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What's hot in home design

Before you start that project, here are eight trends to watch.

By Les Christie, CNNMoney.com staff writer

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NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) - Home fashion trends turn just as relentlessly as clothing fashions -- they just cycle at a slower pace.

What was in a few short years ago can be quite passé today. And the current fads will certainly be replaced with something newer and bolder more quickly than you think.

Anyone doing a home renovation project today wants to avoid yesterday's fashion. And if possible, they want to be on top of tomorrow's. Here's are eight trends to watch.

The bathtub: Yesterday -- whirlpool; Today -- soaking tub; Tomorrow -- infinity tub?

"Five, 10 years ago every new home costing \$125,000 and up had a whirlpool tub in the master bath," says Marshall Williams, manager for corporate accounts worldwide for Kohler, the premier fixture manufacturers.

For the most part, though, whirlpools didn't make bathing enjoyable. "Most were not ergonomically designed; they were uncomfortable and noisy," says Williams.

Today, the people's choice is a soaking tub, a deep, comfy, quiet place to relax and while away your troubles.

There is a step up from the soaking tub, however, that should prove popular: the infinity tub. Kohler recently introduced one it calls "Sök." It has an infinity overflow that lets the water drain slowly over the tub edge into a catch basin, where it is reheated and effervesced (bubble massage) and recirculated into the tub. There's also remote-controlled "chromatherapy," which alters the color of built-in LED lights in the tub to fit -- or set -- your mood.

Paint colors: Yesterday -- neutrals like ecru; Today -- bold like chocolate; Tomorrow -- chameleons?



Bold is back -- in colors at least COURTESY: BENJAMIN MOORE

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"In home design," says Doty Horn, director of color and design for Benjamin Moore, "We used to be afraid of the bold use of color."

Not anymore. Yesterday's neutrals have given way to an intense palette. The success of one "saturated color" -- chocolate brown -- has surprised even Horn.

And she predicts that so-called "chameleon colors" will soon dominate. These are paints that, because several different color tones are mixed in, take on a different tone at various light levels. For example, in low evening light it might look more pearly or luminescent than it would with bright morning sunlight streaming through the windows. Horn expects one of these colors -- Queens Wreath (a lavender variety) -- to be in high demand.

Kitchen: Yesterday -- uniform design; Today -- mix and match; Tomorrow -- anything goes?

Designer Mick De Julio ([de Giulio Kitchen Design](#)) says kitchen looks are no longer dominated by architectural influences but by designer ones. Even that is changing over to kitchens influenced by art. When the kitchen is an artwork, many old rules no longer apply.

"Everything had to be in the same style," says De Giulio. "If the room was English cottage style, everything was English cottage style." Now, kitchens can be one big collage, with walls of sleek contemporary cabinets kitty-cornered with ones in fussier traditional style, for example.

This fusion, so far, has been installed mostly in high-end homes, but De Giulio sees the trend filtering down to the masses.

Kitchen cabinet woods: Yesterday -- cherry; Today -- anegre; Tomorrow -- teak?

Tastes in cabinet color change slowly.

"Cherry has been a very hot veneer, bridging all markets," says Dan Myerson, of Bacon Veneer, one of the leading wood veneer suppliers for high-end office and residential applications. "It's still in demand but fading."

Myerson says a wood called anegre has taken hold in upscale markets. This blond to light-honey colored wood goes into many a corporate board room and has invaded high-end residences.

"Walnut is also back," says Myerson, "with a vengeance." And the style is clearer finishes, which enables the natural color and grain of the walnut to stand out.

Wood fashion can be fickle. A few years ago, according to Myerson, the dark African wood called Wenge, was "dead in the water." Then a designer showed some sleek new cabinets in wenge at a Milan fair. "We couldn't keep it in inventory for two years," he says.

The crystal ball business is tough, but Myerson thinks the wood-tone pendulum will swing back from the extreme light and dark tones popular now.

"My guess is that medium tones will return," says Myerson. "There has been renewed interest in teak."

Counters: Yesterday -- solid surfacing; Today -- granite; Tomorrow -- still granite?

And how will the teak be topped? Five to 10 years ago the countertop of choice was solid surfacings. Today's answer: Everybody must get stone.

"Granite is a given," says Allan Domb, whose company, Allan Domb Real Estate, develops luxury condos, like the conversion of the Warwick Hotel, in Philadelphia. "Corian just doesn't have the same cachet."

Diane Bryant and Margie Wilde, sales directors for another Philadelphia condo development, at the Ritz-

Carlton, predict that granite will not lose much popularity but other stones – limestone and sandstone for example – will gain.

De Giulio says look for metal counters – copper and zinc – to make a bigger splash.

Wood floors: Yesterday -- red oak; Today -- white oak; Tomorrow -- bamboo?

Taste in wood for flooring has turned as well. Albert Cummings, a custom home builder in Williamsport, Massachusetts (he was recently profiled as a [Tycoon in the making](#)), says that several years ago, red oak was everywhere.

Today, he reports, quarter-sawn, clear finish, white oak is the flooring of choice, but another wood is gaining.

"Today, lots of premier architects are picking up on Brazilian cherry, also called Jatoba, for upscale floors," says Cummings.

The future, however, of wood flooring might not even include wood. Timi Bates, an [interior designer](#) in upstate New York, says the emphasis on environmental issues will help make bamboo floors a choice of many homeowners.

Bamboo, a member of the grass family, is a fast-growing, sustainable crop that makes a tough, attractive flooring.

"I also see cork – which I think is a hoot – coming back," says Bates.

Appliance colors: Yesterday -- black; Today -- stainless steel; Tomorrow -- full overlay?

Where black once ruled, stainless steel has taken over appliance-color leadership. But Bates foresees a move away from the polished stainless to a brushed matte look.

And Bryant and Wilde say designers may start trying to introduce brighter colors to the appliance spectrum.

However, Sue Bailey, manager of product development for Viking, reports that her company offers 13 other color choices, yet stainless steel still accounts for 90 percent of its orders.

One trend that could challenge it is the "full overlay" treatment, according to Bailey, which, she says, "minimizes the effect of the appliance." It consists of installing wood inserts onto the appliance exteriors so they blend with the cabinetry, handles, pulls, and all. An under-counter refrigerator, for example, looks just like any other cabinet in the room.

Appliances: Yesterday -- trash compacter; Today -- wine cooler; Tomorrow -- cheese cooler?

Speaking of appliances, Bryant says one of the appliances greatly in demand several years ago – the trash compacter – has fallen out of favor.

Taking its place as the hot kitchen installation is the wine cooler.

And what's the appliance of the future? Well, it's not a sure bet, but Viking has been working on something that fits hand-in-glove in the wine cooler world – a cheese refrigerator.

Artisanal cheeses have gained hugely in popularity but many have specific humidity and temperature requirements rarely found in the old Amana. The cheese cooler, still very much on the drawing board, would provide different levels of care, enabling owners to keep cheese longer and have it taste better when you serve it.

That's a fashion statement you can really sink your teeth into.

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