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Large central islands, such as this one designed by Mick DeGiullo, create a gathering spot that's also a work area — a common goal of today's kitchen renovations.

Cook's choice

12 must-haves on your wish list for kitchen renovation

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Kitchens remain at the top of remodeling wish lists — the room that most brings together family and friends. If you're longing to renew your cooking space, whether to up the ante on your culinary creations or make more room to serve drinks and takeout food to friends, design your kitchen so it meets your needs but have an eye to what's new and cutting edge.

1 One big room. Kitchens have evolved into the hub of the home, but the latest iteration offers not only multiple functions but also acts as part of one giant, multiuse space — what designer Sabine Schoenberg terms the open concept kitchen. “It broadens the kitchen into a family living space,” says Schoenberg, author of “Kitchen Magic.” (Sabineshome.com, \$24.95) Don't have an open plan? Take down walls, says designer Leslie Markman-Stern.

2 Revamped triangle. Once considered essential — with refrigerator, sink and range placed at a triangle's points — the triangle's no longer the only way to lay out appliances. The proliferation of so much equipment — steam ovens, speed ovens, induction cooktops, refrigerator columns, undercounter refrigerator drawers — has spurred designs that work beyond three directions, says New Jersey designer Linda Klein. The goal is to accommodate different cooking styles and family needs, such as kosher kitchens that must be designed with storage and cleaning capabilities in separate areas, she says. Many equipment choices have been redesigned for greater accessibility such as microwave drawers that go below a countertop rather than above a range or atop a counter, and kitchens with separate refrigerator and freezer columns rather than combined units. In smaller kitchens, curtailing appliances is essential — or choose dual functioning products such as Thermador's combination steam/convection oven or 48-inch Pro Grand steam range with seven cooking options.

3 Gray, the new white. White kitchens remain a classic, yet warm grays have become a new neutral, says Alabama kitchen designer Debe Robinson.

4 Quartz, the new granite. Granite still appeals because its cost has dropped, but some consider it too ubiquitous. Man-made quartz is taking center stage since it doesn't require as much maintenance, a big incentive. Two downsides are that it can be pricier than granite and isn't a natural material. Attracting attention is quartzite, which is natural, has granite's durability and resembles softer stones like marble.



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Leslie Markman-Stern's design has original oak floors and energy-efficient LED lighting.