

Kitchen & Bath design news

By John Filippelli

The term "tight squeeze" is probably nothing new for kitchen and bath professionals – whether it be a galley-style kitchen or a mid-size remodel with a super-size laundry list of high-end products.

It does not take a shoe horn to make these elements fit, however. With some creativity, smaller layouts can be transformed into eye-catching designs that maximize every inch.

Christine Ringo, design consultant for Artistic Kitchen Designs, in Downers Grove, IL, explains: "With smaller kitchens, more attention must be paid to what is being stored, how it is used and who is using it, such as storing the breakfast food so that it is convenient for children's use. The key is to help the client focus on what is used most and used least and work through that issue."

Keith Steier, president of New York, NY-based Knockout Renovation Services adds: "People want to incorporate all of their wishlist items into the kitchen, no matter what the size. We have clients asking for lazy susans, large refrigerators and dishwashers and commercial-style ranges."

Erik Van Dexter, CKD, owner of Sewell, NJ-based Van Dexter Design notes: "Clients want to upgrade and go with better-performing appliances. The challenge is to create space while incorporating the appliances and maintaining adequate workspace and storage within the kitchen."

For Chris Grimm, owner of San Jose, CA-based Essential Kitchen Design, often it is a matter of overcoming original flaws in the design.

"A lot of times these [smaller kitchens] had peninsulas that were jutting out and there were tall items like refrigerators or pantries in the middle of countertop space," he says.

Grimm, who refers to himself as "a

NICE and NEAT

Designers are finding that a little ingenuity can lead to smaller kitchens full of style—and room to spare.



Photo: Courtesy of Essential Kitchen Design

Above: Keith Steier notes that, despite a lack of space with which to work, clients still expect designers to incorporate a long list of high-end products in small kitchens.

At right: A creative use of taller items, along with contrasts of color and openness, can give even the most cramped space an airy feel, says Chris Grimm.

creative problem solver," adds: "If I organize all of the tall items to one side and maximize the openness with countertops and place the appliances in a way that makes sense for the room, then [it can be fixed]."

Steier agrees: "Designers can certainly make the most of a space without any major fixture relocations or wall removals."

Indeed, smaller layouts can provide unique benefits not available to larger spaces.

Ringo explains: "For the 'serious' cook, a small kitchen can be very productive. One long wall that contains both the sink and the cooktop or range can be much more convenient than having to walk across the workspace from the cooktop to the sink – especially if you are carrying a pot of boiling water to empty into the sink."

Steier agrees: "The appliances are closer together, so if they use the kitchen a lot, there is less circling around. Plus, it is easier to maintain."

However, for Adam Smith, designer/sales for Castle Rock and Denver, CO-based JM Kitchen & Bath, regardless of how big or small a kitchen is, the successful design layout relies on one important factor. "People want to work with a designer who has the experience to make the design work for them and [the knowledge to] introduce them to the right products for the space," he says.

Van Dexter concludes: "A successful small kitchen comes down to the designer's ability,

[combined with] access to what is available in terms of products."

STORAGE SQUEEZE

Storage issues definitely take precedence in smaller kitchen layouts, designers agree.

"The storage applications are impacted more than anything in smaller kitchens," says Watson.

Ringo notes that drawers are now being used to store everything from utensils to large pots. Dishes, too, can be stored in drawers using pegboard systems, while partitions organize trays and large pans.

Van Dexter, whose firm is also a custom cabinet manufacturer, adds: "We recently created a cabinet with pull-out tall doors in the front, but on pantry boxes with full-extension runners. So, you can pull things out instead of climbing

in after them.

"It was developed out of necessity in a small space and, through the creativity of the designer and being able to make these types of items, we maximized the use of space in an elegant way," he says.

CABINET CREATIVITY

Gaining extra space doesn't always require knocking down walls.

Steier explains: "One thing we do is choose taller upper cabinets. Many older apartments have 30" upper cabinets and they were primarily used because of the price point. Many times we take advantage of the empty space by removing the soffit and bringing the cabinets up to the ceiling."

Ringo adds: "It's easy to put in cabinets along every inch, but what is more pleasing is when you can

Above: According to Steier, an effective technique for smaller kitchens is to incorporate adjustable lighting, such as dimmers and undercabinet lighting to create a more spacious feel.

combine some 'open' areas; that way there is more 'architectural interest' in the space."

Watson says: "Often, the trouble areas are in the corners and spaces that are kind of covered up."

Smith notes that European, frameless-style cabinetry is most popular in small kitchens because it offers a wider drawer.

Watson concludes: "Most of the factory cabinets have custom pieces that you can do all kinds of things – like put little legs in to bump them out."

APPLIANCE INNOVATION

In order to have a fully functioning smaller kitchen, it is imperative to have access to high-end products.

"The appliances are a big issue," says Smith. "I think integrating the right size and the right kind of appliance within the kitchen is a challenge to most designers."

"One of the things we like to do is place the appliances in the corner whenever possible," says Van Dexter. "This makes use of what would normally be a dead corner or a difficult space, and opens up premium space along the wall

Left: In order to create a light and reflective environment in a smaller space, the right color palette is essential, Steier says, noting that glass and stainless steel are great materials for small spaces because they help reflect light and visually enlarge the room.



