



Design integration and customization creates a beautiful look.

Interior Design By Vicki O'Neal, CID, ASID.

# A KITCHEN ODYSSEY



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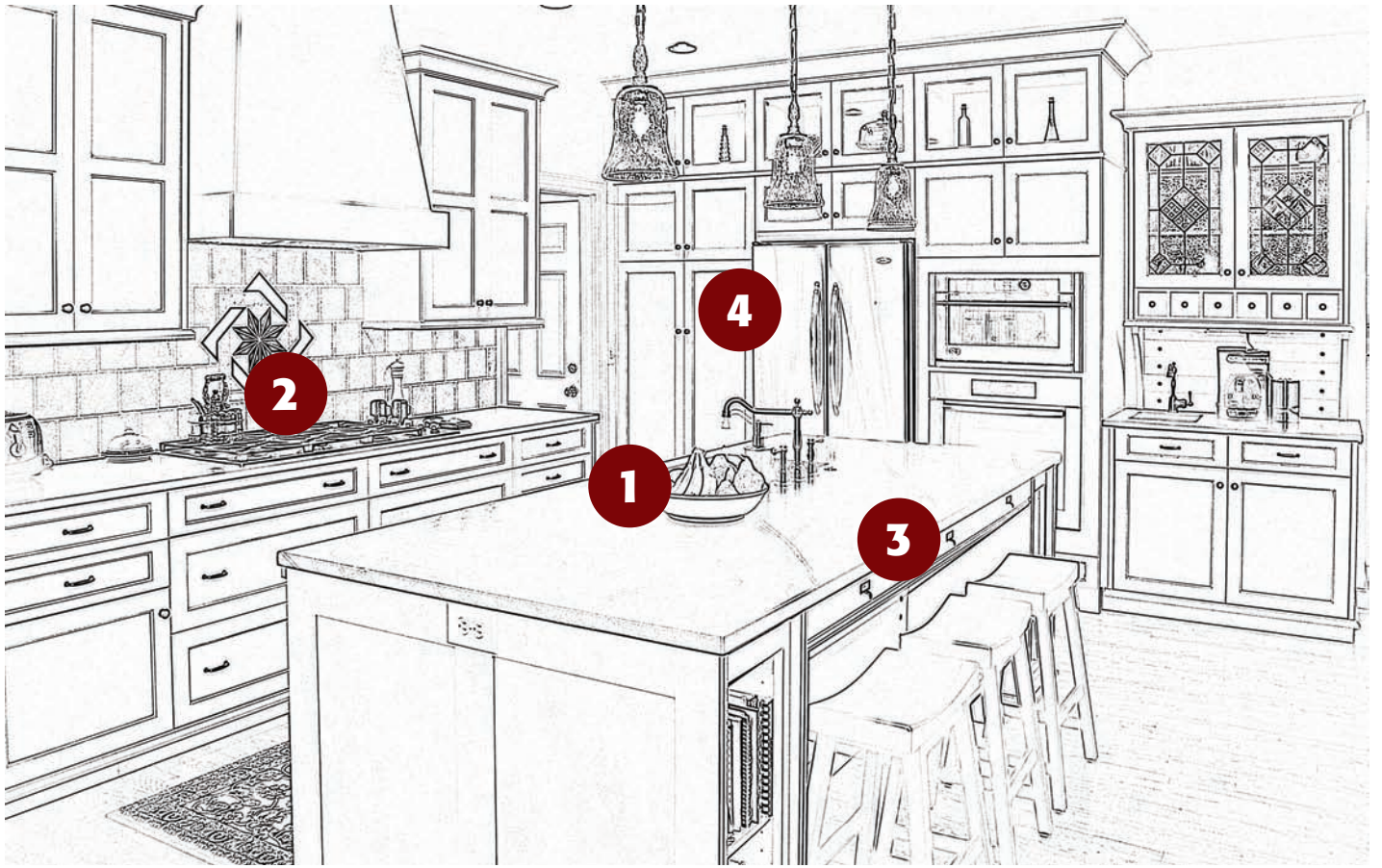
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The kitchen is the center of activity in many homes and truly a multipurpose space. It is obviously the place of physical nurturing, but represents nurturing in a symbolic and spiritual sense as well. Our families gather there, and spend much of our quality time together in the kitchen. It always seems to be the place where people congregate during a party. The kitchen could be called the heart and soul of your home.

As a place of such importance, it's little wonder that so much effort is put into kitchen design, and the bells and whistles that support the many activities happening there. From a design standpoint, the kitchen incorporates a complex flow of movement and functions. It is the most expensive area to construct or remodel, and where small planning mistakes can create big future inconveniences. Many kitchen specialists provide state-of-the-art renderings that are a lifelike representation of the kitchen interior and can be an invaluable visualization tool. ▶▶▶

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State of the art renderings are a great visualization tool. Photo courtesy of Vicki O'Neal, CID, ASID.

