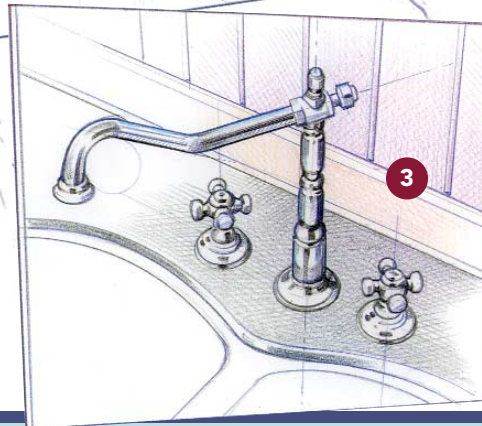
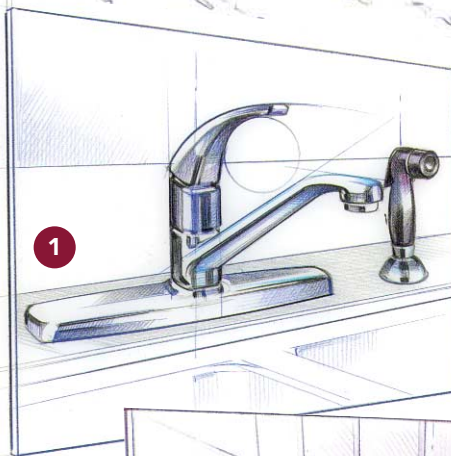
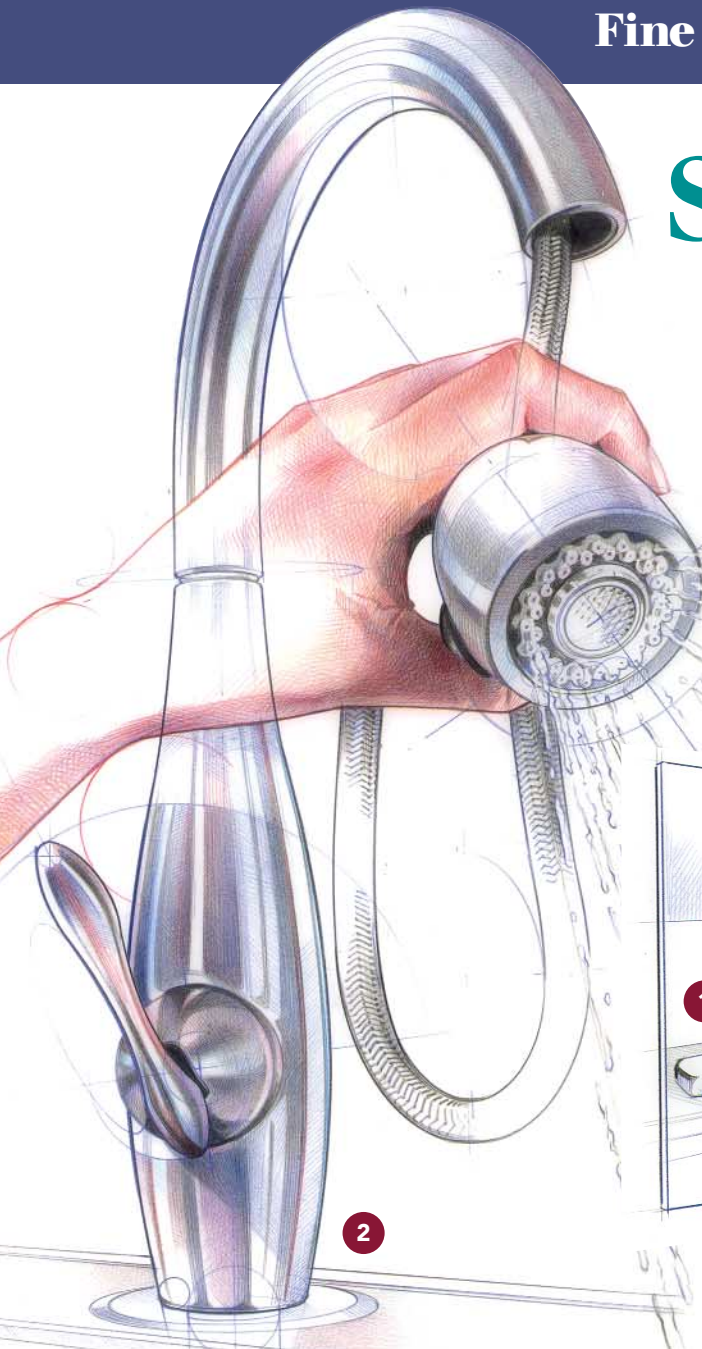


