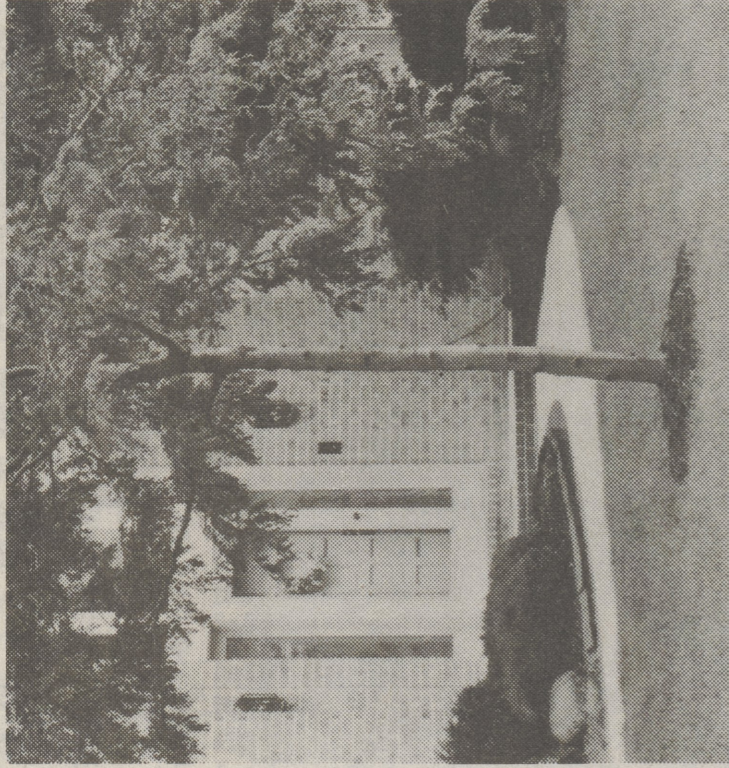


# Healthy trees add to home's value



Ask a Realtor, and you'll find that mature, healthy trees can add as much as 20 percent to the worth of a residential property. But even if a homeowner isn't planning to sell, there are good reasons to plant and maintain trees.

Aside from the obvious aesthetic value, mature trees provide shade during warm months, which helps keep a home cool naturally and drives down the cost of air conditioning. Likewise, trees provide a wind break during winter and help keep a home warm.

But trees usually grow so slowly that it can be many years before there is any effect on a home's value. There are steps, however, that can help young trees pick up the pace.

Be sure to provide routine maintenance, particularly in urban areas, where trees are often stressed. Compacted soil and air pollution can choke a tree, and an adequate water supply can be lost if surrounding grass and weeds prevent moisture from reaching the root system.

The experts say trees should be fertilized, either by the homeowner or a professional, to help ensure their health and vitality. It is important to properly identify a tree's needs and use proper methods and materials at appropriate times, says Brian Barnard of the National Arborist Association. The NAA, based in Amherst, N.H., is an association of professional tree care experts.

Barnard notes that lawn care and landscaping pros, including arborists, often take soil samples to determine what nutrients, if any, should be added to the soil. They then inject liquid or granular fertilizer into the soil near a tree's roots or even directly into the tree to get the most benefit for the tree.

Another way to improve a tree's vigor, Barnard says, is to create a ring of bare ground several feet in diameter around the bottom of the tree, then cover the ring with mulch. The ring eliminates much of the tree's competition from grass and weeds for water and nutrients.

## Making a ring at the base of the trunk helps a tree grow faster.

Scientific studies have shown that mulch rings can be as much as double the rate of tree growth over a period of years. But be careful creating the ring. Lawn mowers and string trimmers don't mix with trees, Barnard warns.

A whirling string or a bump from a lawn mower can tear open the bark, creating a path into the tree for insects and disease.

Many professionals remove the lawn around the trunk with a non-selective herbicide such as Roundup®, which is also available to homeowners, because of the product's effectiveness and favorable environmental characteristics. After the grass dies out, the bareground ring is covered with mulch or stones to help prevent the return of weeds and grass, to hold moisture in the ground, and to improve the appearance of the ring.

The pruning of mature trees is best left to professionals because falling out of the tree, being hit by falling limbs, and dropping limbs onto power lines are very real risks. The pros rely on experience and specialized equipment to minimize the danger.

