



**DO** pay attention to the essentials like layout, scale, and work flow. This kitchen's large island works because the aisles on each side are plenty wide. Built-in storage and a sink add functionality.

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# DO This Not That

Make the right choices to create the kitchen you've always wanted.

**With a major kitchen remodel**, you rarely get to press the reset button. After spending thousands for the job, and living on slow-cooker meals for months while it proceeds, what you wind up with is likely to be yours for years.

That doesn't mean starting the project expecting to get every last detail perfect, with no regrets. But nailing down the big stuff—the basics that will make your kitchen comfortable, functional, and stylish for the long haul—will help you come close and save a bundle in the bargain.

We talked with kitchen designers, architects, contractors, and experienced homeowners to find out the common design oversights and outright goofs that cause the most grief when the job is done. Here are the 10 biggest missteps—and how to sidestep them in your kitchen.

## **DON'T squeeze in a super-sized center island.**

"People are emotionally attracted to the idea of an island, but it requires a pretty large room to fit one comfortably," says kitchen designer Chelly Wentworth of Craftsman Design and Renovation in Portland, Ore. A 12-foot-wide kitchen is too narrow, she says, yet many people squeeze one in anyway and wind up with cramped aisles around their island—or too little space to eat. She recommends building an island only if you can accommodate



**DO** design a room with a view. A brighter kitchen is more enjoyable to work in. Enlarging existing windows is usually one investment worth making.

these minimum measurements: walkways of 36 inches wide, 44 inches where there's seating or an appliance, and 48 inches where there's both. For each stool, a 24-inch-wide by 21-inch-deep eating area, with at least a 12-inch overhang for bar-height islands (42 inches high). A 15-inch overhang

for counter-height islands (36 inches); and an 18-inch overhang table-height islands (30 inches). If you can't swing that, go for a peninsula, since these need walkways on only three sides.

**DON'T overlook your kitchen's built-in flaws.**

With budgets tight and wish lists long, too many remodelers ignore underlying issues. When homeowner Kelly Anne Sohigian remodeled her Fairfield, Conn., kitchen, she didn't take the opportunity to enlarge the tiny windows. "We didn't want the additional expense," she says. "But I regret it every day because the room would be so much brighter and better connected to the outside world." That's

a common mistake, says contractor Scott Shimanski of Associated Housewrights in Madison, Wis.: "People get fixated on cabinets and countertops and don't think about whether they need to replace windows, insulate, take down the dining room wall, or add electrical circuits." If you can't do it all, get these architectural fixes taken care of now, since there's no easy way to come back and do them later. And hold off on the finishing touches, like new backsplash tiles, which you can add anytime.

**DON'T cut the counters.**

It's smart to gang up tall items such as refrigerator, pantry cabinet, and wall ovens on one side of the room so they don't break up the run of primary



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**DON'T under-size your refrigerator.**

The refrigerator is one of the trickier objects to place in a kitchen plan, because it's so tall and hulking. Appliance manufacturers have simplified the job with cabinet-depth models, which typically are 25 to 29 inches deep instead of the standard 30 to 34 inches. That means you can build them into—or align them with—standard 24-inch-deep base cabinets without protruding as far into the room. The catch: Less depth also means less capacity for most cabinet-depth fridges. If you want the built-in look and have a family, consider stepping up to a wider (and pricier) built-in refrigerator.

**DON'T create an awkward triangle.**

You probably know about the kitchen triangle—the concept that the key kitchen work areas of sink, range, and fridge should align into a triangle for easy maneuvering between them. But that's not the whole story. "There are

countertop. Just be sure you do provide some counter space on that side of the room, too, says Wentworth. Otherwise, you'll have no handy place to rest items you're loading into the fridge, or set down a bowl of hot soup that's fresh from the microwave.

Every work and storage area, from the oven to the refrigerator to the microwave, needs 12 to 15 inches of adjacent countertop, preferably on each side. Landing spaces on both sides of a cook-top, range, and sink are a must.

**DON'T forget to include everyday necessities.**

With all the focus on fun features like decorative tiles and gooseneck faucets, it's easy to marginalize the importance

of mundane kitchen elements—or even to focus on some conveniences at the expense of others. That's what happened to Becky Engel of Portland, Ore. "My contractor spent weeks perfecting the location of drawer dividers and roll-out trays—and even which side of the sink the soap dispenser belonged on," she says. "The last thing to find a home was the garbage can, and it wound up clear on the other side of the kitchen from my sink."

