

# life @ home

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# Fast Forward

appliances get multimedia makeover

by lee nelson

A complete kitchen renovation may not be in your economic cards, but updating that electric-guzzling, avocado green refrigerator or water-sucking dishwasher might do wonders for your soul — and your wallet.

For instance, you can save more than \$725 over five years in electricity by replacing your old refrigerator or freezer. Today's washing machines use between 18 to 25 gallons per cycle compared to the 40 gallons used by a standard machine built in 2000, saving \$60 in electricity costs annually as well. And using an Energy Star qualified dishwasher instead of hand washing dishes will save 5,000 gallons of water annually, \$40 in utility costs and 230 hours of your time.

But energy efficiency isn't the only way in which today's appliances have moved by those of yesteryear. Indeed, stepping inside any appliance store these days is more like walking into a computer store. Kitchen appliances no longer just come with on/off switches. Manufacturers have created some of the most revolutionary, high tech and convenient models to make lives easier and also save money and time. As you wander down the rows of stainless steel, white and black appliances, you may feel as if you've stepped into a *Jetsons'* cartoon or one of your sons' futuristic video games.

Ovens, for instance, are now equipped with touchscreens. The cook can select among pictures of beautifully-prepared food similar to what they'll be baking; all they have to do is press the screen. Out comes the perfect chocolate cake or a medium rare roast beef. It also tells the cook where to stick the



meat thermometer and allows temperature and time adjustment to be made by sliding a finger across the screen.

Apps aren't just for phones anymore. You can have apps on your Wi-Fi enabled refrigerator. A small touchscreen computer on the front of the door allows you to find your favorite recipe just like on your laptop, send friends a Facebook message or see what the weather will be across the country. And when you need a microwave for those quick meals, just push a button and the undercounter microwave slides out.

"There are so many options and price ranges out there now," says Dan Oliver at Earl B. Feiden Inc., Appliance & TV, Latham and Kingston. "The cooking products are the main emphasis when someone is building a new house or remodeling. The stove and oven are a little more personal. And now, you have so many ways to go."



◀ **JETSONS, EAT YOUR HEART OUT:**

The Whirlpool Polara combines the convenience of refrigeration with a state-of-the-art oven. Slide your meal to keep it cool in the morning; the oven turns on at the time you program so that it's done when you arrive home.

▶ **THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT:** Wi-Fi enabled refrigerators, like this one from Samsung, allow you to find your favorite recipe on a front-of-door touchscreen.

Gas may still be king for cooking in the Capital Region, Oliver says, but electric glass tops and induction cooking are gaining popularity.

Induction cooktops create electromagnetic fields that heat the pans rather than the surface of the stove. It's a great safety choice for families with small children. You can boil a pot of water for pasta quickly, take the pan off the burner and touch the burner without getting burned. Induction cooking uses 90 percent of the energy produced compared to only 40 percent for a gas burner and 50 percent for traditional electric ranges.

"The concept has been around for 15 years, but the concept was difficult to grasp in its rudimentary stages," Oliver says, noting that G.E. has a new slide induction cooktop.

Tom Thibeault, owner of Adirondack Appliance in Saratoga Springs, is excited about the oven customization options coming from the BlueStar company in Redding, Pa. Clients can pick the size, select from 190 colors or opt for stainless steel with colored knobs, and decide placement of burners, griddle or grill. The stove comes with the ever-popular French doors, a high BTU and an ultra low simmer.

"You really can build it the way you cook. No one has offered this before," Thibeault says. "I haven't been excited about an appliance line like this for a long time. They give professional options to in a residential product."

Thibeault's store sells appliances from many companies. "Two or three years ago, Sub Zero and Wolf were the crème de la crème. People believed that they could do no wrong. But Blue Star and other companies' engineers are being quite creative and pushing the envelope," Thibeault says.

"There are so many innovations out there, it is almost staggering," he adds. "It will be the survival of the fittest. A lot of companies will be stealing the market share from other companies."

