



*We've upended food culture and are arranging every aspect of our lives to be healthier and more considered, so it makes sense to give our kitchens a holistic makeover. **Luciana Bellini** explores the latest frontier in wellness lifestyle*

First they came for our workouts, next it was our diets, and now our kitchens are getting the LA treatment. Largely based on antiquated models from the 1950s, kitchens as we know them cater to convenience rather than wellbeing: dark cupboards hide our tinned goods and junk food; fresh produce is left to rot in deep fridges; microwaves nuke our processed meals. According to the Vegan Society, vegans and vegetarians will make up a quarter of the British population by 2025, while nearly half of UK consumers will be flexitarian. This shift towards plant-based, organic, local consumption has led to an inevitable rethink of the room where it all happens. Cue the “wellness kitchen”, a trend that was identified at the 2018 Global Wellness Summit and pioneered by the architect Veronica Schreiber Smith,

founder of Vera Iconica Wellness Kitchen. “The wellness kitchen was born out of my own frustration,” she says over the phone from her office in Jackson, Wyoming. “I saw how our attitudes to food were changing, so I thought, ‘How does that shift the design?’”

Quite a lot, it turns out. Gone are bulky cabinets and noisy appliances that clutter kitchen worktops; these have been replaced by simple, open shelves displaying our most Instagram-worthy tableware. “We went through a phase where bigger was better — people wanted a cavernous Sub-Zero fridge, the biggest range. Now the philosophical challenge is getting people to think about what they actually need and keep it simple,” says Rachel Allen, a Los Angeles-based architect who has designed wellness kitchens for professional chefs, artists and screenwriters, and has seen demand go through the roof in recent years.



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Unsurprisingly, LA was one of the first places to adopt the trend, and Allen says most of her clients are on the city's hip East-side, in neighbourhoods such as Silver Lake and Los Feliz, rather than in Beverly Hills.

The focus here is to keep fresh and healthy produce front and centre, with the aim of inspiring us to make better eating choices. Food visibility is key: "Digestion starts with our eyes, so it's important we can see our food and connect to it," says Schreiber Smith, who has designed a range of glass-fronted, climate-controlled cabinets with troughs of water running through them to keep vegetables and herbs out of the fridge and on show.

Pantries are also having a makeover, with companies such as the Home Edit being called in to declutter and refocus. "The kitchen tends to be overwhelming for clients," say founders Clea Shearer and Joanna Teplin, who have reorganised larders for the likes of Gwyneth Paltrow, Khloé Kardashian and Mandy Moore. "Having healthy food that is visible, easily accessible and beautiful can be a game-changer."

Natural materials are being used wherever possible, with quartz proving the most popular for countertops ("It's bulletproof in terms of sanitation," says Allen), and cross-grained wood back in fashion. "It's like with food: the closer the material can be to its natural state, the healthier it is going to be for you," says Schreiber Smith. This was the philosophy behind the London-based architecture firm Finch's award-winning wellness kitchen, which was built using as few chemicals as possible and from eco-friendly materials,

including natural cork floors that are resistant to dust and toxin absorption, as well as being antimicrobial and water-resistant. What's more, the kitchen has an alkaline water purifier to increase

PH levels, a steam oven to help food retain vitamins and minerals, and a DoTerra essential-oil diffuser that releases energising and cleansing scents including lemon and eucalyptus.

Interaction with nature is another big consideration, with some going a step further and building a second kitchen outside. For clients who use their outdoor kitchen as much as their indoor one, Allen has created wet bars designed for drinks parties and full-blown kitchens with Big Green Eggs barbecues and storage for firewood. Gardens



Hydroponics unit by Urban Cultivator. **Above** Hanging plants in a kitchen by True Residential

are also coming inside: beautifully designed indoor growing units that allow you to grow herbs and salad microgreens hydroponically, such as those created by Urban Cultivator, have become a hit in kitchens.

Last year, Schreiber Smith exhibited her prototype wellness kitchen at the Lake Nona Institute — a non-profit organisation in Florida focusing on creating healthy and sustainable communities — and is currently incorporating them in projects across America. As well as glass-fronted cabinetry, there are patented composting units built into countertops, where you can deposit food waste to be turned into fertiliser, and systems to make food prep easier, from chopping boards integrated into the counters to screens that roll over your sink for rinsing vegetables. If you purchase the luxury Ritual kitchen package, you will receive personalised diet recommendations and example recipe programmes for a truly holistic approach to eating. "Food can't always be about convenience — sometimes you have to put the work in and chop the vegetable," Schreiber Smith says. "And if it can't be automated then it needs to be joyful. It should help nourish your soul before you nourish your body." ■ @lucianabellini



Wellness kitchen by Finch. **Opposite, top** Living wall designed by Heidi Mendoza, Denver Co