

# KITCHEN DESIGN



## The ‘Post-Lockdown’ Kitchen Design guidelines and trends for renovating today’s kitchens

BY DAVID POLLARD

So central to family life, the kitchen, of all the rooms in the house, took the brunt of the pandemic’s heightened demands, which made clear which design features were working—and which were not. Versatility became critical, with islands being used for home offices and countertops for home-school desks. A cluttered kitchen became a hindrance to productivity and exacerbated existing problems of insufficient appliances and a lack of good design for cooking. More recently designed kitchens were better equipped for these challenges, but older kitchens brought all these issues front and center. So although the pandemic did not inspire any radical shifts in kitchen

design, it magnified the importance and desirability of many trends and improvements introduced in the last several decades.

### VERSATILITY OF AN ISLAND

The kitchen island has continued to prove its worth and is here to stay. The range of uses for this massive chunk of wood and stone is seemingly endless. A quartz top, which resists staining from a wide variety of spills, is perfect for an art table, and the height makes a decent standing desk. Islands can be as big or small as you need, which means the depth can increase to incorporate additional storage and seating. These elements can also support a

range of functions: plumbing fixtures, appliances, charging stations, garbage cans, coffee makers, and more.

## Design Guidelines for Islands

- Make the island large enough to seat the whole family. Only four chairs for a family of five means someone is always left out of the party.

- Consider overhangs and seating on the end or ends as well as the back of the island—it is nicer to have a conversation or play a game sitting perpendicular to each other instead of next to each other. The alternative—one person stands on one side while the other sits on the opposite side—is not the way you would spend time at a restaurant, for example, with a friend or family member.

- Maximize storage on all sides—a 4-foot-deep island provides 24 inches on the kitchen side and 12 inches on the back with a 12-inch seating overhang. Those 12-inch-deep cabinets are the perfect seasonal storage for appliances used a few times a year, extra place mats, and the holiday mug collection.

- Plan the front, or kitchen, side of the island for as much daily-use storage as possible. Being at the center of the kitchen space, it's perfect for holding school lunch supplies, daily silverware, a microwave, a beverage drawer, and garbage-can pullouts. Keep the heavy-duty cooking and baking supplies on the perimeter with the range where the cooking functions happen.

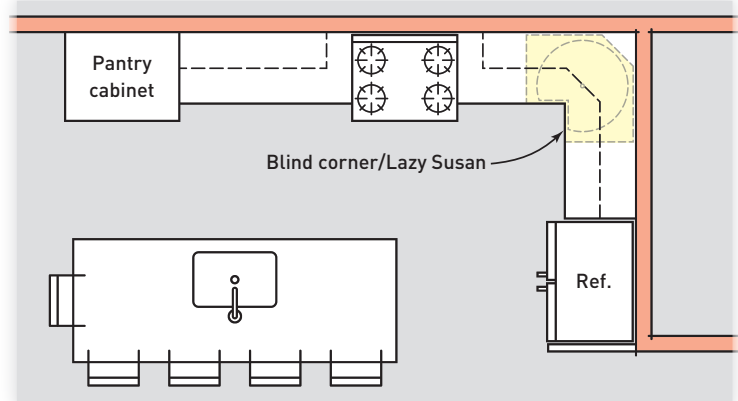
## Trends in Islands

- Countertops without sinks or cooktops are increasingly common on islands. Having a cooktop on one has long been a questionable decision, but we are seeing more and more clients trying to move the sink and faucet elsewhere as well, even if it compromises the work triangle. One big, clear, and easy-to-clean surface offers the most versatility and sharpest aesthetic.

- Single-level surfaces are preferred to the multitiered island design of the past. The 42-inch serving counter above the 36-inch work surface served a purpose of concealing the mess beyond on the counter, but advancements in storage, large-format quartz slabs, and showpiece faucets have made a single, large surface the more practical choice.

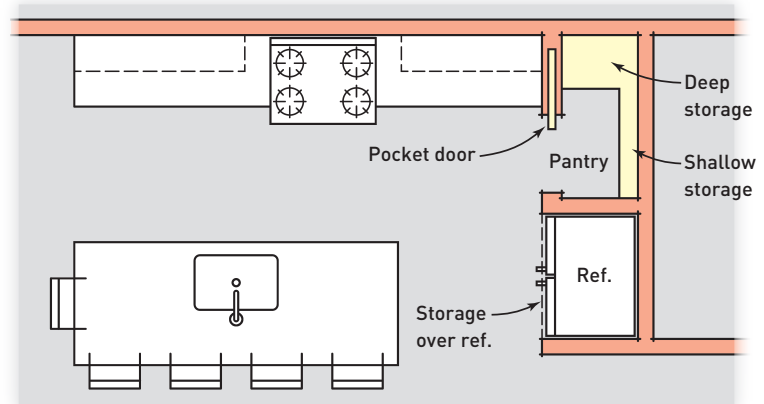
- Owners are now willing to invest in both the durability and aesthetic of cabinet panels for island ends and backs. The cost-

## Corner Cabinet



Blind corners can be awkward. Though Lazy Susans and pullout accessories have improved, the big blind-corner base cabinet can still be difficult to access.

