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# Signature Kitchens & Baths

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# In Good Company

*A kitchen should reflect the needs of a host to the very last detail, and creating a culinary space to welcome a crowd is essential for any avid entertainer.* **STORY BY NICOLE HOLLAND**

Once a utilitarian space banished to relatively cramped quarters away from the household hustle and bustle, the kitchen has transformed into a primary point of convergence. In other words, it's not just for cooking anymore. In fact, these busy rooms are party central in many residences, which means they need to be accommodating to their gracious entertainers, as well as to their grateful guests.

Since the layout is one of the most important factors of the new area, "think about the flow of traffic when designing your kitchen for entertaining," said Erinn Valencich of Omniarte Design. Kitchens hosting informal parties are best suited to an open floor plan,

but the more formal festivities may require a separation between the kitchen and the eating area to keep the activities partitioned. "Guests aren't necessarily seeing the preparation of the meal, but they are there to enjoy the results of that preparation," said Al Curran CKD, WRID, senior designer at Bella Domicile in Madison, Wisconsin. To accommodate this separation, it may be necessary to include additional rooms, beyond a formal dining room, in which to retire after the meal is complete.

For these formal layouts, adding a butler's pantry may also come in handy, from preparing the next course to staging desserts. In the event that caterers are present during

a gathering, the butler's pantry also provides room for meal make-ready and cleanup.

### INSULAR IDEAS

There is truly no better space to gather than in the kitchen, next to all the action during a dinner party. The island can truly be the hub of activity in the kitchen, so designing it to work for you is ideal. When everyone is gathered around, it is important to keep lines of sight open in the area. For example, including a cooktop in the center island will prevent the cook from turning his or her back to the guests as the meal is prepared. To the same degree, a vegetable prep sink and undercounter refrigerator will keep everything at an arm's reach and reduce the amount of time spent running around the kitchen.

The undercounter refrigerator is also the perfect place to stow appetizers and beverages, so if your guests are arriving one by one, it's easy to pull out a cold drink for them when they arrive. To augment available workspace, add a snack bar to the island to set out drinks, serve a buffet or have guests pull up a chair and enjoy some bar-style snacking. And don't forget to accessorize the space with a splash of color. "Fresh flowers are also a nice touch in the kitchen," said Valencich. "Most people don't think to accessorize their counters the same way they would do a tabletop."

### APPLIANCE UTILITY

Make the kitchen work for you when deciding on the appliances. For instance, a second dishwasher is helpful for getting everything clean and out of the way at once. "You can be running one [dishwasher] with pots and pans and be filling the dirty dishes in the second one, so one does not have to be stacking plates and bowls," said Curran. Also



consider a second oven to ensure that dishes can be prepared and completed simultaneously, and for keeping servings and breads toasty, a warming drawer is ideal.

Wine refrigerators aren't just for connoisseurs anymore. Store your best vino in a temperature-controlled setting to ensure freshness and the perfect serving temperature each time. From a six-bottle model to a cooler designed to hold more than 20, finding a space for this appliance will be well worth it. And if guests would prefer a little pick-me-up, offer coffee along with the wine. "An espresso machine built into the wall is also a great party pleaser," said Valencich,

Before the guests arrive, transform the sink into fun focal point by adding refreshments. "I love an entertainment sink," said Valencich. "Kohler has some long narrow ones that are great at parties filled with ice and drinks. Or for a kids' party, fill it with Popsicles and frozen treats."

The island can be the center of attention in the kitchen during a festivity. To keep everything within reach, stock it with amenities, such as a wine cooler, mini refrigerator or second dishwasher.





An open floor plan makes a space easy to navigate and a spacious island offers guests room to gather.

#### ADDED AMBIANCE

Using lighting techniques when hosting a soiree can help guests feel more relaxed and comfortable and can dictate the mood of the gathering. "Lighting makes all the difference and will really make the kitchen sparkle," said Valenich. "When I'm entertaining I put on the undercabinet lighting and the pendants on a low dimmer—it's really elegant."

#### TAKE IT OUTSIDE

If you live in a climate where weather permits, some kitchen spaces set up for entertaining have an adjoining exterior space for eating and relaxing. The outdoor living area, garden or deck, sometimes infused with the kitchen space, takes entertainment to the next level. To keep things simplified, ensure easy access between the two culinary spaces. "Not all of your refrigeration needs are going to be taking place outdoors, and you will be transferring meats to the grill, and many times it could be beverages back and forth," said

Curran. "You don't want uneven floor material on the exterior of the home." And this is another time to consider traffic patterns in the layout, making sure that there isn't a need to walk through a number of rooms to make it to the outdoor kitchen from the interior.

#### SMALL PRECAUTIONS

Even though they say entertaining is all about the guests, you still need to keep yourself safe and comfortable in your own space. Make sure to install nonslip flooring in the kitchen and in the hallways leading out to the outdoor living area. In addition to a slip-free surface, keep tired toes happy with a gel mat specifically designed for use in the kitchen. Stain-resistant and durable, they are a soothing relief to aching feet.

Also, take a close look at your hardware before making the final decision, as some shapes may catch or rip clothing. "Sometimes hardware may have an exposed end," said Curran, "so be aware of protrusions that might be sticking out of the cabinetry or from appliances."

No matter if the project is an upgrade or a complete remodel, take your kitchen to the next stratum of socials with a space specially designed to make you, and your guests, comfortable. ◀