

How to Clarify the Appliance Muddle

by Patrick J. Galvin

Major appliances never have been much of a problem for home builders. There might be a standard package of basic range and refrigerator, there might be the option of adding dishwasher and disposal, there might be an upgrade option, or there might be no appliances at all.

But the builder who historically has paid little attention to appliances now has reason to rethink the whole issue.



One reason is the tremendous proliferation of models and features in recent years. The plain vanilla "white goods" of the past no longer may be good enough for today's more affluent, more sophisticated consumers.

Another reason is that the appliance industry has been moving into an era of power retailing that excludes knowledgeable salespeople. The growing battle cry among appliance retailers is "Move 'em in, write 'em up and move 'em out." One big-power retailer I know even refers to his sales floor as "the racetrack."

As a result, even sophisticated consumers have no expert to turn to and no way to interpret or evaluate all the new features on even basic models.

In the face of so great a knowledge void, it's a good idea for the builder to become the expert—and, as an expert, offer as op-

portunities lost money on builder sales—which is one reason so many appliance manufacturers have fallen victim to purchase or merger in recent years.

Here are some of the recent developments in appliances that builders should be aware of.

Mergers Foster 'Mix & Match' Options

First, the many mergers have changed the face of marketing. For example, Jenn-Air and Hardwick now are owned by Maytag, and any mix of these brands is available under a "Builders Choice" program.

Jenn-Air, the original range with down-draft ventilation, now also offers dishwashers, compactors and disposals as well as wall ovens, cooktops and microwaves. Interchangeable cartridges make available everything from conventional to magnetic-induction cooking on the same cooktop. This comes with its own upgrades, or it may be replaced with Hardwick.

And Maytag, historically the upgrade in laundry equipment, now also has disposals, dishwashers, electric and gas ranges and microwaves.

Hardwick remains a range manufacturer, but its scope has expanded to include gas or electric ranges, microwaves, built-ins and outdoor gas grills.

(For information on the Builders Choice Program, call 800/662-5656.)

While Builders Choice is the only such mix-and-match program announced to date, merger is the order of the day among appliance manufacturers, so others can be expected.

New Space-Savers

For builders involved in space-saving houses, there are space-saver appliances. One of the best of these, on the market for several years now, is the Modern Maid "Cook 'N Clean" center. It combines a gas or electric eye-level oven, cooktop and dishwasher, all in 30 inches of space.

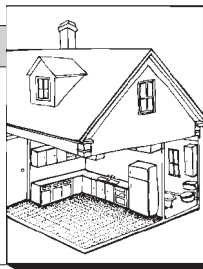
For a downgrade option, the dishwasher can be replaced with a 30-inch base cabinet, which in turn can be replaced with a dishwasher later. (The normal provision for later installation of a dishwasher is a 24-inch base cabinet next to or near the sink; this can be pulled later for the dishwasher. If the downgrade option is chosen, it is a good selling point to do the plumbing and electrical rough-in while the walls are bare.)

GE and Hotpoint also get double use out of 24 inches of space with a dishwasher that mounts under a sink. The sink is available from GE or Hotpoint or from others, but it must be specified for this use.

Stacked washers and dryers continue to proliferate, cutting space requirements in half, but some of these are undersized. Maytag's model has the dryer on top with a washer that pulls out a bit for better access, and both are full-sized.

Other space-savers are a 12-inch compactor and an 18-inch dishwasher by Thermador.

Thermador, however, is another way of spelling "upgrade." The only appliance company that always has remained loyal to the built-in concept, it is more suited to custom homes or high-end condo



Built-in Refrigerators

Builders also should be aware of the new built-in refrigerators by Admiral and Defiance.

Admiral refrigerators, made in Italy, are available in several small models. This means that a large unit might be eliminated in favor of two or more smaller units that may fit into a kitchen design more easily.

Defiance is U.S.-made and has a number of interesting features. For example, the side-by-side can be separated and installed separately, or only one side can be used in smaller spaces. Installed side-by-side, however, freezer-refrigerator space proportions can be varied by moving a separating shelf.

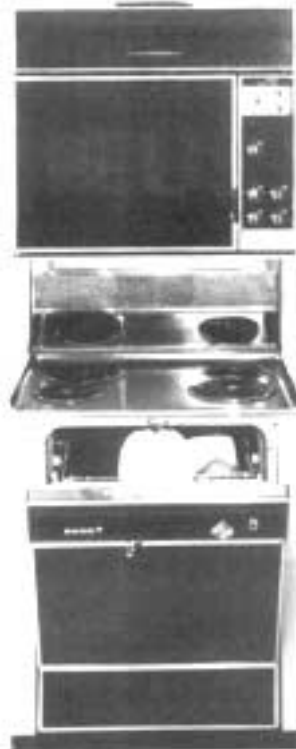
Some Final Thoughts

Spec-home builders may think there is no need to concern themselves with the upgrade options. But all of the space-savers can be important, even if they cost more, because saving a few inches can cut a lot of dollars from building costs (and vice versa).

For more expensive custom homes, the consumer needs some source of information on what's available. Changes in appliance controls are moving more and more to electronics—touch pads instead of push buttons or dials—and many new models know when to turn themselves on and off. They even can provide readouts to analyze their own malfunctions if anything goes wrong.

Appliance manufacturers, realizing that experts are diminishing in number, are moving more toward 800 phone lines to help consumers. At the local level, this can spell new opportunities for the home builder. ■

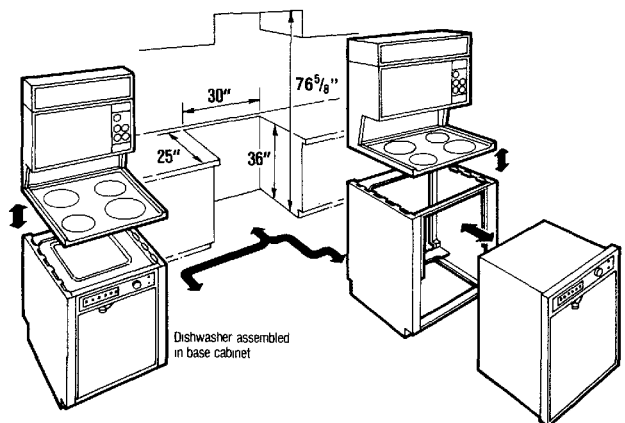
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developments.

Also at the high end of the scale are two West German names: AEG (marketed here by Andi-Co) and Gaggenau. Both now are available widely in the U.S. Their cooktops and ranges exude quality, but, as with foreign sinks, they should never be bought from a catalog; they should be seen before they are bought.

This is because there is a capacity question. For example, the AEG refrigerators look great and blend in well in kitchen design. But they are not as deep as our models, and their freezer space is extremely limited. Ovens might be too small as well.



The latest space-saving appliances, produced by several manufacturers, combine sinks and dishwashers (opposite page) and even ranges and dishwashers, allowing builders to make the most of limited kitchen space.

The new space-saver appliances are important, even if they cost more, because saving a few inches can cut a lot of dollars from building costs (and vice versa).

tions the many upgrades that can add considerably to profit.

This concept, of course, is diametrically opposed to the status quo. Appliances always have been available to builders on a lowest-price basis—lowereven than many distributors pay. Even the manufac-