

Kitchen for a Houseful

of Cooks

BY DAVID EDRINGTON

When a family likes to prepare meals together, happiness is having the space to work without getting in one another's way

Have you ever been cooking a meal for friends and had one of them ask, "What can we do to help?" It's a wonderful offer, and a chance for many hands to take pleasure in bringing a meal to the table. But it works only if there is room for several cooks to work without bumping into one other, preferably in a grouping that encourages conversation and eye contact.

Convivial and distinct kitchen workspaces were high on the list of priorities when I started working with Ken and Cathy on the design of their new house on the outskirts of Eugene, Ore. They have two boys and lots of friends, all of whom like to cook—sometimes all at once. And when they aren't in the kitchen, the whole family likes to be near it. This notion became a guiding principle that governed the entire plan of the house.

Kitchen at the crossroads

The house has two main pathways that intersect right next to the kitchen. This central location ties the kitchen to the public parts of the house—the family room and dining room—without putting any circulation through it. The kitchen bumps out 8 ft. from the eastern wall of the house, allowing windows that face three points of the compass.

In my experience, nothing does more for the quality of a space than lots of beautiful, well-placed wood windows. In this kitchen, the window next to the stove faces north toward the driveway and the path to the house, giving anybody in the kitchen a clear view of arriving visitors. On the opposite wall, the window over the cleanup sink opens onto the terrace, serving as a pass-through for ingredients heading to the grill. The east-facing windows provide plenty of daylight, especially in the morning, and a view of the hills. At 9 ft. 4 in., the ceiling is in scale with the rest of the room.

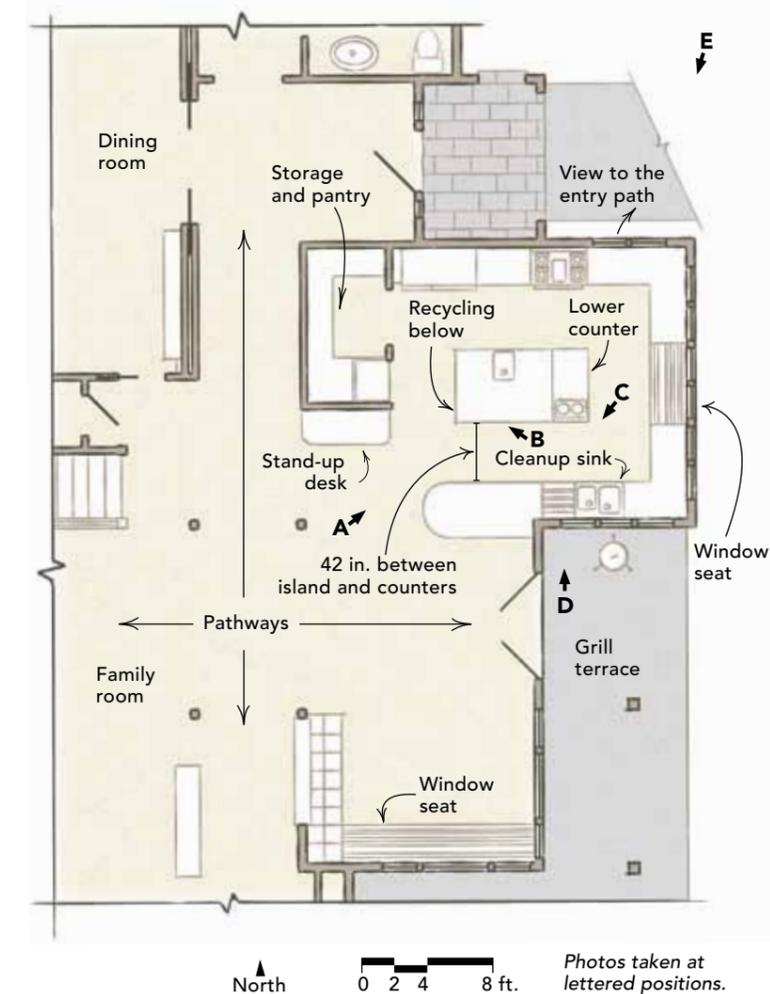
The pantry is crucial to the plan

Lots of windows are delightful, but there's a trade-off: The area for upper cabinets is reduced. To make up for this loss of storage space, we increased the pantry area. Food storage

Plenty of places to work, sit, or do both. Thanks to a generous island, cooks can work on opposite sides without having to worry about taking up too much space. Between the island and the wall counters, 42-in.-wide corridors allow enough room for cooks to pass by one another easily. Photo taken at A on floor plan.

