

Making a splash: Kitchen and bath trends customized to fit the family





Courtesy of LuxeHome

Plain & Fancy Custom Cabinetry, a 43-year-old family-run kitchen cabinetry company known for the quality of its handcrafted workmanship and the wide range of its superior products, opened its first stand-alone Chicago showroom in September 2011 at LuxeHome. The new showroom, called Plain & Fancy by Dandamudi's, is more than 2,080-square-feet and occupies Suite 142 at Chicago's Merchandise Mart.

14 hours ago • [By Philip Potempa philip.potempa@nwi.com, \(219\) 852-4327](mailto:philip.potempa@nwi.com)
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Michelle Bagull of Schererville, wonders if the name for the traditional rooms known today as "the kitchen" and "the bathroom" will one day change.

"These are spaces that do so much more today than just provide the area for cooking and the privacy for bathing," said Bagull, a Realtor for McColly Real Estate for nine years.

"Right now, I'm working with a custom builder called Newcastle Homes for the Lake Hills subdivision in St. John. And what's found in homes that Newcastle Homes has built is amazing. [Kitchens](#) have really come a long way."

She said besides the unique use of cabinet space, today's kitchens are the equivalent of gourmet versus everyday cooking.

"Some of the custom cabinetry have custom color glazes, scroll work and glass doors, besides incorporating two different cabinet colors all in the same space," Bagull said.

"What was once upscale appliances have become more standard, along with a return to huge pantries and everyone's now-favorite granite countertops, in addition to the unique, leather-finish granite that is also a real attention grabber plus a great preparation area."

Bagull's fellow Realtor Ken Varnes, also of Schererville, said it's with good reason there's a constant fixation for homeowners willing to [invest](#) in their kitchen and bathroom areas.

"For anyone remodeling or even someone selling a home, it always holds true that [investing](#) in your kitchen and bathroom are two rooms that pay off," Varnes said.

Last week's annual Kitchen and Bath Industry Show at Chicago's Merchandise Mart celebrated the latest trends and innovations for today's kitchen and bathrooms.

Kate Flaherty, the VP of LuxeHome at Merchandise Mart, was busy unveiling more than 60 new products from their 17 premier showrooms and nine new and expanded showrooms, touting the latest innovations in the kitchen and bath industry only available at LuxeHome.

Located on the first floor of Chicago's Merchandise Mart, LuxeHome is the world's largest collection of premier boutiques for home building and renovation, boasting 115,000 square feet and including 30 boutiques, where designers on site assist with what Flaherty describes as "the finest kitchen, bath, and building products from the most recognized and respected manufacturers worldwide."

"The kitchen is still the heart of the home, but it's evolved so much in the past two decades," said Flaherty, who has been with LuxeHome for 19 years.

"What was once the formal dining rooms of the American home, are being wiped out, with that dividing wall coming down and this space now incorporated into larger kitchen spaces with the space being better used."

And what might once have seemed like "luxury extra features," are now becoming more the norm, such as special "chiller" refrigeration units dedicated just for wine built into the cabinets, customized ovens and cooking ranges created to better serve family needs.

"The big three for improving kitchens today are cabinets, lighting and hardware," she said.

"The hardware refers to all of the highlights which can add so much to fixtures, such as carefully selected handles and oversized hinges to door knobs and accents."

As for today's bathrooms, Flaherty said the space once called "a water closet" because of the tiny dedicated space, has now been embraced and expanded to become home spas.

"With today's hectic schedules, there has to be a place for privacy and escape and with the right bathroom of today, it can happen," she said.

"One of the new favorites, which is here at The KOHLER Store, is the VibrAcoustic Bath, which allows for an easy connection for a personal wireless device to attach to pipe in favorite music with built-in speakers while the water vibrates."

She said one of the big trends includes a return to spa-style soaking tubs.

And while there are definite changes, she emphasizes that some things remain classic feature fixtures, like medicine cabinets and tile options, only improved and updated for today.

"It's a simple theme of today: 'mask the mess,' which can be anything from that hidden garbage container in a kitchen pull-out drawer to a 'smarter' medicine cabinet, such as one I just saw with mirrors on both sides of the door or another one where the door rolls up into the wall, rather than hinged and opening out," she said.

"And as for tile options, the choices are more exotic than ever. A favorite is Shagreen tile from Ann Sacks, which is created from materials made from Sting Ray and bone. This is an exciting time for kitchen and bathroom opportunities."

Flaherty also reminds that the LuxeHome first level of the Chicago Merchandise Mart isn't only open to contractors and industry insiders, but also welcomes the general public.

For more information, call (312) 527-7939 or visit luxehome.com