## Walk-in Pantry

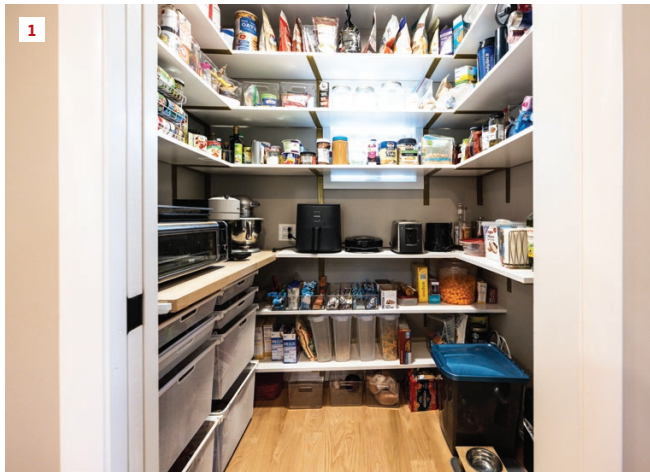


Before using a blind corner as a default, the author likes to explore other options, including a walk-in pantry, as shown in this example.

effective gypsum-board wall ends and back have not held up well to increased activity from home school and work-from-home.

## CLUTTER MANAGEMENT

Spending all day and into the evening working and learning in a sea of our stuff reinforced the importance of kitchen storage. There are things we own that bring us joy and we want to put on display to share, and there are many more things in a kitchen that serve a specific function, and we prefer not to look at them. Thoughtful storage solutions as simple as garbage pullouts and as helpful as charging drawers have come to the forefront. That



A walk-in pantry with plenty of outlets allows kitchen equipment to be used without having to move it and keeps the clutter out of sight when not in use (1). A dedicated coffee bar (2) is one option for creating functional kitchen organization. In lieu of a pantry, smart cabinet solutions at the end of counters (3) offer ample storage for bulky kitchen items.

toaster the homeowners received as a wedding gift may be used every morning, but there is likely a design solution that doesn't require them to look at it, and all of the crumbs, on their counter all day.

### Design Guidelines for Clutter Management

- Understand your client's life situation and what they currently need to put away in their kitchen. Also help them plan for the future. If they like open shelves, talk to them about what they are planning to put on them. Be thoughtful about everything that they will be seeing out in their kitchen on a regular basis.
- Whenever possible, consider a walk-in pantry. This space will allow owners to store food and brooms and also get those clunky appliances out of the way. Imagine what having that dirty coffee pot, toaster oven, and microwave in their own room does for

the cleanliness of a kitchen and the ability to be more efficient with countertop space and cabinet storage. Be sure to consider clearances and requirements for dedicated appliance outlets when planning the pantry, the same way you would planning the main kitchen spaces.

- If a walk-in pantry isn't possible, consider smart cabinetry solutions. Tall corner cabinets above the countertop height are an ideal place for lift-up appliance garages. Or look toward another dedicated space for those functions, such as a coffee bar.
- Blind corners can be messy and clumsy. While mechanisms for Lazy Susans and other pullout accessories have improved, the big, empty blind-corner base cabinet still leaves much to be desired. It can be difficult to access and is often simply full of stuff that sits there until your clients sell the house and move. Before using a blind corner as a default, we like to explore other options: for



Big drawers, and plenty of them (4), offer a storage solution for everything from glasses and dishes to cookware. Kitchens increasingly are planned with one entire wall dedicated to windows and glass doors to connect with the outdoors (5).

instance, a walk-in pantry, a butler's pantry, or a longer island with no cabinets or tops on the return wall.

### Trends in Clutter Management

- The microwave hood is out. One thing we have learned over the years is that the least attractive place to put a microwave is right at eye level as the focal point of the kitchen. In the last few decades, the microwave hood, the least expensive appliance in the kitchen, has been comfortably perched above the owner's showpiece range, holding the dripping bacon grease on a metal screen. Today, there are so many options to move that microwave down and out of sight. In addition to a countertop unit in a walk-in pantry, built-in units either with a drawer or door are becoming more commonplace and available from major manufacturers.

