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First Impressions Decor



# Planning for successful kitchen designs

Successful kitchen design plans begin with a careful review of the real needs and desires of the actual users. New residential home purchasers are faced with a multitude of options. This is probably the room that new home purchasers agonize over the most.

To ease the pain, it's important to develop answers to questions like: What kinds of meals are prepared? How many people will usually be served? How many people will normally work in the space? Will meals be served in the kitchen? Is the kitchen to be an isolated work centre or a room accessible to family and guests and totally open to dining or living areas? What appliances are desired? Finally—and most importantly—will the choices be budget-minded or no-holds-barred?

While most residential builders offer well-designed kitchen areas, they will allow their purchasers to reconfigure this area, within limits. Secondary functions for a kitchen may call for new



features, including informal dining areas or office-like work areas within the space. In addition to all the practical reasons to design this space, there is the desire to make the kitchen visually attractive, well-lit and inviting with personal touches.

With all of this data in hand, it's necessary to determine the amount of space needed; then go on to the general plan layout and the selection of appliances; and finally proceed to the detailed design of counters and cabinets, choices of finishes, colours and other details. All plan layouts, from the simplest to the most elaborate, will feature three primary work centres, each related to one of the basic pieces of kitchen equipment: receiving and storage (refrigerator); food preparation; and cooking.

## Addressing Space Needs

Ideally, kitchen planning places the three centres in sequence, starting with receiving and storage, proceeding to preparation and ending with cooking and serving. This leads to a typical layout with refrigerator, sink, and range in that order, spaced out with work counters and storage between the major appliances.

The most favoured arrangements are:

- 1) **"Straight Line,"** in which the three centres are lined up in order;
- 2) **"L-Shape,"** in which the centres are in the same sequence as in the Straight Line, but are bent around a corner to fit the space available and to reduce paths of work movement. The plan places two of the centres in a line, with the third at a right angle; and
- 3) **"U-Plan,"** in which the three centres make up the three sides of the layout, is probably the most popular and most often recommended.

An island may be added to an L-shaped or U-shaped plan to make either the range or the sink accessible from several directions.

After selecting the basic plan layout that suits your needs, it is time to move on to the detailed planning of work surfaces, storage, and equipment



The most favoured kitchen layouts are "Straight Line" (left), "L-Shape" (right) and "U-Plan," the latter of which is probably the most popular and most often recommended. An island may be added to an L-shaped or U-shaped plan to make either the range or the sink accessible from several directions (right).

selection and placement. This phase of the design involves the following choices: cooking appliance, refrigerator type, sink type and material, storage provision, counter surface, floor materials, wall surfaces, lighting and ceiling materials and miscellaneous items. This is the stage where your budget is the key factor in determining your selections. The most exciting kitchens are a dynamic blend of classic and personal styles. In fact, a more practical and straightforward design will hold up better, both in use and in attractiveness, in the long run. This approach neither eliminates function nor genuine beauty.

## What the trends are

A new chapter in interior design began in the last decade, most specifically a return to the natural elements in kitchen design. A recent Kitchen and Bath Association's Design Trends Survey notes that:

- 1) Although melamine, thermofoil and lacquer are still popular choices, light woods, such as maple, were specified for close to half of kitchen projects. Concealed hinges on doors do not disturb the beauty of the doors and are now an industry standard. Light woods have a mellow grain and offer furniture quality and more flexibility in finishes for door style, custom colour stain and decorative architectural details such as fluted cabinet trim and "grill work". Many styles are frameless so doors and drawers fit flush; no cabinet frame is visible. The cabinetry blends beautifully with contemporary patterns and colours in wall-covering, flooring and window treatments.
- 2) Hardwood flooring is increasing in popularity as a natural element, and makes the kitchen feel like it's part of the rest of the house.
- 3) The survey also indicates an increase in the placement of sinks into a corner to expand design possibilities for small kitchens. Stainless steel sinks



with ledges and spillways are still in demand, but there has been an increase in high-end purchases of sterile quartz sinks which offer durability, heat, stain and scratch resistance and are available in different colours. Although faucets with pull-out sprays are at the high end of the price range, these have also been a popular choice.

