

Simple steps for stylish, yet sensible kitchen

Continued from page 5C

Storage to avoid clutter

Don't leave too much out on the counter. Since insufficient storage is a problem for many kitchens, people tend to clutter countertops, making the space seem cramped and uncomfortable.

Look for other storage solutions, such as countertop organizational systems, or

find ways to organize your pantry and cupboards to accommodate more items. The rule is, have out only what you need and find a way to organize and put away the rest.

Finish look with coordinating finishes

According to Vern, coordinating the finish throughout a room is a great way to pull it together.

First, focus on your appliances. If you have the ability, purchase the same color appliance. Different finishes make your kitchen look disjointed. Next, update your faucet with a new, sleek style in a hot new finish, such as copper, wrought iron or stainless steel.

Be sure not to stop there — change your drawer pulls, knobs, accessories and even

your framed artwork. Not everything needs to be exactly the same metal finish, but be sure the tonal colors are relatively the same hue.

Vern offers a variety of tips for updating with metals at www.summerofstyle.com.

Lighten up

Lighting is an important element in the kitchen, yet a place homeowners make the biggest mistakes. Most

kitchens are equipped with fluorescent lighting fixtures, which give off an unattractive blue tint to people, food and surroundings. Try adding halogen lights to your space, since they give the

closest approximation to daylight and make everything sharper, clearer and cleaner in your kitchen.

For more style solutions from Vern Yip and Moen, visit www.summerofstyle.com.

Conserve water while keeping your yard looking great, green

Continued from page 5C

ing 100 percent of the water benefits your lawn and plantings.

"In a home with no gutter system, a trench is created around the perimeter of the home where rain rushes off the roof," explains Bob Zuklie, vice-president of Rainhandler. "With a typical gutter and downspout system, much of the rain is often directed off the property. With Rainhandler, 100 percent of the runoff water is converted to a two- to three-foot wide band of soft, rain-sized droplets sprinkling the landscape."

As an added benefit, Rainhandler is self-cleaning and eliminates clogged, overflowing gutters and downspouts. That means no climbing on ladders and roofs to clean gutters; and in colder climates, homeowners don't have to worry about destructive ice dams from frozen gutters.

"Most homeowners install the system themselves in about three hours for an average size home," says Zuklie.

As you make plans for ways to beautify your yard this summer, here are some additional tips to keep in

mind that will help you have a great yard while conserving water:

- Plant more native plants. They are adapted to the local climate and rainfall and can survive without a lot of extra watering.

- Use mulch around plants and trees to help retain moisture and cut down on watering.

- Plant less grass. Keeping a lawn green all summer long takes a lot of water. Why not plant a prairie garden in your front yard or a vegetable garden in your back yard?

- Install a drip irrigation

system for flower or vegetable gardens. These systems provide a deep, quenching watering that reaches the roots of plants, giving them the moisture they need with less frequent watering.

- Program your sprinkler system to run only as needed. A couple of longer soaks will be better for your lawn than a short burst of water every day.

For more information on native plants, rain barrels and drip irrigation, visit your local nursery. For more information on the Rainhandler gutter system, visit www.rainhandler.com or call (800) 942-3004. You can also find the system at Abundant Earth on line or in the Brookstone Hard to Find Tools catalog.

Feeling a spa at home

Continued from page 5C

Healthmasseur and Aquamasseur options in one bath. "The Ultimate Systems creates a customized experience for each member of the family," says Tennant.

To further enhance the experience, don't forget the room's ambiance. Using light and sound will help deepen the relaxation and can change from one person to the next, or even within the same bath. Many spas offer chromatherapy — the use of colored light to enhance mood.

You can enjoy these benefits at home with Acryline's baths. These baths provide a range of chromatherapy options, allowing you to customize your bathing experience from one moment to the next. You could bathe with soothing violet light, or view a light display that cycles through the color spectrum.

Change the display throughout your bath to reflect your mood. Add the waterfall fill spout and you can create the feeling of a tropical island getaway right in your own home.

Whether you need to relax after a hard day or pamper sore muscles from yesterday's workout, taking a few moments for yourself allows you to refresh and prepare to face tomorrow's challenges.

By selecting a bath that is able to adjust to your needs — and allows for complete customization for everyone in the family — your bathroom will become a haven from the cares of the world. People are quickly discovering that a relaxing bath is an important ritual that helps them unwind and reflect at day's end while renewing their spirit. For more information on Acryline products, visit www.acrylineusa.com or call (800) 794-4667.

Great place to live and invest

Continued from page 5C

uals who do not wish to be house rich and cash poor.

Obviously, your purchasing price range will influence where you may consider living and how much home you can afford to buy.

There is an abundance of reasonable priced resale homes on the market today. Most sellers are just as motivated as you are. This motivation can be attributed to the attractive low interest rates. Low interest rates mean everyone can purchase more

real estate and possibly pay less for it.

Current homeowners can upgrade while possibility maintaining their same monthly payments or maybe even lower their mortgage payments while gaining more real estate.

To benefit from today's low interest rates, most sellers need to sell their current residence prior to purchasing again. Both sellers and buyers can benefit from today's attractive interest rates.

If you are planning to purchase a home or invest into real estate in the near future, then Charlotte may be one of the best areas in the country to own property.

Currently, the Charlotte area is considered one of the best real estate values in America.

ROLAND K. HAWKINS is a Real Estate Agent with Coldwell Banker United Realtors. He can be reached at (704) 840-5762 or via the internet at www.roland-hawkins.com

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