gigabit Ethernet. The disadvantage is that you need metres of cable beneath your plaster. Wireless setup is cable-free, allowing you to move your laptop from one room to the next. It is the lowest speed of data download to consider, but many wireless networks are less stable than cabled versions and often achieve only 25 Mbps.