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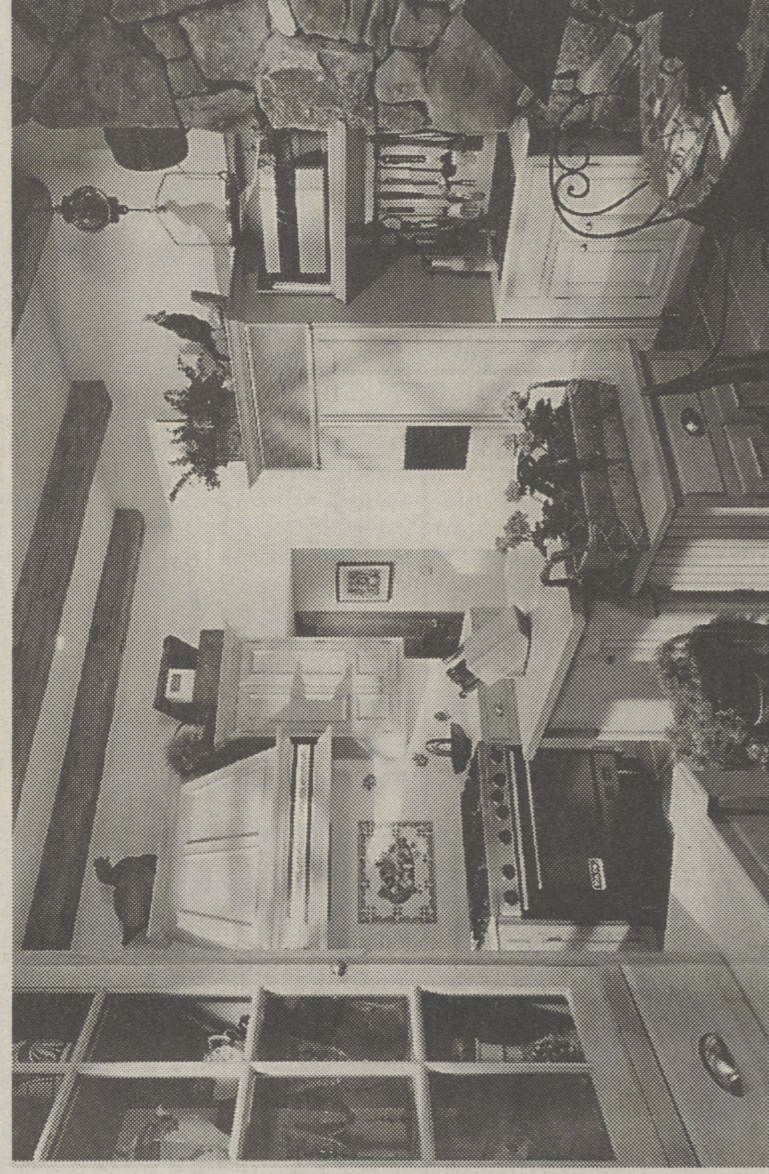
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# 'Country kitchen' is still a favorite, with variations



The country kitchen remains an American favorite, and that's true even when "home" happens to be a high-rise in cities like New York, Chicago or Seattle.

Noted designer George Rallis, who heads Rutt of New York, creates a great many country kitchens in Manhattan apartment buildings as well as in suburban colonials and ranches, and he isn't the slightest bit surprised that this style has proved to be so enduring.

"The fact is that this is much more than a style," he says. "It's a mood, an attitude... It permits us to indulge in charm and comfort, and in this day and age we need that more than ever. I think that the fact that today's two-career families, who have less and less time to spend at home, are in the forefront of the search for the cozy, warm kitchen says it all. Today the kitchen is the heart of the home, and they want that to be a place as far away from the office as possible."

Instead, today's country kitchens are sophisticated and international in scope. When people say "country" today, they're not talking about what we used to call "colonial." They mean kitchens reminiscent of Provence or Tuscany or Sussex or 18th century Virginia, only with a lot of all-American efficiency mixed in. And, above all, we're not talking about formula design here. Today's homeowners want highly individualistic spaces.

## Function And Aesthetics

According to Mark Bernard and Tom Pettigrew of Rutt's showrooms in Los Angeles and Seattle, respectively, function in today's country kitchens is as important as aesthetics.

"If it looks good, but doesn't work,

well as challenge to the designer. But, more importantly, it means incompatible convenience, comfort and enjoyment for the client."

