

Sleek Eats

Contemporary lines, bold colors and unique features make these Italian kitchens a must-have for the modern life.



BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL
Scavolini's Crystal kitchen is made to look like a built-in unit but is actually several separate pieces combined for one custom look.

Think Ferrari, Versace and Prada and it's easy to understand why an Italian kitchen – similarly simply and sleekly designed – is the new must-have item for style-conscious Americans. These are kitchens crafted using modern materials like stainless steel and lacquered doors in colors from cornflower blue to fire engine red. They are popular not just because of their minimalist designs, but because they incorporate inventive extras – cabinet lights that switch on as doors are opened, Blumotion hardware that quietly eases doors and drawers shut, no matter how hard they're closed, and even special LED lighting systems that turn countertops into greenhouses for growing herbs.

“What makes anything Italian popular in the United States is style and innovation,” says Mary Jane Pappas, who owns a Minneapolis-based interior design firm. “The kitchens we are attracted to are contemporary; less is more, but it has to be top notch.”

Italian kitchens are built using modular systems so that they can break apart and be put back together easily. Elements are integrated so that countertops and cabinets are manufactured simultaneously, and designs are customized to accommodate appliances so that everything fits exactly within the dimensions of the room.

“In Italy, kitchen components are looked at as furniture,” says architect Jonathan Barnes, who completed a number of projects in Italy during the 1990s. “A lot of people take them when they move, as they would a couch or table.”

Italian kitchens don't run cheap, and so taking cabinets from home to home doesn't seem such an odd idea given the investment. >

kitchens



(1) Scavolini's Crystal kitchen is a best buy as it comes in as the cheapest among its competitors; (2) Arclinea's designs capitalize on the amount of space available to a cook, like their Convivium kitchen; (3) Snaidero's Acropolis kitchen is very futuristic with its combination of straight and curved lines; (4) Boffi's Zone kitchen has co-planar doors that conceal appliances for a very minimalist appearance (photo courtesy of Boffi Los Angeles - see resources).

Boffi is Italy's most prestigious kitchen manufacturer, famous not just for its minimalist designs, but for its not-so-minimal prices. According to Boffi Los Angeles President Mark Robinson, the average Boffi kitchen costs about \$55,000 and larger kitchens often run over \$100,000.

"The high quality of materials and internal mechanisms set Boffi apart," explains Robinson. The company's latest design is Zone, a system that presents a uniform appearance throughout by concealing everything, including appliances, behind co-planar doors that slide open to reveal the elements behind. Zone is available in a variety of finishes, including black polyester, and like all Boffi cabinetry, is made to order.

Arclinea is another high-end manufacturer of custom hand-crafted cabinets. The kitchens are all designed by

Italian architect Antonio Citterio. Cabinets are available in 13 finishes; prices range from about \$30,000 for laminate cabinets to over \$100,000 for veneers, lacquers, and the high-gloss acrylic Solid Ray, sold only by Arclinea.

Convivium is Arclinea's newest model, and Philip Guarino, president of Arclinea Boston, says the open design is based on the concept that the kitchen should be the center of the living space.

All Arclinea kitchens are developed with ergonomics in mind: "Our kitchens are designed around the movement of the user," says Guarino. "I should be able to move in my kitchen the way that I work. I should also be able to have a wide countertop to work on and drawers that allow me to maximize all space, which is extremely important in places like Boston and New York where space is expensive." >

continues on page 125

Scavolini is the brand to buy for the price conscious. “We’re moderately priced,” says Kathleen Campbell, president of the Kasanova Inc. Scavolini showroom in New Jersey. “We’re still building a name, which is why we’re at the current price point.”

Scavolini cabinets are semi-custom; once cabinets are selected to best fit the space, fillers are added to create a built-in look. In addition to the expected minimalist models, Scavolini also offers more traditional designs that many Americans still favor.

Like the other brands, Scavolini offers neat extras like cutlery inserts, chrome pull-out baskets and the Magic Corner, a unique shelving system that grants access to the dead space in corner cabinets.

Snaidero International is the oldest and largest importer of luxury European kitchens. The company works with a number of well-known designers, including Paolo Pininfarina, of the family that also designs Ferraris.

Snaidero recently unveiled Skyline, a model designed to accommodate handicapped and elderly users. “This kitchen has a lot of curves. We’ve eliminated corners and sharp edges to make it easier and safer to use,” says Paola Snaidero, vice president of advertising and public relations. The company has described this line as “Anything you want, made to measure.”

Boffi, Arclinea, Scavolini and Snaidero all use Italian-based factories to manufacture materials, and though lead times vary from company to company, they tend to range from 10 to 12 weeks. In general, the greater the price, the longer the wait: some Boffi and Arclinea cabinets take four to five months.

The long lead time and not-so-affordable prices might prompt some to ask, “Why buy Italian?” Marceca Bice, spokeswoman for Boffi explains: “Italians are artists but also artisans – we manufacture elegant products maintaining a precious plus that adds more value to the products: craft.” **ehg**