Shopping for Kitchen

We help you sort through the choices with reliability, style, and function in mind



A faucet family tree

In addition to being durable and easy to operate, the right faucet needs to suit your kitchen's style and be up to its tasks. Here's a list to help you match function with nomenclature.

1 Conventional
This is the basic, no-frills faucet. It has a single-lever control and may include a side spray. The faucet itself requires only one installation hole. The spout may or may not swivel.

2 Pullout and pulldown
Here, a hose and spray head emerge from the faucet spout, and the combination pulls out or down, increasing the faucet's reach. A button, lever, or toggle changes the water stream to a spray.

3 Two-handle
Before single-lever control faucets arrived 50 years ago, two-handle faucets were the only option. Now they are chosen for their traditional look. Handle choices can strengthen that message.

4 Bridge
A horizontal connector (bridge) joins hot- and cold-water sources, and the bridge is a prominent design feature above the countertop or deck. These faucets by definition are two-handle.

Faucets

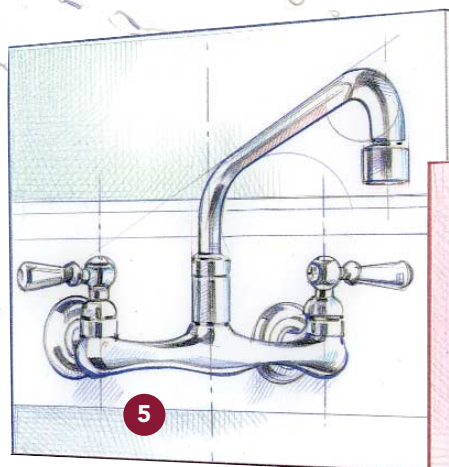
BY NENA DONOVAN LEVINE

Well before our kitchen faucet erupted in a sparkling geyser that soaked the ceiling and the nearby cabinets, we knew that something was going wrong with it. The coiled-metal sheath at the spray head was starting to show signs of uncoiling, and the fixture had been leaking from somewhere for a while (mostly into a pot that we had placed under the sink). But the kitchen faucet wasn't broke enough to fix

yet, or so we thought until the spray head parted with its hose.

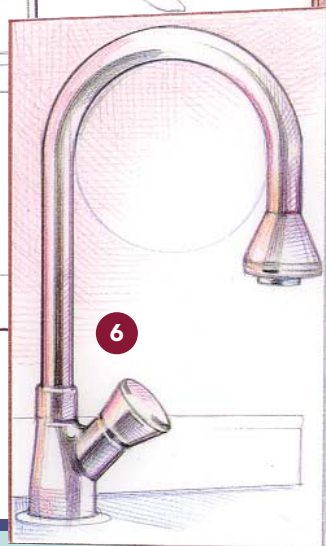
That's the first lesson of faucet-failure avoidance: Fix it while it's still an inconvenient drip. The second lesson is that given the constant demands on this indispensable fixture, it makes sense to budget accordingly and to choose a high-quality faucet.

Like every other component in a contemporary kitchen, faucets have evolved (sidebar below). They now have



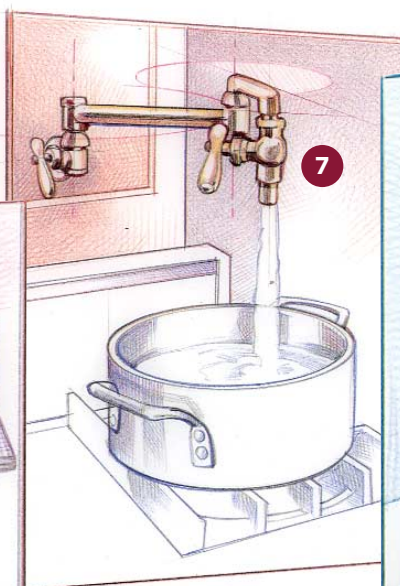
5 Wall-mounted

Unlike typical deck-mounted faucets, wall-mounted faucets and their controls protrude from the wall above the sink. This sensible location makes for a sleek look and a countertop that's easier to clean.