The French company, Miele, for instance, has added RemoteVision™ Wi-Fi technology to its appliances. This creates a virtual link between your enabled appliance and the company's monitoring center. If something goes wrong with an appliance, Miele's client service center will be notified and contact you or someone else on your call roster. If you are on vacation and your refrigerator stops because of an electricity blackout, for instance, someone will be reached to remedy the situation or at least be able to take all the food out of the refrigerator and freezer.

Oliver believes changes in cooktop ventilation are among the biggest improvements in the last 10 years. People now hide overhead vents with cabinetry, stucco, copper and more to make it a piece of art rather than a visual sore thumb. "People are enlarging their kitchens and making it part of the family room," he says. "That means they are more concerned with

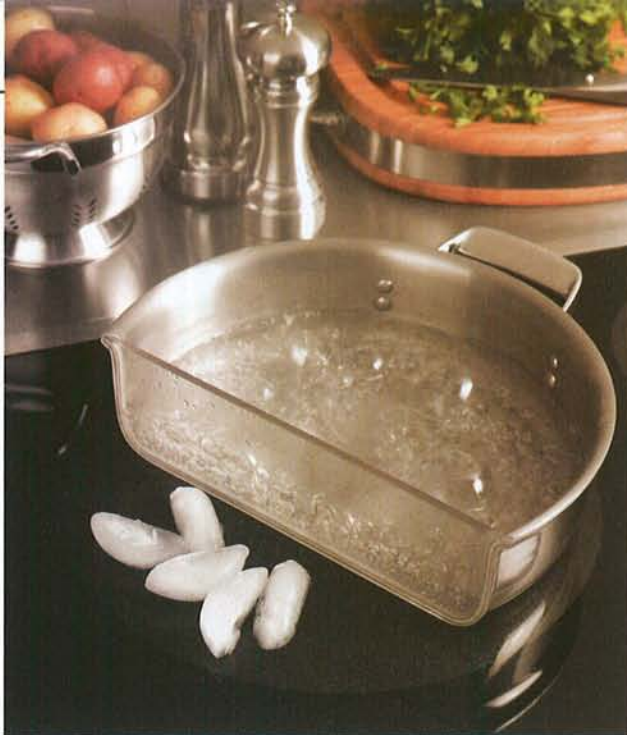
## appliances

odors and people are doing a lot more ethnic cooking, which means more smoke, steam and odor."

Vents are also quieter and more powerful, says Evan Levey, managing partner of Columbia Cabinet Works in Albany. "They have come a long way from those over-the-stove types that people just used the lights on because the fan was too noisy," he says. "There are some great ones that pop out of the countertop. You get the functionality but you don't have to see it all the time. It's the best of both worlds."

When Levey meets with a client for a kitchen makeover or new construction, he asks them what they want and how they use their kitchen. Today's appliances can help make cooking, cleaning and entertaining so much easier and faster.

You can choose refrigerator drawers to use for juice boxes and other quick-grab items — a handy addition for children. Wine coolers are getting more sophisticated, too, with dual temperatures for red and white wines. Refrigerators offer wider and deeper spaces to allow for big cakes, party trays and large pizzas.



◀ **WHAT'S COOKING:** Induction cooktops create electromagnetic fields that heat your pans rather than the surface of your stove, as demonstrated here. Water in the pot is boiling; ice cubes placed on the cooktop just next to the pot stay frozen.

But Whirlpool may have the prototype of the future. Its Polara refrigerator oven combines the convenience of refrigeration with a state-of-the-art oven. Busy families can slide their meal in during the morning where it keeps cool until the oven turns on at the time you program. Your meal is done when you arrive home. And if something happens and you're late, it is smart enough to automatically turn itself into a refrigerator again to keep the meal cool. The Jetsons never had this kind of luxury.

Everyone lives differently and uses their kitchens for all kinds of purposes. Even the small appliances are changing with wireless choices to allow cooks to use the machine without using it in specific work area near an outlet. "What all these appliances allow for is more flexibility," Levey says. "The kitchen has become the secondary living room. It's about creating a place where everyone can convene." @



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