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RENOVATION

5 ways to create a stylish, functional open kitchen in your NYC apartment or brownstone

- Add counter seating for casual dining and doing homework
- Use marble-look surfaces like quartz and porcelain for durability
- Hide the fridge in an appliance 'garage' for a streamlined look



BY EVELYN BATTAGLIA | FEBRUARY 14, 2023 · 9:30AM



A two-tone kitchen, counter seating, quartzite countertops, appliance garage, and wall oven are on trend at 96+Broadway.
Evan Joseph

Despite murmurs that it was on its way out, the open kitchen layout has only gained traction in New York City apartments and townhouses of all eras, sizes, and price ranges. And as the heart—and hardest-working area—of the home, kitchens remain a top priority for renovations.

"Generally speaking, more people are cooking and entertaining at home more often, so kitchens are huge," says Peter Holtzman, principal architect and founder of Harlem-based [Bespoke Architecture](#). "People still want the kitchens open to the living spaces and I don't see that changing anytime soon. This is just a real lifestyle switch between how people used to live and how they live now."

Only now that people are still spending more time (and eating more often) at home, an open kitchen has taken on even more importance as a multitasking space—for example, while prepping dinner you can keep an eye on the kids as they play in the living area or do their homework at the counter.

It also needs to be attractive. Take a cue from luxe new developments like [96+Broadway](#), where the kitchen cabinets from Stevali are made of exposed, dovetailed planks in solid oak (scoring big on style) and are paired with a quartzite island surface (for durability).

"Given the prominent placement of the kitchens, we seized the opportunity to highlight our commitment to elegant, timeless design hand-in-hand with full functionality," said Van Nguyen, partner at [JVP Management](#), the real estate investment and development firm behind 96+Broadway.

"Whereas elsewhere in an apartment, one might be trying to close off private spaces, the kitchen and living spaces remain communal and are the easiest way to allow the home—and the kitchen itself—to feel larger," says Jennifer Tanner, an agent at [Coldwell Banker Warburg](#). What's more, an open layout is a creative means of getting natural light into a kitchen with limited or no windows. "Unobstructed light from an adjacent living space can keep a home feeling light, bright, and happy—a welcome alternative to darker enclosed or galley kitchens."

So whether you are updating your existing open setup or starting from scratch (and knocking out some walls), the following five elements score big in style and substance—and can be adapted to suit any square footage.



4. Use durable surfaces like quartz and porcelain

No doubt marble will always be the end all, be all counter material for many people, but an increasing number are looking for more budget-friendly, practical options.

"There's been a shift in focus for home renovations as homeowners are now prioritizing spatial planning and practicality over elaborate 'jewelry' and ornamentation," Karp says.

And Holtzman has been "running into a lot of people with champagne tastes and beer budgets, particularly with kitchens, which is not new but is amplified a bit now."

He says he almost invariably counsels clients away from marble because as a soft stone, it is prone to etching and stains. (He knows first-hand: His own marble counters, which he got for a discounted price, have taken abuse and beatings and he's learned to live with it. "If I had to do it over again I would have opted for honed rather than polished, then at least you don't have to worry about the etching though staining is more of a concern.")

He also counsels clients to avoid granite, "which is out of style and empirically unattractive with one exception: absolute black when honed looks a lot like soapstone, which people like, but is still indestructible. It's a deep anthracite gray and a good, solid option."

For people who want the heavily veined Calacatta Gold or Carrera marble but the durability of granite, he and others are leaning into quartz such as by [Caesarstone](#), [Silestone](#), and [Cambria](#). "These materials are getting better all the time at being good fakes, especially for marble," he says. (Check out the UWS kitchen above.) They are also resistant to scratches and stains, making them ideal for high-traffic family kitchens.

Fontan is a longtime proponent of porcelain for countertops and backsplashes, including in the UES kitchen shown above (with the wall ovens). His go-to sources include [Porcelanosa](#) and [Florim](#).

If you prefer a natural stone that can be as heat-tolerant as granite, Holtzman has been specifying quartzite recently. "It's kind of my new favorite because it is robust and comes in a wide variety of looks and you can finish it in a bunch of ways." Quartzite was also used at luxe condo development [96+Broadway](#) shown at top.

(For more information, read [Brick's guide to marble and granite alternatives](#).)

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