



Island Living

What every homeowner needs to know about today's most popular kitchen built-in.
by Leslie Plummer Clagett

No man is an island—or so it is said—but most people want one in their kitchen. Fully 80 percent of home buyers consider a kitchen island desirable or essential, according to a National Association of Home Builders survey. Islands not only provide storage and work space but they can also make a strong visual focal point as you'll see from this range of configurations beyond the basic box in the center of the room.

The key to an island that meets your needs is understanding how the many designs you can choose from work with the realities of your kitchen. Here we present advice from top kitchen designers, along with six custom islands that lay out a few of the possibilities. We'll also look at a fully equipped island you can order through an architect or designer, as well as how to deal with venting an island sink or cooktop.

Most of the islands featured were designed and built as part of a whole-kitchen remodel. For \$600, you can get a serviceable but bare-bones island, built from stock kitchen cabinetry and topped with laminate. Although that price can easily climb into the thousands with a sink or cooktop, you can keep the project within reach by sticking with affordable materials and narrowing your wish list to the features you want most. **Where to Put It**



Photo by: David Livingston

The middle of the kitchen is the traditional spot for an island. A central island anchors the room and organizes the work flow while providing accessible counter space from all directions. It's also your only option in an enclosed kitchen, because the center is the only place where an island won't block work centers and interfere with traffic.

A perimeter island is better for an open or semiopen floor plan, in which it can connect spaces as well as separate them. In open or semiopen kitchens—particularly those without windows—people tend to stand at the island facing the adjoining area. That's especially true if a sink or cooktop is installed on the island and oriented to the "public" side of the space.

The social aspect of an island layout can be as crucial as its practical side, says Krikor Halajian, a kitchen designer in San Rafael, California. "An efficient, properly located island helps keep stress levels down by giving everyone who uses the kitchen—cooks and guests—their own space." Getting an accurate perspective on how you use the space and how the room works functionally and socially can be a challenge. **Choosing Size and Shape**



Photo by: David Livingston

Practical and esthetic concerns converge when it comes to determining the size and proportion of the island to the kitchen. Too large, and the island becomes a physical and visual obstacle, crowding the kitchen instead of centralizing it. Too small, and it won't be useful; an island is no good if it's out of arm's reach when you need it.

There are no set guidelines for sizing an island, but there are a few rules for the spaces around it. A designer figures out the work- and walk-aisle clearances, and those dimensions dictate plans for the structure.

- Designers suggest that work aisles facing a range, refrigerator or other appliance be 42 in. for a single chef and 48 in. if there are two cooks in the household. These standards help keep cooks from colliding and prevent appliance or cabinet doors on an island from banging into the ones opposite them when open. The pros also stipulate the island surface provide at least 36 in. of continuous countertop for each cook.
- Like the location of an island, its shape is often determined by the surrounding area. The basic four-sided island is the workhorse configuration most popular in closed floor plans. For open rooms, angular islands—think L, Y, U or V shapes—act as a wall delineating the kitchen without totally blocking it off. While these multifaceted designs cost more to build, they typically offer more places

for shelves, drawers, wine racks, towel bars, pullout bins and other amenities, as well as more space for appliances.

This all-in-one stainless-steel unit was introduced by bulthaup, a German manufacturer, in 1989 as the first ready-to-install kitchen island. With a few design tweaks along the way, it has become a modern classic as the functional heart of a modular kitchen.

Its \$11,000 price tag includes a four-burner glass ceramic cooktop, a fitted cutlery drawer and two sinks—one deep for washing dishes and filling pots, one shallow for spraying and draining tasks. The shallow basin adds work space by trading depth for surface area. A recessed track houses sliding cutting boards and a slicer/ grater encircles the sinks. Drainage and power connections are integral—just hook up the lines and plug in the cooktop.

Maximizing the space



Photo by: David Livingston

An island presents an ideal opportunity to develop an often-neglected dimension of kitchen design: the space directly over it. In schemes where it won't obstruct the sight line, this can add both interest and function to the room. Examples include a hanging pot rack, shelves and an eye-catching pendant light fixture. You'll also find a wide range of stylish, sculptural range hoods for islands with nondowndraft cooktops.

The growing trend toward linking the kitchen and family room has also made more and more islands perform dual functions. Cabinets or shelves on the side of the island facing away from the kitchen are likely to hold a TV/VCR setup. If this will be the case in your home, take equipment dimensions into account when planning your kitchen island.

Another current fashion in the kitchen is to dress up cabinetry as furniture. Adorned with moldings, trims, brackets and footed bases, islands are often presented as eclectic, one-of-a-kind pieces rather than a match for the cabinets.

So if you're longing for an island lifestyle, look for inspiration as well as solid information in the rooms featured here. [Six Custom Islands](#)

Dual Islands



Photo by: David Livingston

This novel approach is for kitchens where a single central island would block access to a point on the work triangle. It's also another example of the growing cabinetry-as-furniture trend. In this kitchen, designer Anita Trullinger, of Pennington, New Jersey, employed a pair of slender, parallel table-islands to maximize counter space while creating an open corridor between work centers that keeps cross-traffic at bay.

On the Level

Minneapolis-based designer Connie Gustafson created this two-level, seven-sided island as the hub of three distinct spaces: the kitchen, a breakfast room and what Gustafson calls a social gathering area that adjoins the dining room. The island, split more or less lengthwise into heights of 36 and 42 in., can accommodate multiple purposes simultaneously, thanks to the stepped kasota-stone surfaces. On the kitchen side, the standard-height, extra-deep counter is a dedicated workstation—small appliances plug into a pair of four-plex outlets on the backsplash, which also shields clutter from view. The taller tier runs along the outer edge of the island. Knee space is carved out under half of it so it becomes a comfortable eating bar, while the other half conceals a recycling center.