- Built-in desks are out, as well. Too many families learned the hard way that the seemingly brilliant built-in desk designed for homework and planning the meals for the week became a highly visible landing spot for junk mail and Amazon deliveries. While the extra space and storage is handy, the workspace is not. It is more comfortable to open your laptop or tablet at an island than to sit in a low chair staring at a wall. We have now seen a conversion of these old desk spaces to beverage bars, pantries, or closed storage for mail and electronics recharging. The space can still be useful but can be closed off out of view with the swipe of a hand.

- Lots of big drawers are in. Today's cabinet hardware and drawer-box construction allow for deep and large storage drawers to house everything from plates, to glasses, to cast iron frying pans. Our kitchens are typically planned with multiple three-drawer banks for pots, pans, and daily serving dishes. Similar in cost to a cabinet with a top drawer and two roll-out trays, the drawers provide more efficient storage and a simple open-and-grab to retrieve what you need. We typically try to keep drawer banks to 27 to 30 inches so they provide ample storage but are not too heavy to open and close.

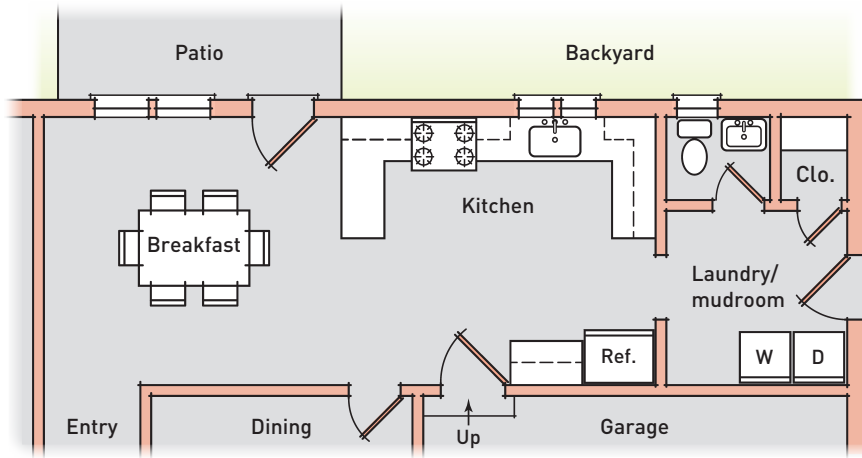
### CONNECTION TO THE BACKYARD

Families today have learned to appreciate their outdoor space in a different light. What was once a dirt playground full of toys and soccer balls has become an oasis for retreat and entertaining complete with outdoor kitchens, living room setups, fire pits, and string lights. Most owners now want to engage with that space more than is possible through the half-glass back door and one or two windows in the original house design. Replanning the back of a home from the inside out begins with freeing up exterior wall space to allow for more windows and doors; the island and storage solutions mentioned above help to make this possible.

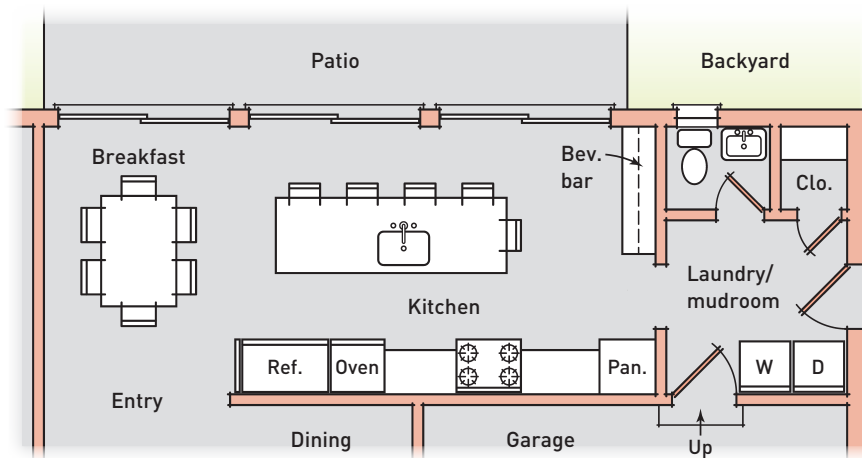
### Design Guidelines for Connecting to the Backyard

- Depending on the layout, consider moving the perimeter kitchen

## Cabinets on Exterior Wall



## Cabinets Moved to Interior Wall



Depending on the layout, consider moving the perimeter kitchen cabinets to an interior wall: By flipping the kitchen, the exterior wall can now be sliding doors or large windows, allowing backyard access or sunlight directly to the island seating area. This layout also provides a perfect opportunity for a sink in the island; owners can look outside while using it, just like the good old days of watching out the kitchen window.

cabinets to an interior wall: By flipping the kitchen, the exterior wall can now contain sliding doors or large windows allowing backyard access or sunlight directly to the island seating area. This layout is also perfect for a sink in the island, since clients can look outside while using it, as they did in the good old days with a kitchen window above the sink.