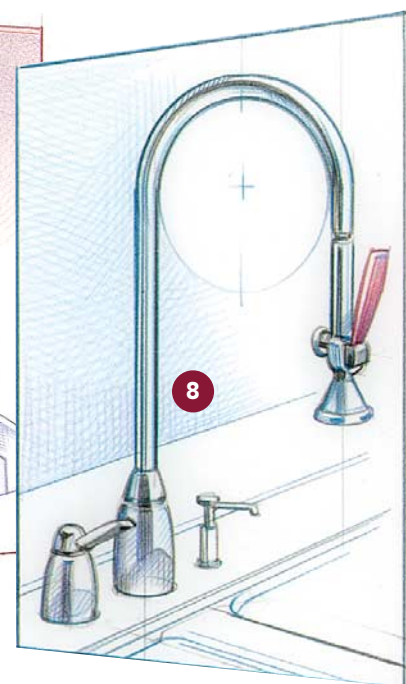
6 Gooseneck

Also called a high-arc faucet, these deck-mounted faucets feature a tall, arching spout that provides generous clearance underneath, which simplifies pot and vase filling. The spout usually swivels.



7 Pot filler

These typically are wall-mounted, jointed faucets sited behind the range so that pots can be filled right on the range. Now, however, there are deck-mounted models, which are great for kitchen islands.



8 Pro style

These overscale pulldown faucets bring a restaurant look into a residence. They boast a long hose or an elongated gooseneck (up to 30 in. tall) and a spray head that offers choices of spray strengths.

THE INSIDE STORY

Two faucets may look nearly identical on the surface, but inside, their construction details reveal important differences. The most up-to-date faucets use ceramic-disk cartridges to control the flow of water. With brass faucets, cast spouts set the standard.



Ceramic disks in open position



Ceramic disks in closed position

Ceramic disks don't drip. State-of-the-art faucet cartridges contain a pair of polished ceramic disks pressed tightly together. Turning the faucet handle aligns the holes in the disks, allowing water to flow through them.

Cast-brass versus tubular-brass spouts. Brass is an excellent material for faucets, but be aware that cast-brass spouts have much thicker walls than those made of tubular brass. That makes them more durable and lends a weighty sense of quality.



Tubular-brass spout

Cast-brass spout

more shapes, styles, finishes, and functions than ever. So before you make a choice, familiarize yourself with the types of faucets on the market.

The most reliable faucets have ceramic innards

Beneath their metallic skins, most types of modern kitchen faucets contain a plastic cartridge housing a pair of ceramic disks that regulate water flow (photos left). Each disk has holes in it. Turning the faucet's handle slides the disks over one another. When the holes line up, water flows through the cartridge and the faucet. Turning the faucet off moves the holes out of alignment, halting the flow.

Ceramic disks are second only to diamonds in hardness, which is why they are ideal for this job. If there is any grit or debris in the water, the disks grind it up and remain unscathed. Gritty water can damage other types of valves.

The disks are fired at over 2000°F; therefore, the hottest tap water cannot damage them. The disk faces are so highly polished that they stick to each other as if magnetized. The higher the polish, the smoother they glide, and the smoother the faucet handle operates. Smooth operation increases minute control over volume and temperature and requires less user effort. There are other types of valves that regulate water flow in faucets, but ceramic-disk technology is state of the art.

Buying a faucet with a first-rate cartridge doesn't mean that you have to squander the budget. Basic models like American Standard's Reliant Plus series (photo facing page) sell for around \$80 to \$120, depending on the spray attachment.

