

Inside *Design*

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PLANNING THE IDEAL KITCHEN LAYOUT

Redesigning and renovating a kitchen is the most trying home improvement project for most homeowners. Aside from having to survive a minimum of two weeks with no kitchen, each decision to be made can affect both the function and aesthetics of the room. Added to that is the fact that the kitchen is the most expensive renovation most homes will ever face, so doing it right the first time is a definite must.

We all use our kitchens differently and that is why we can often see a beautiful kitchen and think to ourselves, without knowing exactly why, that it isn't quite right. Your ideal kitchen should consider:

- Your shopping habits – Do you buy in bulk or only purchase things as you need them?
- Your cooking habits – Do you routinely prepare home-made meals or are frozen foods and reheated take-out more your style? Are you an avid baker?



- Your handedness and height – Are you a lefty or a righty? Are you considerably taller than, or shorter than, the average?
- Your household – How many cooks use the kitchen? Are there teens or children who prepare their own snacks?
- Your space – Is the kitchen used for eating meals or is all eating done in the dining room? Does the kitchen double as a homework area or for any other task?
- Special needs – Should your kitchen be child-safe or suitable for someone with physical limitations or disabilities? Do you require a kosher kitchen?

The first step in kitchen planning is to determine where your major appliances will be located. From there, you can determine if an extra-wide refrigerator is possible, or if you will have space for the wine fridge you have been wanting. If an island is a desired feature, make sure you will have at least 36-inches between it and the cabinets. All islands must be carefully planned as they can be either a wonderful amenity or little more than a cause of bruised hips and frustrations.

Try to map out where you will store things, keeping everyday dishes and gadgets within arm's reach, and banishing the least frequently used items to the least desirable locations – usually the back of the cabinet above the refrigerator. By determining what will go where, you can determine early on if you can make do with four drawers or if eight drawers would better suit your needs. Consider items like cookbooks, countertop appliances that won't always reside in open view, and the basics that seem to migrate into every kitchen even though no one plans for them to be there.

The microwave should be located where it will be most practical, so be honest with yourself (and your designer) about how you use it. Is it just for heating coffee or do you often use it for food preparation? The same advice should be followed for other small appliances that remain visible too.

Lighting in the kitchen is something too often overlooked. People presume that enough lighting equates good lighting, but the truth is that every fixture style and every bulb type gives a slightly different coloration to the light; a pink undertone from the lighting can cause meats to look undercooked and greens to look a bit on the brown side. Likewise, light with a yellow or blue undertone will cause certain foods to not look their best. The kitchen serves many functions, and each requires its own lighting: task lighting should be installed to serve the food preparation area and the sink; general light should provide even illumination to the whole kitchen; and ambient light allows you to highlight decorative objects, or just offers a nice soft glow so the room is not in total darkness. The ability to control the lighting is important, as all the lights are rarely needed at the same time; multiple switches and dimmers are recommended.

Once you have the functional elements of your kitchen planned properly, any décor style that you introduce will be able to be implemented simply with your choices of colours, materials, and accessories. Because the kitchen is a busy space to begin with, minimal décor is required beyond the selection of materials and colours for cabinets, countertops and window treatments; often one theme for countertop accessories, one piece of art, and very little else is required to add the finishing touches to a kitchen's décor.

For more information or if you have a question on Design, please visit Karen's website at:

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