

## The Family Friendly “Green” Kitchen

As a kitchen and bath designer, one of my goals is to educate clients in terms of safety and efficiency in an environmentally responsible manner. When designing your kitchen with children and family in mind, there are many important considerations to recognize in cabinetry, appliances, countertops, and window treatments. Here we will discuss each of those materials as it relates to sustainability and safety.

**Cabinetry:** There’s much involved in the process of making cabinets, including wood, glue, paint, stain and finish. Each has a major part in determining whether the finished product is safe and green. As a result, the Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturers Association (KCMA) developed a program to ensure cabinet manufacturers adhere to a set of manufacturing policies that dictate how materials are used, stored, and recycled. This program has five categories with 18 different criteria with the possibility of earning 105 points. It also maintains a philosophy of environment and community to assure that the manufacturing process does not leave footprints upon its surroundings.

Talk to your designer on different cabinet manufacturers, the KCMA rating, and wood species’ offered. For example, Bamboo is fast-growing and everyone says it’s a sustainable wood, but the majority of bamboo is still coming from Asia, which means a lot of embodied energy use to transport it. Or you may choose to stay away from wood altogether by going with a line of composite veneers. This is an innovative process that creates the look, feel and warmth of almost any wood. It can also replicate the patterns of exotic woods such as ebony, mahogany, teak, walnut, and zebrawood, just to name a few.

**Appliances:** Energy Star is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Energy that helps us all save money while protecting the environment through energy efficient products and practices. Choose those appliance manufacturers that strive to offer products that meet or exceed federal standards for energy efficiency. The EPA Energy Star rating and energy usage should be well within all federal regulations.

Some companies, such as Sub-Zero and Wolf, have also taken serious measures to reduce air and waste stream pollution. They’ve significantly reduced VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) emissions at their manufacturing facilities by eliminating the painting process and utilizing more environmentally responsible coatings from their vendors.

**Countertops:** There has been a lot of talk these past couple of years about the safety of granite. However, allegations that granite countertops emit “dangerous” levels of radon and radiation have been mostly by competing countertop material companies. While the controversy continues, most tests from the Marble Institute of America (MIA) and the EPA conclude that the levels are not enough to “pose a health threat” to your children and family. Health physicists and radiation experts agree that most granite countertops emit radiation and radon, however, at extremely low levels. Repeated studies have found granite safe.

If you don’t want to risk it, many other choices in countertops have the approval of the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) and hold Green Guard Certifications. This includes natural quartz surfaces

(Cambria, Silestone, Caesar Stone) that are more durable and more resistant to surface damage than other stone. They are also twice as strong as granite and maintenance-free (no sealing, polishing or reconditioning needed).

**Window Treatments:** Basic household items, including window coverings, can turn into potential hazards. Most people are unaware of the enormous energy loss through windows and of the energy and cost savings available to them by adding energy-efficient window fashions from companies such as Hunter Douglas. Hunter Douglas offers fabric options that filter out 99% of the harmful UV rays while in the closed position, and as much as 86% of UV rays when in the open-vane position.

Hunter Douglas, number one in safety in the U.S., offers the following items with children in mind: (1) The LiteRise Touch System raises and lowers blinds by simply using your fingers. This elimination of lift cords means enhanced safety for children and pets. (2) Another popular option is the Power Rise. It is a battery-operated remote control system that once again, eliminates lift cords. (3) Other safety features offered by Hunter Douglas includes break-away tassels and cord stops. They are designed to break open under minimal pressure should a child or pet become entangled in the cord.

**Additional Family-Friendly Considerations:**

-Select appliances that include handles. This allows the use of the whole hand which is easier to use for children.

-Choose vented appliances and ensure natural gas appliances are properly vented outside. Ducts should be sealed to ensure proper ventilation of gas byproducts.

-Consider a microwave “drawer” such as Sharp, which is proven to be much safer than microwaves that are placed high in wall cabinets.

-Keep all combustible materials such as towels and window fashions away from the stovetop.

-Lower the countertop in certain areas so bakers and children can work at 30” above the finished floor, instead of 36”.

-Consider placing dishes and bowls in a base cabinet for easier access to children and the elderly.

-Choose paint with low odors and no VOC’s offered by companies including Benjamin Moore.

-Create many functional areas including a place to store homework and office items, as well as storage.

-Review the traffic pattern in each space and how many people (including children) will be passing through at any one time. For example, the width of a work aisle in the kitchen should be at least 42” for one cook and at least 48” for multiple people or cooks.

- Do not locate the cooking surface under an operable window, and window treatments above the cooking surface should not use flammable materials.

-A fire extinguisher should be located near the exit of the kitchen away from cooking equipment.

- GFCI (ground-fault circuit-interrupter) protection should be on all receptacles servicing countertop surfaces within the kitchen.

If you have any questions on the content in this article or would like to discuss safe and green kitchen materials, please visit Diane Giebner, owner and designer at Montagne Interiors. Montagne Interiors has a showroom located at 1153 Bergen Parkway, Unit 0, in the Evergreen King Soopers Shopping Center. You may also contact via phone or email: 303-670-3610; Diane@MontagneInteriors.com.