Now, whenever she's cooking or cleaning, she has to carry over the bin and set it on the floor. But at least she has a garbage bin: Some kitchens completely omit essentials like the recycling bin, utility closet, coat-and-boot storage (crucial if you enter through the kitchen), or cellphone charging station.



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a lot of kitchen triangles out there that make the chef's life miserable," says Wentworth. Sometimes the island is right smack in the middle of it; sometimes the work zones at each tip aren't organized around the tasks done there (the glassware and dishware aren't stored by the sink, say). And sometimes its points are too far apart or close together. No leg of the kitchen triangle should be longer than 9 feet or shorter than 4 feet, she says.

### **DON'T forgo practicality.**

Concrete countertops, limestone backsplash tiles, enameled sinks, and white-painted cabinets are all gorgeous options. But they're also risky ones because they're vulnerable to staining and chipping, and they therefore require more care. "You have to decide which is more important: a look you're in love with, or the peace of mind of having a hard-wearing kitchen you don't have to constantly be cleaning and sealing and worrying about," says Glendale, Calif. kitchen designer Marlene Oliphant, who works hard to talk her clients out of high-maintenance finishes. Some people are comfortable with demanding surfaces, but for most, the low-stress route is better in the long run.

### **DON'T cling to trends.**

Kitchen-design trends are nearly as fickle as runway fashions: The more up-to-the-minute something is today, the more dated it's likely to look in a few years. "Watch

out for the things you're seeing in every magazine and showroom," says Curt Schultz, a Realtor-architect-contractor in Pasadena, Calif. The big ones these days include translucent glass tiles,

industrial-style lighting fixtures, and retro red and blue appliances. As with clothing, you're much safer with classic, timeless looks. "Choose details that fit the home's original style and period by letting the existing moldings, light fixtures, tiles, and doors inspire your selections," he advises.

### **DON'T misplace the microwave oven.**

Even for foodies, the microwave is among the most frequently used kitchen appliances. And yet it's often placed in a totally inconvenient spot, says kitchen designer Duval Acker of Kitchens by Design in Mt. Pleasant, S.C. "Everyone wants to build in the microwave, but it needs to be somewhere that's easy to access." Over the range can mean you're reaching too high, and below a counter means you're stooping down—unless it's a drawer-style microwave, which is one solution if there's no spot to put a standard unit between elbow and eye level. Even simpler and cheaper: Leave it out on the countertop if there's no sensible place to build it in.

### **DON'T ignore the future.**

Nobody sizes an island height for little kids—it would be too small in just a few years. So don't forget about your own future needs (or those of your parents) either. To accommodate aging eyes, plan plenty of light, including general lighting from ceiling fixtures and task lighting from undercabinet lights, recessed cans and pendants, says kitchen designer Jean Marie Courtney of Creative Designs in Cambridge, Mass. Also choose contrasting dark and light finishes, so that it's easy to spot the transitions between floors, cabinets, countertops, and appliances. To accommodate aging bodies, skip the hard tile floors in favor of wood, and provide at least one convenient spot where a cook could sit down—perhaps even in a wheelchair—to work.

**DO** consider longevity. ►  
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## Remodeling Gripes

The contractor-homeowner relationship isn't always easy. Even good pros can give clients headaches, and vice versa. So we asked homeowners and contractors to tell us their troubles—and got advice from the pros on how to avoid the problems.

**Homeowners sound off** General contractors were significantly more aggravating than subcontractors such as plumbers, electricians, and painters, though not quite as annoying as the cable guy, according to a nationally representative survey of 913 homeowners conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. Failing to show up was the top complaint. Also annoying were not taking the time needed to do the job right, not listening to or understanding requests, and leaving a mess. Surprisingly, cost overruns were at the bottom of the list.

**Contractors' pet peeves** "Kids and pets," said Michael Hydeck, president of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. "People have to remember that a remodeling site is not a playground." Other complaints include clients calling at all hours of the night and not appreciating the minor imperfections that come with handcrafted work.

**Keeping the peace** Miscommunication and mismatched expectations are the cause of most of those problems. So don't underestimate the importance of a good rapport. Establish guidelines for hours of work, cleanliness of the job site, and whom to contact when a quick answer is needed. Once the work begins, keep in touch every day. E-mail maintains a paper trail and averts those after-hours calls. But don't take the entire relationship online. "There's still no substitute for live conversations," says Candi Hilton, a remodeler in Naples, Fla. And if there's a problem, speak up. The longer you wait, the more expensive it can be to fix.