This kitchen is a destination

Placed at the heart of family activities and at the intersection of major paths through the house, the kitchen invites you to be sociable, even if you're in an adjacent space. It helps to connect the family to important outdoor areas near the house as well as to the main entry path. At the same time, its working areas are uninterrupted by household circulation.



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doesn't need views or daylight, so we put the refrigerator and pantry in the western corner of the kitchen. With all the food storage concentrated in one corner, rounding up ingredients is more efficient.

We also made extensive use of large drawers with low sides for storage of plates, bowls, and cooking equipment. Like many of my clients, Ken and Cathy prefer lifting dishes out of a drawer close to counter height rather than reaching up and across a countertop to pull them off a shelf in an upper cabinet.

Glassware, on the other hand, stores better on a shelf. Cups, mugs, tumblers, and wineglasses are housed in a see-through cabinet that comes all the way down to the countertop and is handy to both the dishwasher and the dining table. Glass doors on each side of the cabinet allow easy access and a good view of what amounts to a dazzling showcase of functional glass sculpture.

The only other upper cabinet in the kitchen is above the coffee counter, between the stove and the refrigerator. Ken and Cathy keep it stocked with beans, filters, and cups.

Two-level island serves many functions

At 36 in. high, the maple-topped portion of the island is suitable for most food preparation. It's saturated with food-grade oil, and you could chop on it, but so far Ken and Cathy have preferred cutting boards. The stainless-steel prep sink, with its wrist-operated lever, is the place to rinse ingredients or to fill the teakettle (a pot-filler faucet above the stove handles the high-volume water chores).

The cabinet next to the prep sink contains a pop-up shelf for the food processor. Above it, the maple top overhangs enough to make a place to clamp the pasta machine. The cabinets along the south side of the island, opposite the cleanup sink, contain bins for recycling and compost.

Topped with granite, the east end of the island is 32 in. high. Ken makes pasta on this counter, where he really can lean into the dough as he kneads it to the right consistency. The lower counter also contains

Separate storage and cleanup centers

Canned goods, cereals, breads, and so forth are all stored in the walk-in pantry (above), which includes a pass-through beneath the microwave for staging ingredients. Big drawers for plates, bowls, and flatware are within easy reach of the dishwasher (left). Above them, a display cabinet with doors on both sides houses the tumblers and stemware. Photos taken at B and C on floor plan.



Make room for windows

Bumping out the kitchen 8 ft. from the main wall allowed windows on three sides. Transom windows along the east wall let in an extra measure of light and views. Below them, a window seat is a favorite spot for kids and guests alike. Photos taken at D and E on floor plan.



a two-burner infrared cooktop. It's a great place to make sauces or to allow something to simmer slowly out of the way of the main range. It's also ideal for use by the children as they begin learning how to cook.

A stand-up command center and places to sit

Cathy keeps track of appointments on a big calendar that never leaves the top of her command center, a stand-up desk at the entrance to the kitchen. That's also the place where cell phones are recharged, answering machines answer, and everybody leaves notes for everybody else (photo facing page; for another view of this workstation, see p. 63).

If a kitchen is generous and the workspaces well provided for, then it's time to make a

comfortable place to sit so that the cook can have some company. The west side of the island is one such place. With room for a couple of stools, this is the place to sit, chat with the cook, pitch in, or all three. This spot is also where the children go when they buzz through and take over the kitchen. And the children often take over the kitchen.

In an old-fashioned farmhouse kitchen, the sit-further-down place might have been a comfortable rocking chair by the fire. In this kitchen, it's a window seat, where a slightly lower windowsill and some soft cushions invite you to lean back, relax, and stay awhile. □

David Edrington is an architect in Eugene, Ore. Photos by Charles Miller.

SOURCES

Faucets Grohe, Ladylux models 33 737 and 33 758; 630-582-7711; www.grohe.com

Integral-drainboard sink Elkay, model ILFGR5422L 630-572-3192; www.elkay.com

Island cooktop Gaggenau, VC 230; 800-828-9165; www.gaggenau.com

Windows Northwest Door & Sash; 541-744-0150; www.northwestdoorandsash.com