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Designing the New Classic Kitchen

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THE NEW CLASSIC KITCHEN: DESIGNING 20TH-CENTURY SPACES FOR 21ST-CENTURY LIVING



Continuity in cabinetry and trim help maintain the home's character throughout this newly remodeled, open space.

By Chelly Wentworth

Portlanders love their old homes. Features like original moldings, millwork, built-ins, coved ceilings, covered porches, leaded glass windows, and hardwood floors are irresistible to many homeowners, who will go to great lengths and expense to preserve and restore them.

That appeal of another era loses its romance, however, in the kitchen, where many homeowners abandon preservationist ideals. Who finds anything seductive about a refrigerator on the back porch or counters with the working space of a postage stamp? In our design-build company, we address common complaints about vintage kitchens. Typical complaints involve kitchens that are cramped, cut off from the rest of the house, or have insufficient counter space; surfaces that are outdated, made of worn-out materials, and hard to maintain; poor lighting; insufficient storage; and outdated, energy-inefficient appliances.

Multiple Purposes

Beyond worn surfaces and tight spaces, a kitchen's shortcomings stem mainly from expectations of its functions, which have expanded dramatically over the past 100 years. Kitchens must now accommodate many of the same tasks as their 20th-century predecessors like food preparation, cooking, cleaning, and storage, but also serve newly cultivated aspirations.

Versatility is key. Today's homeowners want to use their kitchens to serve up quick, casual meals most days and kick into high gear for special occasions. Not only does the kitchen need to meet the feeding needs of its human residents, it must also cater to family pets.

Particularly in the gray Pacific Northwest, the kitchen is likely to serve as a mud-room and, in deference to our green sensibilities, a place to recycle and compost.

The kitchen customarily serves as "command central," where bills are paid and homework is done, plans made, notes left, and cell phones charged. It's often a craft or hobby room and an ad hoc media room, where the chef can watch a cooking show or the family can enjoy a movie with their meal.

Finally, in virtually every home, the residents want their kitchen to be a form of self-expression, to reflect their tastes, interests, and personalities.



Generally an afterthought, pet feeding stations are often overlooked. This one tucks neatly into the island's toe space when not in use.



A porch right off the kitchen was repurposed for this home's command central.

Work Zones

Addressing typical insufficiencies and creating a kitchen that meets the demands of 21st-century life requires a meticulous remodel, beginning with the room's layout.

The classic working triangle (refrigerator, range, and sink) has been a mainstay of kitchen design since the mid 1940s. Initially developed with one cook in mind and for the most basic of functions, the triangle today may be expanded and multiplied within a kitchen to create working zones that accommodate multiple cooks and activities.

Designed with greater specificity of function than the classic triangle, basic working zones include the following:

- ◆ The Consumable Zone contains food staples, drinks, and refrigerated goods.
- ◆ The Non-Consumable Zone houses dishes, glasses, storage containers, and silverware.
- ◆ The Cleaning Zone consists of the sink, dishwasher, cleaning supplies storage, and receptacles for trash, recycling, and compost.
- ◆ The Preparation Zone holds knives, cutting boards, utensils, mixing bowls, small appliances, and food-stuffs frequently used for food preparation, such as spices and oils. The prep zone should include plenty of counter space, and more than one such zone may be incorporated into a kitchen.
- ◆ The Cooking Zone includes the oven, range, cooktop, and microwave. Usually pots, pans, cooking utensils, and baking sheets are stored here.

In addition, specialized work zones may be designed to the specific needs and interests of the homeowners, from an area for household management to a station for brewing beer.

