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REAL ESTATE

# The Closed Kitchen Makes a Comeback

By KAYA LATERMAN    MAY 20, 2016

During a New Year's Eve dinner party several years ago, fun and laughter quickly turned to anguish for Jennifer McAllister-Nevins. The pipes in her kitchen were suddenly blocked. And because she lived in a TriBeCa apartment with an open kitchen, all the guests got to witness each chaotic moment as the sink backed up.

It's no surprise that Ms. McAllister-Nevins, who loves to entertain, now lives in a different TriBeCa loft, one with an enclosed kitchen.

"Sometimes I'm not as organized as I hoped, and other times there's just a mess," she said. Her next event at home is a party next month for Savor, a company she owns with a friend, which makes stylish keepsake boxes. "I like having the option of having your kitchen be a private or public space."

Open-kitchen floor plans have dominated home design for years, especially in new construction, and kitchen size has expanded as a result. Reviewing average kitchen size in a dozen new developments and apartment building conversions before 2000, the real estate firm Engel & Völkers found that the average kitchen accounted for about 6 percent of the total square

footage of the apartment. But in comparable developments after 2010, the agency found that as kitchens have been opened up to adjoining dining or living rooms, the average kitchen now takes up about 8 percent of the entire apartment.

Kitchen size aside, the pendulum has started to swing back toward enclosed kitchens. Several new residential buildings in Manhattan have offered separated kitchens — a nod to prewar apartment design, but also to the growing demand from potential buyers looking for separate cooking and entertaining spaces.

“I grew up in the Upper East Side and never saw an open kitchen,” said Edward Yedid, a partner of Grade New York, an interior design and architecture firm.

When designing the Twenty 1, a nine-unit condominium at 117 West 21st Street in Chelsea, Mr. Yedid decided to separate the kitchens because the units were all floor-through, with space to incorporate walls and hallways. He chose to use sliding solid oak doors in the kitchen in six units, so the residents would have “control on how they used the kitchen,” he said.

“For someone who isn’t sure if they want an open or closed kitchen, pocket doors are a great feature,” Mr. Yedid said.

Mark Kolodziejczak, a partner of Studio Tractor Architecture, a firm hired by Ms. McAllister-Nevins to renovate her current TriBeCa loft, said he has long discussions with clients about how they foresee using the kitchen. Do they prefer having a kitchen that will be the social center of the home or something more muted?

While the kitchen in Ms. McAllister-Nevins’s new apartment was separate from the entertaining space, it did not have doors, so she decided to install two large pocket doors, a design accent that seems to be gaining popularity. Of the roughly 450 respondents to a recent survey by the National Kitchen and Bath

Association, a trade group made up of kitchen and bath designers and suppliers, about 70 percent said they used pocket doors as part of a kitchen remodeling or new construction project in 2015.

Bryan Cho, an executive vice president of the Related Companies, said his company had not built a residential building with a closed-kitchen floor plan since the 1990s. But demand for larger rental apartments for families was high, he said, so Related included 45 three- and four-bedroom apartments in the Easton, a high-rise rental at 205 East 92nd Street with 230 units. All these larger units will have closed kitchens. Some will have open entries; others will have space for a small table, or a dining alcove attached.

“I think some people are attracted to a more formal way of life, so maybe the trend is shifting between having a big open space to cook and entertain to having some separation,” Mr. Cho said.

The ability to have a closed kitchen often is dictated by the available amount of space, said David Penick, the managing director of Hines, a developer. If you live in a small studio or one-bedroom, it is wise to put the refrigerator and stovetop on one wall, and incorporate a pass-through or island as extra countertop or dining space.

But if you have more room, you can get creative, said Mr. Penick, whose company is a developer of 53W53, a condominium tower that is rising next to the Museum of Modern Art. More than 90 percent of the units in the building will have separate kitchens that can be closed by a floor-to-ceiling automatic sliding door, he said.

The extra wall space created by enclosing a kitchen opens up more design options, Mr. Penick said. “There’s more storage, more counter space and room to populate kitchen-specific designs.”

Closed kitchens also work well for those who entertain a lot and hire caterers and private chefs. “You don’t want your dinner party guests to walk

through the kitchen and see what's being served," said Phillip Mendlow, a senior vice president of Bluerock Real Estate, which developed the Charles, a 27-unit condominium on the Upper East Side where all apartments come with closed kitchens.

Some developers are also testing out hybrid kitchen floor plans. Ian Schrager, a developer who recently broke ground on 160 Leroy, said all of the 49 condo units will have two fully equipped kitchens. The 300-square-foot enclosed chef's kitchen can be closed off by a sliding door, while the adjacent open "social kitchen" is anchored by a large marble island and countertop.

He said he took the idea from his own home, where he custom-installed a second, "dirty" kitchen. "I personally don't mind when people cook and wash dishes in front of me," Mr. Schrager said. "I like the social aspect of an open kitchen. But some people don't like that."

The two-kitchen concept isn't new. Many farms and suburban homes traditionally had second kitchens, often called summer kitchens, so the heat from the stove didn't raise the temperature in the entire house during the summer. In a stand-alone hut on the property, or in a small room in the back of the house or in the basement, they were used for butchering meat and making and preserving jams.

Other architects are creating closed kitchens that are adjacent to family rooms, not formal dining rooms. When designing the residences at 30 Park Place, Daniel Lobitz, a partner of Robert A.M. Stern Architects, said incorporating flexibility into a floor plan was important. "We tend to like clearly defined rooms, like a large foyer, hallways and rooms you can't walk through," he said. "But it's important that different families can live in the same building."

Of the 157 units in this downtown building, only 10 homes will have open kitchens; 55 will have kitchens that open up to family rooms; 72 units will have separate kitchens without an eat-in component; and 20 units will have

separate eat-in kitchens.

Julie McAllister recently moved into a four-bedroom apartment at the Greenwich Lane, a condominium complex in Greenwich Village. She likes the option of closing the kitchen off from an adjacent office, but the kitchen also opens onto a family room, an area used often by her two young children.

“It’s great to keep the noise and smells inside the kitchen, especially when my husband is using the office,” she said, “but I like the fact that I can see my kids play in the family room.”

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