## Choose Cabinetry First

Bernard and colleagues recommend that homeowners shopping for a new kitchen start with the cabinetry.

Since this is by far the most visible element of any kitchen, it establishes the look, they say. It can also account for 60% of the cost, so it's smart to learn as much as possible before making a choice.

If you like your country kitchen to look as if it were assembled over several generations, Rutt suggests one of its many styles that rival antique pieces brought home from auctions in far-flung fields. Often, several styles are combined in one kitchen, and for authenticity's sake, base cabinets may be painted deep green, dusky blue or barn red while wall cabinets are left in their natural wood color. Then, for good measure, the cabinetry may be distressed, glazed, antiqued and sanded in places where wear would have occurred over time. Altogether, it takes 13 steps to produce such finishes.

For a more elegant and formal country look, Rutt suggests cabinetry with the detailing of English, French or 18th-century American furniture styles. It is most elegant when crafted in cherry in natural or mahogany finishes.

The rest of the country look comes from floors of wood or rustic slabs of tile or stone, hand-crafted and/or hand-painted ceramic tile backslashes, stone or rustic plank counters, and well-chosen accessories. The latter may be an antique chandelier, folk art, or china pieces.

Charm and comfort are essential ingredients of a country kitchen, but kitchen designers emphasize function is as important as comfort. Custom cabinetry may look like authentic antiques, but also provide excellent storage and work surfaces. Ceramic tile behind the range and on the floor is practical as well as beautiful.

That fits our possessors, materials that are easy to care for, and style that pleases over the long haul.

Bernard adds that while the kitchen's perfect kitchen include a floor plan that eases our work load, appliances that work well for our way of life, cabinetry

enormously appealing to the eye.

"Even sinks, stoves and dishwashers have become good-looking," he says. "Never before has such a wealth of function and style been available, and that means enormous excitement as

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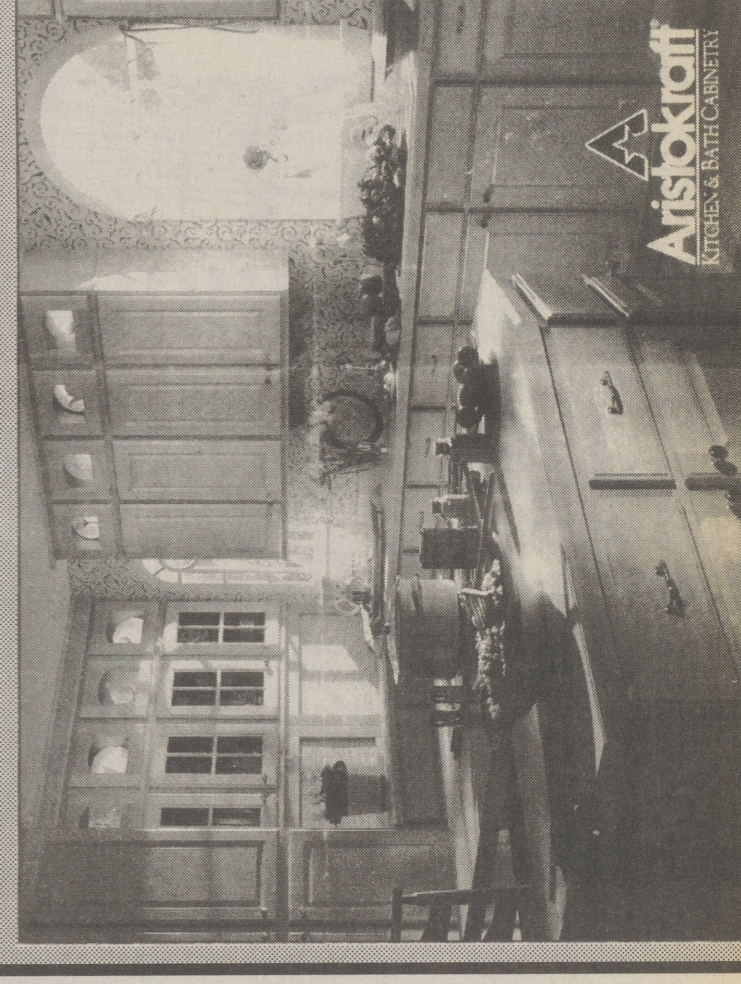
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