

A range of options

Range hoods marry form and function



By Patricia Newman
STAFF WRITER
pnewman@greenvillenews.com

Move over, refrigerators. The range hood is finally taking its rightful place in the kitchen as a design element. And the new designs look more like art than appliances.

No longer just utilitarian pieces of equipment used to clear the air near the stove, range hoods are just as fashionable as they are practical, with form often trumping function.

For many of his deep-pocket customers, "It's more about appeal and appearance than functionality," said The Cook's Station's sales manager Kevin Crowe. But, Crowe adds, he always strives to give customers both great style and great functionality.

In the past, before kitchen design became a key selling point for home buyers, materials and design options were limited in range hoods, said Arcadio Lainex, director of marketing for Zephyr, a San Francisco-based company specializing in vent hoods, with only black and white plastic and sheet metal ventilation systems available.



Stove decor: Siemen's multimedia hood, top photo, with 17-inch LCD TV and DVD and CD player.



New look: Vent fans, above and at right, have gone from plain and providing a single function to stylish and multi-functional as these examples by Zephyr show.

"It was either hide it, or put a stainless steel box over the hood," he said. "People didn't really think of the range hood as a style piece or an architectural statement in the kitchen."

While stainless steel continues to be a fashionable choice for range hoods, homeowners now have more decorative



options.

Take the hoods in Zephyr's Cheng collection.

Created by Japanese designer Fu Tung Cheng, all of the hoods have sloping curves

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under the canopy, which takes away the hard edge of traditional range hoods.

With the Cheng collection, homeowners have the option of customizing the hoods with mosaic tile, ribbed glass, Italian Marmorino plaster or any material that complements the kitchen's decor.

Chimney style hoods designed for Best by Broan by F.A. Porsche are now available in metallic red and black and matte aluminum finishes.

The popular trend of hiding appliances like refrigerators and dishwashers using door panels that match a kitchen's cabinets was expanded several years ago to include custom hoods, thanks in part to the introduction of new liners from Vent-A-Hood, the nation's oldest range hood manufacturer.

In 2003, the company introduced hood liners with wood, plaster, tile and other exteriors to meet the design needs of homeowners with varied kitchen styles.

Now, other appliance manufacturers are adding new innovations, including hoods that expand at the touch of a button. Thermador's new chimney-style hood, for example, has a slide-out canopy that extends an

extra 12 inches for 45 percent more coverage of the cooking area.

Or Best by Broan offers a model that detects excessive heat and adjusts fan speeds automatically to prevent accidents.

Some hoods even have functions that go well beyond venting. Zephyr's Cache hood has a slopping canopy that doubles as a storage bin.

The multimedia hood by Siemens, introduced at this year's Kitchen and Bath Industry Show in Las Vegas, is made of stainless steel. It has a television set and slot-loading DVD and CD player sealed inside the hood to protect them from grease and smoke damage.

Stephen Pile, director of sales and marketing for Siemens Appliances, said once the hoods hit the market in 2008, customers should mount them over induction and radiant electric cooktops only.

The multi-media hood will cost about \$3,499.

While range hoods weren't the first kitchen appliances to integrate multimedia functions, Pile said the innovation appeals to younger homeowners and urban dwellers with an appetite

for space-saving technology.

"There's a huge wave of people moving into high rise condominiums and co-ops, and space is a real luxury," he said. "It's very tough to get a lot of appliances in these small spaces. So more and more you will see appliances that combine technology and saving space."