- 4) More than half of kitchens are being specified with an additional "island work" surface with a second sink. The island expands counter space, increases storage capacity and provides an area for casual dining.
- 5) Arborite countertops, because of their cost-effectiveness and the wide selection of colours and finishes, are still the most popular.
- 6) Along with the ever-popular ceramic tile, natural stones such as granite and limestone are increasingly being selected for surfaces such as countertops and back-splashes, as they withstands a lot of wear and tear while maintaining their beauty.
- 7) Solid surface material for countertops, although expensive, is also growing in popularity because of its resistance to stains and burns.
- 8) Different metal finishes in various styles for cabinet pulls and knobs have also grown in popularity—for example, brushed pewter pulls in cutlery or vegetable shapes.
- 9) Finally, within the last few years, there has been a significant increase in consumer purchases of commercial-style and built-in appliances for residential use.

## Storage

A successful kitchen design incorporates several storage areas such as:

- Pull-out trays which store cleaning supplies, non-refrigerated foods, and linens.
- Rotating corner cabinet trays, which bring to full view collections of pots and pans stored below the counter.



Hardwood flooring (left) is increasing in popularity as a natural element; it helps to make the kitchen feel like part of the rest of the house. An effective lighting plan combines general lighting with task lighting (right) such as directional lighting or recessed lighting and under-cabinet fixtures.



- Pull-out appliance drawers with full extension slides for proper support and swing-up shelves, which are ideal ways to store less frequently used small appliances and free up valuable counter space.
- Pull-out pantries with multi-level plastic coated metal storage baskets hung on hooks, which provide flexible storage and fit neatly into a corner.
- The spice pantry, which is an example of sizing the storage space to the containers stored.
- Deep drawers for bread storage, wine racks and wine coolers, roll-out serving carts and roll-out tables, which are being incorporated into designs as practical uses of space.
- Roll-out trash bins, concealed within drawers that match the cabinetry.
- Microwave ovens that are built into cabinets.
- Open cabinetry, which allow easy accessibility to dinnerware, glassware, etc.
- Cabinet doors in the kitchen designed to resemble china cabinets with leaded glass inserts, which have increased in popularity as display areas as well as storage for china.

## Lighting

An effective lighting plan combines general lighting with task lighting, such as directional lighting or recessed lighting and under-cabinet fixtures. Natural lighting is also an important part of any kitchen plan. Skylights and openings high in the wall such as greenhouse windows are superior sources of natural light. Decorative accent lighting such as lighted glass-front cabinetry is growing in popularity.

## Meeting your needs and budget

Whatever your choice in finishes, whether or not you are on a limited budget, your ultimate goal is to have a kitchen that is practical and functional as well as attractive. High-end budgets may include every storage area possible; granite or solid-surface coun-

ters and back-splashes; solid wood cabinetry; and all of the top-of-the-line appliances, sinks, faucets, pulls and knobs mentioned.

If your budget is limited, anticipate your needs at the planning stage and choose only those finishes that are most practical for your purposes, and that express your personal style. Simplify the process of selecting materials by selecting one or two basics at a time.

Tackle counters and cabinets first. Wood or laminate are the two basic cabinet choices. Define your need for details such as door style, finish or colour, trim and storage components. Next make your choice in flooring.

These suggestions will minimize costs:

- Select storage spaces that are absolute musts for your needs.
- Instead of granite or solid surface material for the entire counter area, limit it to the island or back-splash only and use ceramic tile and Arborite on the remaining areas.
- Instead of hardwood floors, select ceramic to cover the kitchen floor area. There are many available that imitate the look of real granite or marble.
- One area that you should definitely not skimp on is lighting. Working at the sink, cooktop or counter requires effective lighting.

As for colour scheming, cabinet and counter colours dominate a kitchen, but there are no hard-and-fast rules about which colour goes where. Keep in mind that a strong colour scheme gives a kitchen character and unifies the design. For a little visual impact, use bold accent colours on neutral schemes; these will prevent neutrals from becoming too subdued.