Look for brass or stainless steel

Top-quality faucets possess both inner and outer beauty. The best ones are made of either solid brass or stainless steel. Both of these metals can stand up to high pressure, high temperatures, and potentially corrosive minerals in the water supply.

In the world of brass faucets, be sure to shop for one that is made of cast, not tubular, brass. Cast-brass faucets are thicker and longer-lasting than their tubular cousins (photos left).

Because it will tarnish, brass usually is plated with another material, typically chrome. Chances are good that the shiny silver faucet reflecting your gaze is brass under its skin.

Stainless steel, on the other hand, needs no additional finish. But stainless steel is more difficult to work than brass and is also a lot more expensive. Stunning examples include a high-arc bridge faucet from Hornbeam Ivy that retails for about \$1,000 (photo p. 55). If you

prefer a more contemporary look, Hansgrohe manufactures a single-control Axor Steel line (photo right).

Chrome still shines as the most popular kitchen-faucet finish, with brushed (satin) nickel, satin (matte) chrome, and stainless vying for second place. Oil-rubbed bronze, weathered copper, and brass trail the front runners but are gaining (sidebar below).

If a metallic finish doesn't suit your fancy, manufacturers offer powder-coated faucets, typically in black or white. This finish isn't as durable as PVD (sidebar below), but these faucets still are backed by limited lifetime warranties. They cost about 10% more than chrome.

One hand or two?

Single-control faucets comprise at least 80% of all kitchen faucets sold every year. The ability to control water temperature and volume simultaneously with one hand is an ergonomic benefit and a strong selling point.

Buyers choose two-handle controls for aesthetic reasons. Faucets such as Danze's Opulence and Chicago's bridge-style model (photos p. 54) are decidedly more "period" than most single-control options. If you choose the two-handle variety, look for quarter-turn ceramic-disk technology. It regulates water from off to full on with a quarter turn of the handle.

More single-control models are reaching the market with traditional or so-called transitional styling: Vinnata



Hansgrohe's Axor Steel kitchen faucet, shown here in the 14-in.-tall model, features solid stainless-steel construction and a pullout spray head. Street price: \$430.



American Standard's Reliant Plus, shown here in chrome finish, offers ceramic-disk reliability at a reasonable cost. Street price (without pullout spray): \$80.

THE OUTSIDE STORY

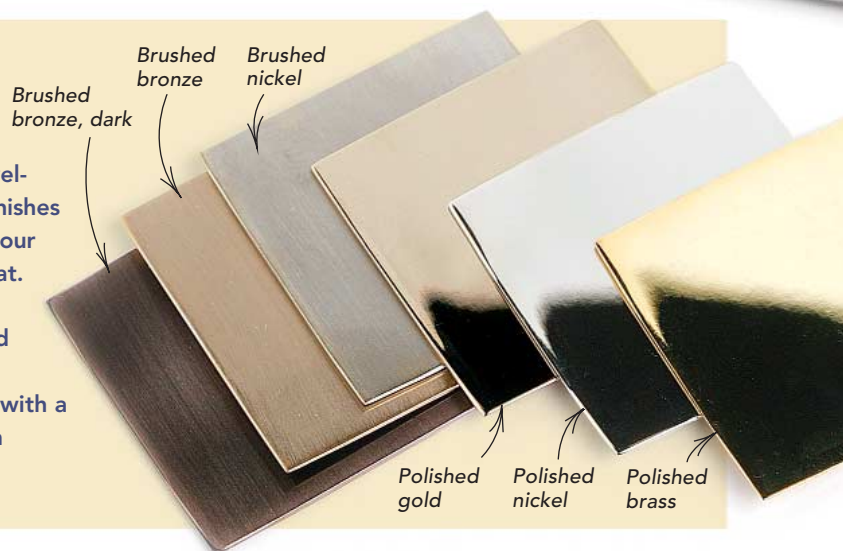
Brass will tarnish if left unprotected, so manufacturers rely on chrome-plating to give a brass faucet a durable, attractive finish. The beauty of a stainless-steel faucet, on the other hand, is more than skin deep: It runs all the way through.

