

Kitchens & bathrooms designed for life



WORDS

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Ensure your kitchen's long life and functionality no matter what your situation.

WHEN WE THINK OF A 'GREEN' KITCHEN

our thoughts usually turn to recycled materials, low or no VOC finishes and energy efficient appliances. Often overlooked yet essential are the benefits of good design, longevity and usability. So when you're next building or renovating a kitchen or bathroom, give the following some consideration as well.

Sustainable design elements (and this applies to kitchens, bathrooms and laundries) include keeping the areas compact and functional, while allowing for ease of movement. See the *Livable Housing Design Guidelines* for practical details like door widths, space to allow between walls and cabinetry and so on.

Other general items include good ventilation and natural light, both necessary to ensure healthy spaces. When considering flooring, extend the floor finishes to go wall to wall – yes, that means under the cabinetry. This allows the space to be redesigned in the future and cupboards to be moved without having to replace the flooring.

For kitchens, everyone loves a decent pantry so include one if you can. From a sustainability perspective they're a good addition as they take up less floor space, use fewer materials and can maximise storage. In the general kitchen area, using drawers instead of cupboards is a better option as drawers are more accessible and easier to use, particularly as we age. Remember to include a recycling station close to the food preparation area; this makes it easy to separate waste for recycling, organics for worm farms and the rest for landfill.

Bathrooms should include slip resistant flooring and ideally a shower in a corner with hobless (no lip) recesses or a screen that can be easily removed in the future when better accessibility is required. If you happen to have the walls around a bath, toilet or shower open when renovating, take the chance to include some insulation and if possible reinforcement to facilitate grab rails in the future.

Combining recycled or low impact building materials, energy efficient appliances and low VOC finishes with the good design tips above will create liveable spaces that are healthy, light on the environmental and a pleasure to be in.

Danielle King is a qualified and accredited Sustainability Assessor working in the built environment. She sits on the Building Designers Association of Victoria's Sustainability Advisory Board, teaches sustainable building topics part-time and runs a busy consulting company.

LINKS

Livable Housing Design Guide
www.livablehousingaustralia.org.au

A note on materials

"Many wet areas still use wood-based materials with laminate over the top for waterproofing, but these end up delaminating and absorbing water, hence expanding and disintegrating," says ATA technical editor Lance Turner." He says solid surface materials are best for all bench tops, including stone surfaces, acrylic solid surfaces (many of these have recycled paper content to give them texture) and various others.

[Ed note: For more information on different kitchen and bathroom materials, see our bathroom special in *Sanctuary 20* and our kitchen special in *Sanctuary 17*.]