Photo Courtesy of Scott Morris, SGM Photography



Photo: Courtesy of Essential Kitchen Design



According to Grimm, the space of a smaller kitchen can often be maximized through the effective use of countertops; particularly when paired with a well-planned approach to the appliances.

for roll-out storage drawers and various storage needs within the kitchen."

According to Steier, his firm suggests counter-depth refrigerators so as not to interfere with the limited floorspace of the kitchen.

"Smaller appliances, like microwave range hoods, are very popular for smaller kitchens because they incorporate two different appliances into one and save space," he adds.

He also says that most of his clients are opting for undercounter refrigerators as opposed to a full-size refrigerator, a drawer dishwasher, drawer microwaves or undermount sinks "because you can typically get a smaller undermount sink and have a deeper sink so you can make up in sink depth what you might be lacking in sink width."

He concludes: "If it is a 150-sq.-ft. kitchen or 200-sq.-ft. kitchen, clearly you are not going to put a 48" professional-style range there. But, with a little creativity, there are ways you can finesse it into the space."

MAXIMUM EFFECT

According to Ringo, the proper use of materials can transcend a smaller kitchen space.

"The use of different moldings and materials creates visual movement and your eye continues to move through the room; this is extremely effective in a smaller space," she says.

Steier notes that glass tiles and backsplashes can also add a unique effect to smaller spaces.

"Light glass backsplashes that reflect are great for small spaces. Glass tiles in general tend to give the kitchen a larger look, as do lighter paint colors," he says.

He continues: "It's always nice to contrast that with some dark elements as not to make it a muted kitchen."

However, he also notes that stainless steel remains quite popular, particularly in smaller designs, because of its light and reflective properties.

Grimm adds that he is even seeing a demand for dark colors

in small spaces, such as Brazilian black granite countertops and cherry cabinetry.

"Color and texture elevate the room to another dimension and create visual and tactile interest," says Ringo.

"I love color, but I especially love texture," she adds.

Grimm agrees that texture selection is key to creating a warm look in small spaces. The designer reports a demand for harvest finishes, shaker doors and butcher block tops to create a homespun, furniture-style look.

Color — especially when paired with proper lighting — can visually expand a space as well.

"When you go with a smaller space, the wrong color choice can make it look extremely small, with the caveat that in some cases, lighting can actually counterbalance or make up for that," Steier concludes.

LIGHT AND DARK

Lighting is another crucial element when designing smaller kitchens, says Ringo.

"For example, we put lights in corner base cabinets so that when you open the door, you can see what's inside," she says.

"If it is a remodel situation and they have a drop ceiling and we are able to lift that out and open it up, that makes a huge difference," Smith says.

A well-designed lighting scheme should be addressed during the design process. Smith says, "Task lighting, undercabinet lighting and pendants are all important and add to the ambience, making a significant difference."

Specifically, he notes that, when the backsplash, cabinetry and countertops are lit in the right way and the right place, the result will be the feeling of greater spaciousness overall.

Steier continues: "Adjustable lighting is something that we like to recommend in almost every space. Dimmers, as well as undercabinet lights, are something we recommend a lot as well."

Watson adds: "We do a lot of undercabinet lighting and the lighting over the top of the cabinets. A lot of times, if we have a ceiling high enough, we will do the high- and low-cabinet combination, which sets them off quite a bit with the undercabinet lighting and the overhead."

However, Van Dexter offers this caveat: "Lighting is important, but if you are over budget, then lighting is usually the first thing to go on the chopping block."

PROJECT HIDEAWAY

For Ringo, one particular small kitchen design of hers stands out.

"We were successful in convincing our clients to take down a wall that enclosed their kitchen in their narrow town home. The area opened up the kitchen to the walkway and the dining area. The clients were losing the upper cabinets along the eliminated wall, but we were able to elongate the new island as well as capture a small area in the dining area," she says.

"The end result was a much more open, functional space with better storage for the client," she continues.

Grimm adds: "Instead of putting in full-size nooks, I'm using smaller tables such as bistro tables, and it seems to create places for people who want to have an eat-in area. It makes it a little more efficient than full-scale, five-foot-diameter kitchen nooks."

Smith recounts space solutions that were key to some recent projects: "The first kitchen had double-stacked wall cabinets with glass doors and some open cabinets for display, an integrated Sub-Zero with freezer drawers, a Magic Corner two-piece swing/pull-out to the left of the range, a three-tier spice pull-out next to the Wolf Dual Fuel oven range, and a pull-out double trash cabinet next to the sink."

He adds: "Each base cabinet with doors had two full-extension roll-out trays. The right of the range had a super lazy susan and no pole to obstruct the access for storage."

Other features included a tray divider section for cookie sheets, with all drawers in cabinetry featuring pull-out full extension, for full access and soft close.

He continues: "The other project has a raised bar, where one section of the kitchen is open. So, with the two levels, it offers a nice way of hiding an area."

Ringo concludes: "Whether it is a small or large space, the most important part of the process is the design. Working with the clients to discover and meet their needs doesn't happen by luck; it happens through [meticulous] planning and design."

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