



BUILDING A *Livable Kitchen*

Design by Janelle Helms, Karr Bick
Photo by Lisa Mitchell

By Ashley Klein

How design experts
balance practicality
and aesthetics in
the kitchen

Certain areas in the home can function well with a few impractical pieces thrown into the mix – fragile antiques, for example, or an accent chair that’s rarely used but still ties the room together. The kitchen, however, is one space that demands pragmatism and prettiness in tandem, and a savvy interior designer knows how to make that happen.

Practical matters

“When designing a kitchen, we always ask our clients how they use their current space,” says Amy Studebaker, owner and principal designer at Amy Studebaker Design. “Do they use their kitchen as an entertaining space or more of a cooking and staging area? Is a lot of storage needed for pots, pans, dishes, etc.? Is this a room that will see a lot of foot traffic with kids and pets? Once we figure out how our clients live, we can then design a space that can be functional for everyday life while still being a gorgeous kitchen that was thoughtfully designed.”

Similarly, aesthetic considerations are second – though not

secondary – in the design process for Jenny Rausch, co-owner and kitchen and bath designer at Karr Bick.

“We always start with the functional part of the layout; we focus on space planning, and once that is perfect, we layer in the design elements,” she says. “We start with how the client will use the space and what works and doesn’t work for them in their current space. Do you recycle? How many kids do you have? Do you go to Sam’s and stock up, or do you go to the grocery store often and buy fresh? Stuff like that. Then, it’s all about the show-stopping materials!”

Sometimes, a designer can offer a fresh set of eyes to identify inefficiencies that the client may not notice on their own. Anne Boedges, president and designer at Anne Marie Design Studio, says: “People can get so used to their existing kitchen that they don’t even realize that the function is horrific and they’re taking several steps to do something very simple. I want to make the best functionality specifically for that homeowner and their family ... Then I look at the cosmetics of it – the ‘jewelry.’ I always say, I can make anything look pretty.”

Functionality involves more than just improving organization and offering ample storage space. For example, Boedges emphasizes the need to create ease of movement around the room, especially when entertaining.



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Design by Anne Marie Design Studio
Photo by Nicole Migel Photography

"The whole goal is to make [the household] want to gather here, whether it's with each other, grandparents who come over often or friends who come over all the time," she says. "We need to create good seating places for people to come hang out and not have to walk in your workspace when you're trying to cook and clean and move from the trash can to the sink to the range. We want the workflow to be separate."

In the details

For Studebaker, perfecting both form and function means customizing the design every step of the way: "Every single detail is important to us when designing a kitchen. Whether it's cabinet hardware, countertops or ranges, each design element needs to work together to feel cohesive, functional and beautiful."

In a recent project, Studebaker brought in personality – and practicality – when installing a peninsula with barstool seating and an eye-catching island as the room's centerpiece.

"I view any kitchen that we design as an opportunity to create a space that will see a lot of use but can still reflect the personality of the homeowners," she says. "For this particular kitchen, the homeowners wanted to add a peninsula in addition to the center island. Normally, we would just focus on the island and making sure that it was large enough and had plenty of storage. Because we knew we were adding a peninsula, we were able to have fun designing the island, allowing it to act more as a furniture

piece with unique design details."

Playing with depths and textures is one of Boedges' signature touches, allowing her to add character to the design through subtle variations in dynamics.

"The first thing that I always think about is the cabinetry of the space. It sounds silly, but this is really what makes it – all these little bitty details. For example, I almost never do a whole entire kitchen where everything is just the exact same depth. I always bump things in and out across the plane; that way you see a change in depth, like a change in the profile of the crown molding, or in your countertop or at the base molding at the bottom.

"Details like that make a space feel more expensive, more luxurious or more creative. Maybe adding a light fixture where you normally wouldn't or sconces around a window in the kitchen. I want to have character even if it's a white kitchen ... I want your eye to visually be engaged and enjoy something about the space that you can't really put your finger on."

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