PVD finishes

SPACE-AGE PROCESS LANDS AT HOME

PVD stands for "physical vapor deposition," a process NASA developed for protecting metal. The process is used to apply metallic finishes over chromed brass. The "satin nickel" or "polished brass" finish your faucet wears is deposited on, and bonded to, the chrome undercoat.

Differences in the alloys in the vapors deposited on the faucets yield different-color finishes. PVD prevents corrosion, tarnish, and scratches more effectively than the acrylic-coating process it replaces. By the way, manufacturers don't apply PVD to a faucet with a "living" finish, or one meant to weather. And you won't find it on chrome, which provides its own tarnish protection.





Transitional style. Single-lever faucets harken back to the old pump-handle look and stake out the design terrain between traditional and contemporary. On the left, Vinnata by Kohler in brushed bronze. Street price: \$425. Below, Rohl's A3408 Country Faucet in Tuscan brass. Street price: \$370.



Old-time style. The two-handle look is alive and well in contemporary faucets. The best ones have quarter-turn ceramic-disk technology. Above, Chicago's brushed-nickel, deck-mounted bridge faucet. Street price: \$400. On the right, Danze's Opulence in antique copper. Street price: \$360.



by Kohler and Rohl's Country Faucet line are examples (photos top left).

To spray or not to spray?

Increasingly, single-control faucets feature integral spray heads (photos facing page). These pullout components provide clear convenience for rinsing produce in a colander, washing dishes, swishing out the sink, and filling a tall pot or vase. Separate side sprays suffice, but they are lightweights and not as user-friendly. The side-spray location at counter height, offset to one side, is less convenient, and the hoses are more likely to twist and tangle.

The pullout hose for these faucet spray heads requires sturdy construction. Unlike ceramic disks gliding within a controlled environment, the hose is subject to greater forces, erratic jerks, and tugs. The best hoses are either nylon or plastic, protected by an outer sheath of woven stainless steel. The woven steel provides stability with its weight and is less likely to kink than unsheathed plastic. Some manufacturers take this a step farther, coating the stainless sheath with plastic, thereby making it quieter.

Most pullout spray heads are made of plastic and are finished to match the rest of the faucet. This choice is deliberate, not a cheap ruse. A plastic spray head is not per se a poor-quality component. American Standard, for example, chooses plastic because it doesn't heat up and, if dropped, won't damage the sink.

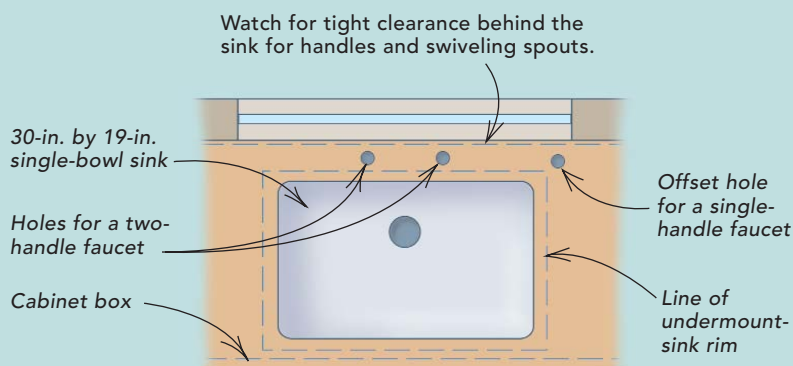
Hansgrohe's high-arc Swing spray head has two rings of sprayer holes that provide two spray experiences: full and needle spray (photos facing page). It uses a silicone nozzle that resists lime-scale buildup. Just give the nozzle the occasional rub, and any lime scale breaks away from the flexible ports.

Try before you buy

If faucet construction can be vetted at a Web site, why not buy a faucet that way? Because

CHECKLIST FOR A PERFECT FAUCET FIT

Whether you're installing a new faucet in an old sink or in one that is newly purchased, planning will help you to avoid a mistake.



1. For an undermount sink, position the faucet holes so that they clear the hidden sink-rim edge.
2. For a top-mounted sink, match the faucet and accessories to the number of predrilled holes in the sink rim. Check the hole spacing carefully if you want a two-handle faucet. If you need to cover extra holes, choose a faucet that offers a baseplate.
3. Consider clearances behind the sink. Do the

faucet controls need room at the back for the arc of the control lever or for lever handles? Does the spout location pose any problem? I offset my new single-control faucet to the right corner of my sink to eliminate interference with casement-window hardware.