## THE FLOOR PLAN

Space planning for the kitchen, in its most basic approach, focuses on the concept known as “the work triangle.” This can be thought of as an imaginary triangle that connects the major functions in the kitchen: the sink, the range, and the refrigerator. All else spatially supports this primary relationship, and ideally is configured to save time and shorten distances between tasks. Kitchen floor plans usually start with the basic geometry of the galley, U-shape, L-shape, peninsula, or island, with variations depending on the square footage available and the openness to adjacent spaces. In larger kitchens with additional task centers, defining the work triangle becomes a bit more complex. Planning a kitchen may seem a bit daunting, but think of it in terms of functional or activity zones: preparation and cleaning; cooking; eating and planning; and storage.

### 1 THE PREP AND CLEANING ZONE

The prep zone includes the sink, faucet and disposal, dishwasher, and trash can or compactor. Sinks come in all shapes, sizes, and depths, with location and function being the most important considerations. Beautiful metallic finishes can create a striking look for features such as a bar sink. Faucets and sinkware continue to evolve with clever and practical options in style and ease of use. Drawer sized dishwashers are a water and energy saving opportunity, and may be a good choice for the kitchen or wet bar. Many dishwashers are so quiet they are barely audible when operating. Recently introduced are dishwashers with a steam cleaning cycle which have the ability to clean the toughest pots and pans. Stainless steel dishwasher interiors are favored because they don't stain, crack, or hold odors. Integrated and hidden controls create a built-in and streamlined appearance.

### 2 THE COOKING ZONE

Ovens and ranges come in versions including convection, microwave, steamer, conventional, or some combination, and installations can be built-in, slide-in, drop-in, wall mounted, overhead, or pull-out. Cooktops can be gas, electric, or induction, with the latter two available in solid glass surfaces. It pays to really think about how you cook, or would like to cook, when planning an appliance purchase, a new kitchen or a renovation. It's easy to get caught up in the dazzle of it all. But when the dust settles, you'll be the one using this space every day. Research is all-important, and reading blogs and consumer reviews can be very helpful.

### 3 THE EATING & PLANNING ZONE

Dining in the kitchen is the activity that makes a house feel like a home. The formal dining room is frequently no longer present, and the kitchen and eating space are often visually and spatially connected.

Eating counters add charm and great functionality to the kitchen. They provide extra counter or serving space, additional seating, and a place for casual dining. It is a wonderful arrangement for interaction with family or friends during meal preparation, and may become the most used area in your home. Bar height counters (42" high) visually separate areas but may not be the best arrangement with small children in the family. Eating counters can be an extension of an island or peninsula counter (36" high). Table height counters (30" high) are an option.

Breakfast tables have seen many updates in design that bring them in step aesthetically. If space allows, round tables offer great style and flexibility in seating capacity. Built-in booths, perhaps constructed to integrate a window seat, can create a cozy environment for casual dining. Planning desks are frequently a part of the kitchen, and can serve as “family central,” with space for a computer, files, activity calendar, and cookbooks.

### 4 THE STORAGE ZONE

Integral to every kitchen is the need to store everything under the sun. Storage has become quite a specialty with specific inserts for drawers, customized pantry systems, pull outs, wine storage, etc. The most important factor in configuring storage is to take advantage of all available inches while keeping objects highly visible and within easy reach. Many items are moving from the areas where they have been typically stored and now can be found in surprising but practical locations. One example of this trend is locating spices in drawer bins. Some specialized storage such as wine requires unusual considerations such as light and temperature control.

#### Refrigeration...

A relatively new advancement in convenience, and my personal favorite, is the French door refrigerator. It features side-by-side doors, full width shelves, and a pull-out bottom freezer. Counter depth refrigerators are less intrusive spatially and create a built-in appearance. Refrigeration drawers and beverage or wine centers are an option for special use areas.



### Cabinets...

Although visually, cabinets appear to be pretty simple, there is much detail hiding behind those pretty doors. The easiest to build and most common are framed cabinets. Typically, these have more detail to the door design, exposed hinges, and the door appears to be on top of the cabinet face. Frameless cabinets are generally more contemporary and visually simpler in design, sometimes with slab style doors, special fittings, and concealed hinges. Finishes and hardware further add to the ambience of your kitchen. Cabinets can be traditional or contemporary- natural wood, stained, or painted. There are variations in painted surfaces such as glazed, distressed, or solid color. Factory manufactured cabinets, although somewhat less flexible in details than custom built, can be a great choice with many designs available and extremely durable finishes. Glass door cabinets, open shelving, and other display features can brighten and break up a “sea of cabinets” effect.