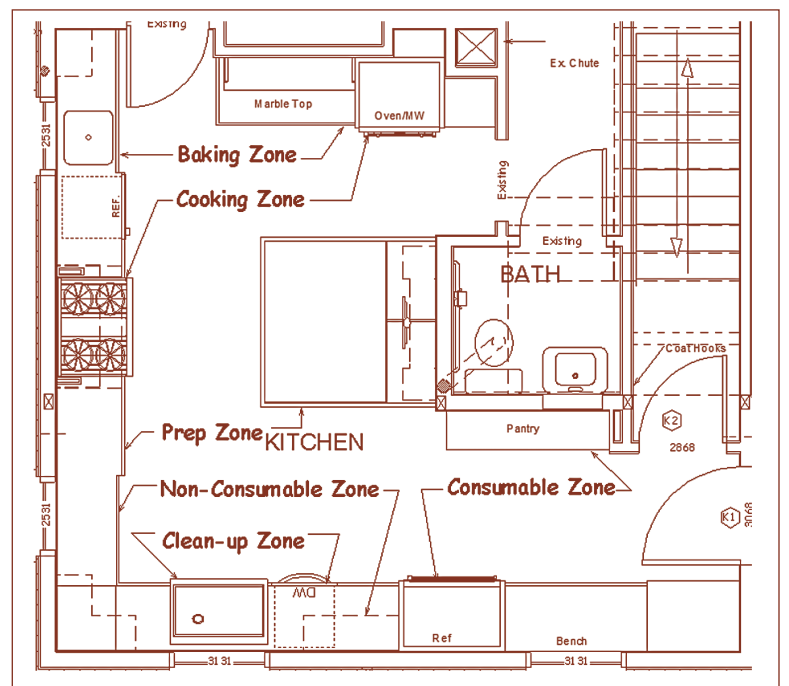
Kitchen Connections

With cooking becoming ever more social and kitchens increasingly the locus of family activity, the open kitchen has gained in popularity since the 1950s. It has

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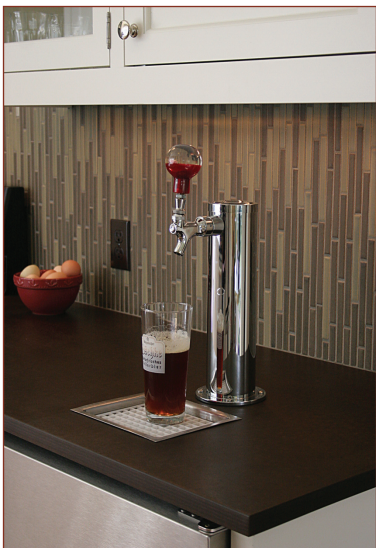
Carefully designed and placed, this peninsula serves many purposes including dining, food prep, storage, serving, display, and television viewing.



It's easy to identify the zones in this large kitchen. This kitchen's prep zone illustrated above.



A custom tea shelf holds a prized teapot collection, while the lowered counter provides a comfortable prep area specified for the main cook.



A beer tap built right in to the cabinetry allows this homeowner to share and enjoy his craft brewing skills.



This kitchen remodel created a mudroom space by incorporating an enclosed porch; the pull-out desk cabinet houses a recycling container.

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particular appeal for families with small children, who can be supervised while meals are being prepared, families who enjoy cooking together, and people whose entertaining style includes socializing in the kitchen.

While we may associate an open floor plan primarily with ranch-style houses, it can work in a 1910 Portland Foursquare if done with sensitivity and skill. The key is in ensuring the incorporation of characteristics of the adjacent spaces into the kitchen, so the room flows naturally into its surroundings. Matching new cabinetry and trim to that in the adjoining rooms is vital and requires a detail-oriented designer and contractor.

Even in kitchens that aren't directly open to a dining, living, or family room, consideration of the larger context of the home is important. A successful remodel, especially in an older home, draws attention to the beauty of the home without advertising its reinvention.

Finessing the Finishes

There's nothing superficial when it comes to choosing finishes in a vintage kitchen remodel. The room's surfaces affect both function and esthetics and can also affect the longevity of your renovation. You want materials that can stand up to customary use, are easy to maintain,

feel appropriate for the overall age and style of your home, and reflect your personality.

There are countless choices available, but the classics are your best bet. We use a lot of honed black granite for countertops; it has a similar look and feel to the soapstone used a century ago but is much more durable. Quartz is an attractive, low-maintenance option. We may add a marble remnant in the baking zone or a piece of walnut butcher block in a prep area. All wood and the newer paper-based countertops are popular because of their look and sustainability.

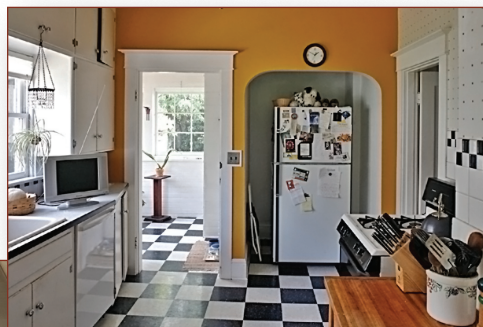
Installing oak and refinishing the original fir flooring are typical ways of tying a new kitchen in with the rest of the house. Natural linoleum flooring is period appropriate, sustainable, and holds up to the rigors of daily wear and tear.

Don't overlook the backsplash as an opportunity to personalize your space. While many homeowners choose a simple subway-tile backsplash, this area can serve as a blank canvas for the residents' esthetic tastes, reflected in either an artistic liner or a full mural over the range. ■

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This previously cramped kitchen (top photo) was transformed into a multi-functional room with more connection to the outside.