4. Extrathick countertop? Hefty counters, such as those made of thick stone, wood, or concrete, can present a problem for deck-mounted faucets if the

you should handle it prior to purchase. When I study new faucets at the annual Kitchen & Bath Industry Show (www.kbis.com), I find models that I don't want to pick up and others that I don't want to put down. Typical drawbacks: faucets that feel too light and flimsy; faucets that are unbalanced, with the spray-head end too heavy; faucets that are clumsy, with an unfriendly handle shape or spray activation; and faucets with balky hose pullout or retraction.

Pro-style faucets, some soaring 30 in. out of the counter, are becoming more and more popular, continuing the march of commercial-kitchen style and function into residential settings. I find this faucet design a real challenge to use. Unlike the pullout spray heads, pro-style faucets have lever grips that require a thumb-up grasp. The difference is enough to warrant testing.

Once you find a faucet that fulfills all your functional and aesthetic requirements, there's one last item on the checklist (sidebar facing page): Will it fit?

Faucets that filter your drinking water

Faucet manufacturers have noticed that we're obsessed with pure drinking water. To slake that obsession, some faucets now are equipped with filters that remove lead, grit, and even smells such as chlorine. The finest filters screen out ominous, multisyllabic entities, including cryptosporidium, giardia, lindane, and mercury. But they leave the fluoride in.

Faucet filters have either a filter cartridge inside the faucet or an undersink unit. For example, American Standard's ClearTap has a filter cartridge that either

mounting system doesn't have enough reach. Make sure the shank length will accommodate the counter thickness.

5. Make sure you've got reach. Does the faucet spout swivel in a wide-enough arc to reach all the sink bowls? Two-handle faucets, including bridge-style faucets, may not work with some double-bowl sinks.



SPRAY HEADS OFFER GREATER REACH

Many modern faucets take the old side-spray attachment one step farther by turning it into a retractable nozzle that nests in the spout.

Some spray heads pull out. Delta's Saxony has a pullout wand with a broad, oblong spray head. Street price (for bronze model shown here): \$235.



Others pull down. Franke's Mythos faucet has a pull-down spray head and a tall goose-neck spout. Street price (for brushed-nickel model shown here): \$480.



Yet another pulls off. Hornbeam Ivy's patented design features a spray head that nests in the open groove of its stainless-steel goose-neck spout. Street price (for one-hole mixer model shown here): \$1,000.



Two-stage spray. Hansgrohe's faucets feature two spray patterns. One is a tight cone of water, the other a dispersed column of smaller droplets. Lime deposits can be removed by simply rubbing a finger across the flexible nozzles.

PURE DRINKING WATER

If you've got water of dubious quality, consider a faucet with a filter. Some are dedicated to the task; others let you switch between filtered and unfiltered.



Moen's AquaSuite, shown here in chrome with a tall spout, is a dedicated filtering faucet—cold water only. Its filter is mounted in the cabinet under the sink. Street price: \$190.

American Standard's Clear Tap is a standard kitchen faucet that also can deliver filtered cold water. A digital readout tells when to replace the filter, which resides under the cap to the right of the spout. Street price: \$250.



drops into the faucet baseplate (photo below) or snaps into a bracket under the sink. Another approach is Moen's AquaSuite, which is a dedicated, cold-water filtration faucet (photo left).

By the way, only the cold-water line should be filtered. Hot water passing through the filter cartridge flushes captured materials back into the water stream.

Pot fillers and pedal controls

Chicago Faucets originated the pot filler 50 years ago for commercial and restaurant kitchens. Now these handy faucets have flooded the market. Their residential model (photo bottom right, facing page) has three desirable features: It is double-jointed and can be pushed back against the wall or extended to 18 in.; it has two controls, at the spout and at the wall; and control levers are either heat-resistant plastic or porcelain.

