

Ultimate Kitchens for the Holidays

Kitchens are the heart of the home. It's where we cook, eat, and congregate – especially during the holidays. In honor of the season, we've spotlighted dream kitchens sure to set a merry mood not just for those holiday house guests — but for the host too.

“A modern kitchen is very important to people – whether you cook or don't cook – because so much time is spent in there,” says Jarrod Randolph, a luxury broker with CORE Real Estate. “When you walk into a home or apartment –even if it's older — and the kitchen is newly done and done well, it makes it ten times easier sell.”

With the help of [Realtor.com](#), [Sotheby's International Realty](#), [Coldwell Banker Previews International](#) and [Trulia.com](#), Forbes has cherry-picked a variety of for sale homes offering tantalizing cook spaces, outrageous amenities and delectable layouts sure to set spirits bright.

Homebuyers and owners fork over top dollar for kitchens, which can run into the hundreds of thousands for top-of-the-line materials and appliances. Alongside bathrooms, kitchens are the most common remodeling projects taken up by homeowners, according to the [National Association of Home Builders](#). And they're on the rise: kitchen projects are up 17% this year compared to 2010.

Open layouts that blend with the surrounding living areas prevail when it comes to homeowners' floor plan aspirations, according to the [American Institute of Architects Home Design Trends Survey](#). Breakfast bars with counter stools and large islands that serve as workspaces and entertaining/dining spaces, all of which bolster an open layout, are among the most popular kitchen details, adds Liza Hausman, a vice president at [Houzz](#), an online platform for home remodeling and design concepts.

In some homes, multiple islands have been implemented to allow the space adaptability to operate as a catering kitchen as well. A [\\$30 million Bel Air compound](#) in Los Angeles, Calif. boasts among its many party-centric amenities a commercial-grade kitchen with two islands, each equipped with twin sets of appliances.

A gourmet kitchen tucked inside an [\\$18.9 million Fort Lauderdale, Fla. mansion](#) has double islands, including one with a griddle and warming drawers, a breakfast banquet and a granite eat-in bar with beverage fridge that extends out into a 2,000-square foot great room. A professional chef works within the lavish space daily, yet, hiding behind a swinging door at the back of the room is a butler's pantry fully finished with a double fridge, electric stove, and commercial-grade dishwasher. The pantry also has two additional doors that swing out to a formal dining room and an outdoor dining verandah.

“This kitchen essentially has another kitchen behind it so that if you are having parties, you have plenty of room,” says Eileen Kedersha, the ONE Sotheby’s International broker that represents the South Florida home.

High-end appliances are a must, with owners installing Sub-Zero refrigerators, six-burner ranges by Viking and Dynasty (to name a few), and double dishwashers from Miele. “What we’re seeing more of are complete integration of appliances – not just paneled dishwashers and refrigerators, but ovens and microwaves that look like part of the cabinetry,” explains Hausman.

The most decadent of kitchens even incorporate restaurant-ready gadgets like rotisseries, built-in espresso machines, and pasta drawers. One \$12.9 million Dutch Colonial in Fairfield, Conn. boasts a wood-burning pizza oven (a foodie feature typically found outside, if at all).

The American Institute of Architects has found that renovation projects are increasingly spanning nontraditional features like computer stations or recharging areas for electronic devices, built-in recycling centers and wine storage areas as well.

Perhaps the most unexpected amenity creeping into kitchens is the fireplace. In Beverly Hills, Calif., a recently finished massive \$58 million mansion dubbed the Crescent Palace boasts a massive 5,000-square foot “kitchen” filled with seating for 16, a commercial-sized freezer, a glass walk-in pantry, multiple flat screen TVs – and a lounge area donning a gas fireplace. In Water Mill, N.Y., a \$39.5 million Hamptons estate’s state-of-the-art kitchen has its own fireplace bedecked living room as well, so guests can get cozy while looking out on the water of Mecox Bay.

In New York City, where space is notoriously cramped, developers of new multi-family projects haven’t fixated on fireplaces just yet but they are experimenting with ergonomics to make the kitchen feel more like the living room. “We’ve rotated the kitchen so that the cooking surface faces the guests so that you can socialize while cooking,” says Michael Namer, founder and principal of Alfa Development/Management, the New York developer of up-and-coming green condo building Chelsea Green.

All of the kitchens in Chelsea Green are designed by celebrity chef Eric Ripert for Poggenpohl. Facing out toward the rest of the apartment, the space includes a Miele induction cooktop with a Smeg oven, a garbage/recycling pull-out cabinet on the right side and a pots-and-pans cabinet on the left, ensuring no need to turn your back on guests. And its drawing buyers: despite a 2013 completion date, all but three of the project’s 51 units have been bought.