

PROMENADE

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Above: [An ultra-modern slice of the Museum Mile at 1280 Fifth Avenue. Below: 123 Third Avenue's contemporary kitchens lie at a cultural crossroads. Opposite page: Kitchens are the height of green chic at The Visionaire]

the heart of the (modern) home

Open kitchens with contemporary, streamlined designs are redefining luxury residences throughout Manhattan.

By Kaitlin Ahern



By way of the classic Brontë novel, long gone are the days of extravagant dinner parties attended by stuffily dressed acquaintances, when visitors congregated in the dining room, and the kitchen and its messes were thoroughly out of sight, out of mind. Today, we take a more informal approach to social gatherings, an evolution that has influenced both our habits and the design of our homes. "Ten years ago, when people went out to the theatre or a restaurant, they dressed up. Today, there's an informality that has become acceptable in social life, and that's the way we live within our homes as well," says Nancy Packes, president of Brown Harris Stevens Project Marketing. She adds that this cultural shift has especially influenced the heart of the home: the kitchen. "The idea that the kitchen needs to be separate is in the past; people want the informality of being able to cook and talk with guests or watch their kids do homework."

With this idea in mind, designers in many of Manhattan's newer luxury buildings have trended toward an open kitchen that integrates a home's dining and living spaces. This contemporary preference has also spurred an ultra-modern aesthetic: sleek, sophisticated designs with subtle tones and textures that establish a modern yet timeless feel. With understated elements, these kitchens work with a wide variety of palettes and décor. Here's a look at three:

At the Top

These condominiums claim a unique space 1280 Fifth Avenue, above the new home of the Museum for African Art, which lies on the soon-to-be-extended Museum Mile, the first addition since the 1959 opening of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. The property is similar only to the residences above the Museum of Modern Art in midtown. But did we mention the park and river views? "This is one of the last sites that can be developed on Fifth Avenue where it abuts Central Park," Packes says, adding that apartments facing east have views of the Triborough Bridge and East River. "There is the potential for these homes to increase dramatically in value over time."

As for the kitchens, ultra-modern elements are incorporated through quality materials like teak cabinets, a fine-grained, warm wood known for its minute seams, which echo the design's attention to details. "It reminds me of the stitching on lapels that is done by hand," says Packes. The oversized refrigerator, which is Energy Star® qualified, is also cloaked in teak. Kitchen floors are made from white oak, which continues into the living and dining spaces, allowing for integration among the rooms. Countertops and backsplashes feature dark brown granite, providing a neutral backdrop for stainless steel appliances like the Thermador gas oven and Miele ventilator hood. Lighting is abundant, with most residences featuring both under- and over-cabinet fixtures as well as hand-blown glass globes, a feature made in Brooklyn by J. Good Design. This kind of local sourcing for materials is one example of the building's efforts to achieve LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification, which is expected upon the building's completion.

"Getting the kitchen right is extremely important," says Packes, adding that replacing a kitchen can be a burden both financially and emotionally. "The new buildings we see are trying for innovation at the expense of timelessness and beauty. What we've done is on the cutting edge; it touches the perfect balance between what is new and what appears to always have been."

The property opened for sales in early September and is releasing homes on a limited basis. Available units range from studios with a home office at \$725,000 to three-bedroom residences \$1.65 million. Larger combination homes are also available.

In the Middle of It All

The development at 123 Third Avenue has a simple philosophy: "Live local." And for good reason. The building lies at the crossroads of four vibrant neighborhoods—East Village, Greenwich Village, Union Square, and Gramercy—and residents glean the best of all four areas, with restaurants, shopping, theatre (cinema and Off-Broadway) and a wide selection of supermarkets (not to mention the Union Square Greenmarket) right outside the door. The many subway lines at nearby Union Square station provide access to just about anywhere in the city.

Kitchens here are streamlined and straightforward, with crisp, clean lines. The ultra-modern design enables this room to co-exist with just about any design aesthetic you choose for the rest of the residence, says Henry Hershkowitz, the property's sales director, with Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group. "I've seen modern kitchens in bright blue or teal—that makes a statement you have to work with," Hershkowitz says. Instead, kitchens at 123 Third feature custom Pioggia Grey high-gloss finishes by renowned Italian kitchen manufacturer Poliform, with aluminum edging. Countertops are white quartz, the backsplash is porcelain tiled, and floors are the white oak that spills over from the living room. The sleek look is completed with Miele appliances like the refrigerator and dishwasher, which are covered in Poliform panels, and accents like Dormbracht sink fixtures.

"Everybody hangs out in the kitchen; it's the center of most people's homes," Hershkowitz says. "Cooking is not something like in the old days, left for someone else to do in a hot kitchen. Now, in a modern family, you're multi-tasking while cooking—having conversations and texting—it's become part of the entertainment."

The property opened for sales in early September and is now more than 50 percent sold. Available units include two- and three-bedrooms ranging from \$1.34 to \$1.9 million and penthouses ranging from \$3.5 to \$4.425 million.



On the Hudson

Perhaps the most ultra-modern element of The Visionaire, located at 70 Little West Street in Battery Park City, is its Platinum LEED certification. The building is the first residential tower in the country to achieve this status, which is the highest title awarded in "green" building. This commitment to sustainability is of course seen in the property's kitchens: cabinets are made entirely from bamboo, with low VOC (volatile organic compound) wood composite; the brick-patterned glass backsplashes are made from recycled and recyclable tiles; countertops are made of River-Washed Absolute Black Granite; all appliances are Energy Star® qualified; lighting is LED; and the flooring is FSC (Forestry Stewardship Council)-certified quarter sawn oak. Additionally, each kitchen's exhaust system allows for individual resident control, on demand, for improved air quality and energy efficiency.

"The interior designer of the building [Tim Button of Stedila Design], planned the open design of the kitchens with a contemporary, 'modern hearth' conceptualization," says Jackie Urgo, president of The Marketing Directors, Inc., The Visionaire's marketing and sales agency. "The colors are subtle; the whole design throughout the building is of that serene, 'green' quality." The interior design mimics the property's location in Battery Park City, which is heralded by its inhabitants as a sort of oasis inside Manhattan, removed from the hustle and bustle (but not too far away). Some neighborhood highlights include a plethora of parks, the nearby Hudson River, and a family-friendly social calendar run by the Battery Park City Authority.

The Visionaire opened for sales in 2008 and is currently more than 65 percent sold. At 35 stories, the building contains a variety of home sizes, ranging from 605 to 2,700 square feet (including two available penthouses), priced between \$690,000 and \$4.445 million. ■