



Cutting-edge designers dream up gadgets you never knew you needed.

Imagining a Better Kitchen

By Clive Thompson

More than any other room in the house, the kitchen is the place to find futuristic gadgets. In 1803, the inventor Moses Coates patented a newfangled device called an "apple parer" — the highest of high-tech back then. The blender came along in 1922, the Cuisinart in 1973; Philippe Starck introduced his famous U.F.O.-shaped juicer in 1990. So what's the next wave of kitchen tools? We've selected six concepts, dreamed up by some of the country's most innovative designers. They are by turns whimsical, technical and brilliant — and although none of these objects actually exist yet, in physical form, consider these designs as snapshots from a future kitchen.

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Kit Cart

in Sweden, Dale Worselich, Lucas McCann, Jeon Young Hu and Su Dong Cho.

Director of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago.

maximize space in tiny apartment kitchens, the designers went in the only direction possible: up. A high-tech rolling cart expands like a Swiss Army knife and is filled with swing-out units — some refrigerated, some heated — to hold ingredients and tools. Swing-out cutting boards and heating pads put everything in easy reach of the stove. The coup de grâce? The computer screen on top, which you can use to display from 4 videos while you cook.



Shape-Shifting Knife

Eric Chan, ECCO Design, New York

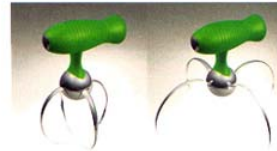
At first, Eric Chan's shape-shifting knife looks pretty normal. But use it for a few seconds and the handle eerily reshapes itself, molding to match your grip. Set it down for a few hours and it reverts back to its "neutral" shape. And that cutting board? Using the same materials, it will "self-heal" — filling in any nicks and cuts on its surface every time you wash it.

Chan figures his inventions are 5 to 10 years away from actual production, but the futuristic materials he plans to use are being tested in labs now.



Nutri-Terra Indoor Composter
Jula Sorzano, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, Calif.

Everyone loves the idea of composting. "But you're in a tiny New York apartment with the kitchen floors sealed to prevent odor. It's lower drawer where the compost comes out use it to nourish your houseplants." It also uses a mechanism that is powered — in a self-contained bit of environmental design heat of the decomposing matter.



Swirllet Ice Cream Scoop

Eliana Strauss, Pratt Institute School of Art and Design, Brooklyn

Eliana Strauss was always bothered by the way ice cream sticks to a normal metal scoop. In her redesign, you plunge the open scoop into the ice cream, close its pincers, twist it around like a corkscrew and pull it out. A thumb button releases the perfectly shaped ball of vanilla, chocolate or blackberry.

The Swirllet has a look straight out of a "Terminator" movie — and is possibly the first ice-cream-retrieval device you could use to hold up a corner store.



Qube Toaster

Christine Oh, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, Calif.

Christine Oh's toaster looks almost like a next-generation PlayStation. The hinged cradles make it easier to retrieve large toastable items like bagels — "stuff that usually gets stuck inside and forces you to reach in with a knife," Oh notes. When closed, the cradles seal tight to prevent dust from floating in and building up. Each cradle has a separate controller, so you can conserve energy when toasting only a single slice, and postage-stamp-size side windows let you see just how brown things are getting.

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