Open floor plans create the need to coordinate the look of the kitchen with furnishings in adjacent spaces. As kitchens have expanded in size and complexity, many are designed with mixed cabinet styles and finishes to define certain functions such as work islands, baking centers, or a butler’s pantry. The mixed style kitchen, sometimes referred to as the “unfitted kitchen,” also may include the use of cabinetry as furniture, or vice versa. These “unfitted kitchens” can aesthetically appear as a throwback to a simpler time, creating a warm and homey feeling. Many use a unique combination of furniture and cabinets, and borrow from European details including plate racks and free standing ranges.

*Above: Storage has become quite a specialty with drawer inserts, customized pantry systems and pull outs.*

### SURFACES

The most important considerations in selecting surfaces for your kitchen are durability, ease of cleaning, and simplicity of maintenance.

New matte finishes in quartz and granite provide a fresh look, but may require special care. Laminates are available in new patterns, colors, and finishes, making them a good selection for a kitchen on a budget. Stainless steel, often with integrated sinks, offers an easy-clean, seamless and high tech aesthetic which appeals to many serious cooks. For the innovative, concrete is being used as cast countertops, finished with interesting glazes.

### Flooring options...

Due to high traffic patterns, the flooring surface should be the most durable possible. Wood requires more maintenance than might be desirable, and bamboo flooring may be a bit softer than wood and potentially less durable in the kitchen. Linoleum is a green flooring alternative, is softer underfoot, and comes in an interesting array of colors and textures. It is highly durable, has good soil hiding characteristics, and is available in tiles or a roll. High quality vinyl floors are available in a wide assortment. Ceramic and porcelain tile, as well as natural stone, make beautiful choices but less comfortable underfoot, and do require more maintenance.

### Countertops...

Granite and other natural stone have been the favored counter surfaces for some time, but do require periodic maintenance. Quartz composite, recycled glass, solid surface materials, and paperstone (made from recycled paper) are great alternative choices.



*Top: Sinks come in all shapes and sizes. Bottom: Drawer microwaves offer unique convenience.*

### Backsplash...

Lots of fun and panache can happen in the space between your counter surface and the upper cabinets. It's a small area with a potentially high visual impact. Special 3-D tiles, borders, and accents make creating a design feature challenging, due only to the sheer number of possibilities. Natural stone adds wonderful color and texture. Glass tile, metallics, porcelain, and terra cotta are fun to add to the mix. This is a great place to let your personality shine through with some creativity!

### Appliances...

Stainless steel continues to be the preferred appliance finish for consumers seeking an upscale aesthetic. However, some manufacturers are creating innovative floating glass fronts in beautiful colors. New finishes are coming into the market such as oiled bronze and titanium silver. Many appliance lines offer matching suites of products for a uniform appearance. For a seamless look, wood front panels matching adjacent cabinets make appliances almost disappear.

### LET THERE BE LIGHT

In the kitchen, lighting is all-important from a functional and a design standpoint. No lighting scheme is complete without capitalizing on natural lighting and available views to the outside. Artificial lighting plays a huge part in creating atmosphere, and is a wonderful tool for drawing attention to focal points and adding drama. A layered effect can be achieved using a combination of lighting: task, general or ambient, accent, and decorative. Task lighting is critical in prep and cooking areas, and is why hoods have built-in lighting for the cooking surface. A good solution for task lighting in prep areas is under-cabinet lighting, which illuminates the counter surface. Down lights are frequently used for inconspicuous general lighting while pendants and accent fixtures add character. Cabinets with glass doors and interior lighting add another dimension to the space. Dimmers are important in the kitchen, just as in other spaces, both from an aesthetic and energy efficiency standpoint. Plan and budget for lighting as the major design component that it is.

### LAST BUT NOT LEAST

The kitchen is a big investment and it pays to do plenty of research before committing. For construction and renovations, hire experienced, insured, and licensed contractors. Make decisions up front and, if possible, have all materials and appliances on site before work begins.

There are green initiatives in kitchen design that warrant consideration. To protect our environment and reduce storage needs, consider installing water filtration systems rather than buying bottled water. There has been recent publicity regarding possible radiation and radon emission from granite. Instances appear to be infrequent and minimal. More information is available on the web. Universal design is an important approach that integrates principles of safety and accessibility. Compare appliances and look for "Energy Star" ratings on models offering greater energy efficiency. Always maintain your appliances and surfaces according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Love your kitchen! ■