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the house is," Smith says in his North Scottsdale showroom, surrounded by solid steel faucets and sinks that are deep and wide enough to handle a few Thanksgiving dinners at once.

"Our industry is finally being as innovative as it should have been. We were doing porcelain sinks for how long?"

Smith attends trade shows and networks with other suppliers to ensure that when cutting-edge kitchenware hits shelves, Phoenix is among the first metro areas to get them.

Materials are key. If you want a top-of-the-line faucet that will last, splurge for a culinary grade solid stainless steel one. But if you want to stay true to the character of the Southwest, opt for an eye-catching copper basin, hand-hammered and bronzed for a one-of-a-kind aesthetic.

Sinks have undergone the biggest transformation in recent years. With the ubiquity of dishwashers, those double bins are obsolete. Now manufacturers are cranking out deep single bins that work as food-prep stations. Some models come with cutting boards and colanders that slide right over the drain, plus drawers and holders for your

dish sponges and towels.

The shape of the moment is "square, square, square," Smith says, although look for the trend to soften. The newest sinks have elegant, slightly rounded edges, and even come in shapes that resemble wandering rivers. For a customized look, Smith can order sinks in just about any shape, from a martini glass to the state of Texas.

Boutique home developers are debuting some of the latest styles. Ed Gorman and his Phoenix firm, Modus Development, recently built a small enclave of eight homes near 24th Street and Campbell Avenue called The Galleries at Turney. People such as Mercury superstar Diana Taurasi have scooped up the units, wooed by the modern touches and "green" building techniques.

Inside Gorman's residence there, the kitchen flows seamlessly into the living room, creating a "great room." There are no upper cabinets blocking views between rooms; instead, a 15-foot row of deep, lower cabinets provides plenty of storage.

All the cabinets are Italian gray oak, with grooves carved into each door to serve as handles. They cover nearly every surface,

so the only kitchenware you see is an oven and faucet. Gorman pulls the handle on one cabinet to reveal a refrigerator - an impressive party trick for sure.

A bar is attached to the center island, so guests can pull up a chair while you cook.

"It's a modern twist on the classic Tuscan kitchen - momma has a big kitchen, and people can pull up a seat and have a glass of wine and cheese," Gorman says. "People say the kitchen is the heart of the home. We put a lot of emphasis on that."

Granite or concrete still make for posh countertops, but some people are moving away from those materials. Gorman recommends CaesarStone, which is harder and more durable than granite and doesn't crack like concrete. It also provides a uniform color. The Galleries at Turney chose "blizzard white."

And with a beautiful countertop, you'll want to "undermount" the sink rather than drop it in on top of the CaesarStone or granite.

High-tech and low-tech features finish off a perfect kitchen. Look for faucets with motion sensors or touch response (an easy way to turn water on and off), hydraulic drawers

that snap shut and cabinets that close softly.

Bathrooms are another place to wow guests and homebuyers. While Europeans are sticking with traditional white and chrome colors, Americans are experimenting with artistic styles, Smith says.

To get the look you see in the Valley's newer restaurants, opt for a sink crafted by a local artist, beautiful enough to set right

on top of the counter rather than below it. Smith stocks dozens of them, ranging from hand-painted pottery and glasswork to bronze and marble basins.

Another option is to mount a more traditional sink to the wall - no base required. Faucets, handles and even the medicine cabinet can be recessed into the wall so that everything appears to float, Gorman suggests. He

says to look for the biggest mirrors you can find and run them all the way to the ceiling to create the illusion of space, and consider raising your vanity to a comfortable height in the master bath.

Toilets are the tech wonders of the bathroom and becoming more efficient. In the 1980s, bowls gobbled up 3.5 gallons of water per flush. Now the legal limit is 1.6. Some toilets are ahead of the curve, using just 1.28 gallons. Toto is finding ways to engineer a powerful flush with less water.

Don't forget the shower and bathtub. Freestanding tubs inspired by vintage styles (minus the claw feet) are popular, many with a second layer that swallows up overflowing water. At The Galleries at Turney, showers have a skylight, a "rain" showerhead and so much space no door is needed.

"The rain shower is a trend we're seeing," Gorman says. "We're trying to create a Zen-like spa here."

— Stephanie Paterik can be reached at [spaterik@citieswestpub.com](mailto:spaterik@citieswestpub.com).