- Include lots of windows to the backyard. If the perimeter cabinets are on the outside wall, first design the back wall with the maximum number of windows. Using smart island and pantry design, plan for the rest of the cabinetry to store everything that would traditionally be in those perimeter upper cabinets.

### Trends for Connecting to the Backyard

- There are significant advantages to a kitchen design that reduces or eliminates upper cabinets. Typically, the top two shelves of an upper cabinet are not easily accessible because of their height, and the idea of having unused storage space heavily hanging on your wall in plain sight doesn't make sense. If the storage from the bottom two shelves can be relocated to lower drawers and a pantry, opportunities for windows, doors, artwork, and tile arise.

- Access to the backyard is more of a priority now. At the very least, half-glass back doors are being replaced with full-glass ones, but we are also seeing openings being enlarged for slider doors, and in some cases, made large enough for folding- or pocket-door systems, enhancing the indoor/outdoor connection between the kitchen and backyard.

### HAVE FUN

With so many activities and functions beyond cooking happening in today's kitchen, the space has become a place to celebrate family and show a little personality. In a kitchen remodel, owners are able to customize with many variables and options. From appliances, to countertops, to cabinets, to tile, the possible combinations designed for both function and personality are endless. Make sure to guide your clients to embrace the possibilities of their customization and have fun along the way.

### Fun Design Guidelines

- Start with countertops or backsplash first. Often, homeowners have seen a countertop or backsplash pattern in the past that they want to have in their kitchen remodel, and it may even be the inspiration for their remodeling project in the first place. If they do, then that is a great starting point to get nailed down early. It will help guide cabinet colors and finishes when you can compare them to the tops or tile.
- We typically focus on two cabinet colors or finishes to begin with.

## THE 'POST-LOCKDOWN' KITCHEN



Both kitchens above demonstrate the trend toward having few upper cabinets in lieu of more windows and ample wall space. While white-on-white is in decline, white is used to contrast with a darker island (6) or darker wood ceiling (7).

Sometimes clients will add another along the way, but beginning with a different island and perimeter finish is an easy start.

- Give the clients homework. We have found the best way to keep clients busy and focused on moving the design forward in their free time is to facilitate shopping for kitchen appliances. We work with certain appliance vendors that have large showrooms where clients can see, touch, feel, and price their appliances early in the process. The relationships we've developed mean the salespeople can guide owners within our process and help them arrive at appliance resolution early. This piece is also a huge variable in the overall cabinet design and layout, so the sooner it is defined, the better.

- Think about how your clients live and their personalities: Do they have a huge wall calendar to organize their lives? Do they love displaying their children's artwork? Do they have friends and family visit often? These are just some of the important questions that can help guide clients toward creative and personalized spaces designed and built for them.

### Fun Trends

- White-on-white kitchens are becoming less common, and if we do see white, it is usually against a contrasted element like dark trim, a wood top, or wood hood vent. Often, we will see white on one portion of the cabinetry used to set off a unique wood or color accent on another portion. A deep walnut, blue, green, or orange island has a little more energy next to clean, white cabinetry. One thing is for sure, though: Owners are excited to have fun and take risks with cabinet colors in specific areas.

- We have seen more and more clients move away from white subway tile, bringing in some texture for fun and personalization. Most often this happens with backsplash tile, but we also see wallpaper and open wood shelves adding a custom feel.

- Huge swaths of industrial stainless steel are being replaced by cabinet panels on refrigerators and dishwashers. By softening these appliances with wood or paint, the range and range hood can be the singular focal point.

- Large, heavy-duty, and well-designed ranges continue to be important elements in many of our clients' homes. Both for their powerful cooking abilities and impactful appearance, these expensive appliances deserve a well-designed layout to help them shine.

Having so many families spending so much time in their kitchens the last few years has expedited a shift toward function and joy. While the tips and trends mentioned here may be more prevalent in our particular market, they came from deep discussions and discovery of our clients' needs. No matter what geography or demographic you are working, be sure to dig deep to understand both client needs and pain points and propose thoughtful solutions. There has never been a time in recent history when homeowners have had such focused opinions on the dysfunctions of their kitchens, so keep asking questions to tap into these opinions, and, most importantly, listen.

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