Many other companies, including Franke and Hornbeam Ivy, offer wall-mounted pot fillers. For the ultimate in flexibility, T&S Brass Pot & Kettle offers a wall-mounted, 5-ft. stainless hose (photo left, facing page).

Pot fillers also are available in deck-mounted versions, which are great for use in island cooktops. Because it's not necessary to tear out a wall to plumb them, deck-mounted pot fillers also are retrofitted more easily.

Foot-pedal faucet control is another commercial-kitchen innovation turning up in the home.

KITCHEN-FAUCET SOURCES

American Standard;
800-442-1902;
www.americanstandard-us.com

Aquadis International; 800-936-9966; www.aquadis.com

Blanco; 800-451-5782;
www.blancoamerica.com

The Chicago Faucets Co.;
847-803-5000;
www.chicagofaucets.com

Danze; 877-530-3344;
www.danze-online.com

Delta Faucet Co.; 317-848-1812; www.deltafaucet.com

Dornbracht; 800-774-1181;
www.dornbracht.com

Elkay Manufacturing Co.; 630-574-8484; www.elkayusa.com

Franke Consumer Products Inc.; 800-626-5771;
www.frankeksd.com

Grohe America Inc.; 800-201-3407; www.groheamerica.com

Hamat; 866-524-2628;
www.hamatusa.com

Hansgrohe; 800-488-8119;
www.hansgrohe-usa.com

Hornbeam Ivy; 972-248-9890;
www.hollysofbath.com

Kohler; 800-456-4537;
www.kohler.com

KWC Faucets Inc.; 888-592-3287; www.kwcfaucets.com

Moen Inc.; 800-289-6636;
www.moen.com

Pedal Valves Inc.; 800-431-3668; www.pedalvalve.com

Rohl Inc.; 800-777-9762;
www.rohlhome.com

T&S Brass Pot & Kettle; 800-476-4103 (East Coast); 800-423-0150 (West Coast);
www.tsbrass.com

Whitehaus Collection;
800-527-6690;
www.whitehauscollection.com

You don't have to buy a commercial faucet to get the benefit of this arrangement, though. A retrofit kit from Pedal Valves works with any kitchen faucet (top photo, right). When your hands are covered in chicken goo, you don't have to slime the faucet handle to get water; just step on the pedal. And in areas where water shortages are an issue, a pedal-operated faucet provides tight control over the water flow while your hands are otherwise occupied.

A word about warranties

A lifetime limited warranty against any leak or drip is typical, even standard, for kitchen faucets. The manufacturer or retailer will supply a new disk cartridge, hose, or other part. Labor charges to install or repair are never covered by a warranty. But if you're competent with a screwdriver, you won't have any trouble replacing these parts.

The lifetime limited warranty also may cover the fixture's finish. For example, PVD finishes such as Delta's Brilliance and Kohler's Vibrant last so long that they can be backed with confidence by the manufacturer. Given the product choices that are completely covered, there is no reason to purchase a kitchen faucet that doesn't have a comprehensive warranty.

Quality points: Don't come home without them

- Solid-brass or stainless-steel faucet body.
- Ceramic-disk cartridge system for longevity and flow control.
- Spray hose made of nylon/plastic with stainless-steel sheath.
- Satisfying feel, weight, and balance (for pullout spray).
- PVD finish (except on chrome).
- Lifetime limited warranty. □

Nena Donovan Levine is a kitchen designer in West Hartford, Conn. Photos by Scott Phillips, except where noted.

PRO GEAR COMES HOME

If it makes life easier in a commercial kitchen, sooner or later, innovations such as pedal-operated faucets and pot fillers will make it into the house.



To turn it on and off, just step on it. Both new and existing faucets can be converted to foot control with a kit from Pedal Valves. Street price: \$289.



Double-jointed pot fillers. Need to augment the noodle water? A wall-mounted pot filler over the stove lets you fill the pot without heavy lifting. This is Chicago Faucets' classic model. Street price: \$175. Deck-mounted versions for island installations also are available.

No-jointed pot fillers. For maximum reach, a 5-ft. stainless-steel hose from T&S Brass Pot & Kettle hangs at the ready. Street price: \$250.