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REAL ESTATE | DESIGN

Glass-Door Fridges: Why Design Pros Love (and Hate) Them

Are refrigerators with see-through doors inviting and homey or the kitchen equivalent of leaving your garage door open? We asked interior designers to weigh in



A LACK OF CLOSURE Glass-door refrigerators—like this au courant example in a New York kitchen designed by architect Martin Sosa—reveal both your diet and your styling skills when it comes to Tupperware and pickle jars.

PHOTO: LESLEY UNRUH

LOVE

IN THE STEADY march to emulate pro-chef kitchens—see Viking stoves and magnetic-strip knife holders—glass-door fridges seem to be the latest footfall. “They engage the senses and show the owner truly loves food, cooking and entertaining,” said Chicago decorator Andrea Goldman of the peek-a-boo appliance. “I find them inviting.”

“They have a magnetic appeal,” agreed Andrew Shead, marketing manager at True Residential, an appliance manufacturer based in St. Louis, Mo. Its 30-inch glass-door column refrigerator, launched in 2017, now accounts for 58% of the brand’s sales. Kitchen designers note that the interior glow from such fridges brightens a dark space and, much like a window, visually expands a room’s footprint. Eco-conscious advocates argue that people who buy into the trend can save energy by taking grocery inventory without opening the door.

In the West Village home of cooking-school founder Alison Cayne, Los Angeles architect Martin Sosa punctuated the open concept space with a Sub-Zero glass-paneled refrigerator. Ms. Cayne, who regularly stocks the fridge for her five teenagers, relishes how it breaks up visual monotony. “It softens the otherwise monochromatic room with color and texture,” she said. “It’s the sweet spot where utility meets homey.”

HATE

“TRUST ME,” no one wants to see your half-eaten box of pizza rolls,” said bicoastal interior designer Kevin Isbell, summing up the main objection to glass-front refrigerators. We welcome transparency in political fundraising, but when it comes to fridge doors, solidity is salutary.

Ubiquitous in 1980s New York lofts, where commercial refrigerators fed a postmodern industrial aesthetic, clear panels lost favor around 2000, and many designers bemoan their return. “The neurotic part of me would want to buy only the best brands with the most interesting containers,” said Chicago designer Donna Mondì, who fears ugly packaging would mar a handsome décor. “You’d never find a French’s Mustard in mine.”

“They will hold you accountable,” warned Newton, Mass., interior designer Liz Caan of diet-displaying clear doors, conceding that they might make you a more thoughtful consumer.

Beyond revealing poor organizational strategies, glass shows every smudge and requires more upkeep than stainless steel, said the design pros. Add the loss of door storage and it’s hard to justify the often-five-figure price tag—especially if you have kids. Noted Jeffrey Weisman, of San Francisco’s Fisher Weisman: “Heavens help the zealous child who messes up the *mise en place* when reaching for the peanut butter.”