Cooktop



Photo by: David Livingston

An island with a cooktop can be a handy arrangement for inward-looking kitchens (and outgoing chefs). The copper ventilation hood—expensive but beautiful—draws attention to the coffered ceiling, a look developed to hide an existing structural beam in this renovated Victorian. Designer Lou Ann Bauer achieved an updated period feeling with these details and warm, earthy colors that set off the white cabinets. A single slab of granite not only creates a heat-resistant resting place for hot pots and pans but it also meets the recommended minimum counter dimensions of 9 in. on one side of the cooktop and 15 in. on the other without seams.

Second Sink

According to the National Kitchen & Bath Association, an industry trade group in Hackettstown, New Jersey, one-third of homes remodeled or newly built in the past two years feature kitchens with more than one sink. Whether you opt for a full-size, fully

equipped sink or a vegetable basin on the island depends on your cooking habits. "An efficiently functioning kitchen was important to this homeowner—she's a serious cook who entertains a lot," says designer Dave McFadden, of Past Basket in Geneva, Illinois, who organized the room into two major task zones. "The prep area consists of the refrigerator, the cooktop and the small sink on the island, while cleanup centers around the main sink and the dishwashers." McFadden wanted the island to have a look distinct from the cabinetry, so he gave it a limed-oak finish and highlighted with overhead soffit lighting.

Defining Space



Photo by: David Livingston

By breaking down the walls that shut this kitchen off from the rest of the house, San Francisco-based designer Lou Ann Bauer tapped into another trend in kitchen design. Nearly 80 percent of home buyers prefer kitchens that are completely or partially open, using a half-wall. Angling the island gave form to the space without enclosing it; it now defines the way to the garage and the dining room while freeing up the view to the family room and garden. A structural column that runs through one end of the island was sheathed in wood, and the trim at the top of it was stained with a red aniline dye. The island houses a dishwasher and a 30-in. undercounter oven along with the sink.

Storage and More

The simplest islands provide storage, but they can do much more. As part of this remodel, the wall that divided the formal dining area and living room—and which had been home to the china cabinet—was removed. Designer Krikor Halajian created a new transition between the working kitchen and family room by replacing the display/storage space with a trio of glass-door cabinets that pull the eye from the front of the space through to the back. As a result, this maple island with a whitewashed, pearlescent finish becomes a part of the room design. "On evenings when the homeowners entertain they turn the kitchen lights off and keep the cabinet lights on, but dimmed," Halajian explains. "The kitchen disappears and the glass collection takes center stage." **How to Vent Your Island**



One of the thorniest problems encountered with islands that incorporate sinks or cooktops is how to vent them. Each case is different. Plumbing fixtures like sinks have to be vented through the roof to keep harmful gasses from building up. Cooktops are vented to draw off moisture, grease and odor-laden air when cooking. Both typically make use of walls or upper cabinets to conceal piping. Since that's not an option with islands, this venting begins its journey headed south.

Running venting below the floor is easy in homes with a basement or crawl space—everything is run between the floor joists (it's particularly easy if the joists run "the right direction"). But it gets trickier with a concrete slab: A trench must be jackhammered to run the new pipes.

Whichever floor you have, here are some of the details on both types of island venting:



Sink smarts. Although island plumbing eventually connects to a vent stack that penetrates the roof, most building codes require a high venting loop within the base cabinet. This drawing is based on requirements in the National Plumbing Codes Handbook.

- Use 1 1/2-in. PVC pipe in the vent loop as well as to the main drain line.
- Plan drawers and cabinet space around the plumbing, and make sure there's room to get at the pipes for repairs.

Cooktop concerns. There are two choices for venting an island cooktop: overhead vents, which are very expensive, and downdraft vents, which are featured in many cooktops designed for islands.

- Downdraft ventilators should be routed to the nearest exterior wall. Keep the duct run as short and straight as possible. And follow the manufacturer's restrictions on installation, or you might void the cooktop warranty.
- Ductwork for a downdraft system has longer runs and is forced to make more turns than the ductwork for a hood. Stay away from flexible ducting because its spiral ribs grab grease and can inhibit proper air movement on long runs. Use straight-wall galvanized-steel or stainless-steel ducting, except in concrete, where PVC is the best choice.

Resources

100 Great Ideas for Islands

by Annette DePaape
Miller Freeman Books, San Francisco, CA
1995

This tremendous resource for ideas, features simple line drawings that convey design essentials while allowing readers to personalize their island. Floor plans and dimensions are provided for each project, and can be copied or adapted for construction. An index organized by features (pot racks, vegetable bins, wine racks and the like) as well as by

island size and configuration is an added plus.

Kitchen designers:

Lou Ann Bauer, ASID
239 Broderick St., Dept. San Francisco, CA 94117
www.bauerdesign.com
415/621-7262

Classic Cabinetry
Anita Trullinger
10 Meadow Ln.,
Pennington, NJ 08534
609/737-0820

Kitchens & More
Rosemarie and Krikor Halajian, CKD
4178 Redwood Hwy.,
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Past Basket
310 Campbell St., Dept. TH1198
Geneva, IL 60134
630/208-1011
and 765 Woodlake Rd.,
Kohler, WI 53044
920/459 9976

Sawhill Custom Kitchens & Design
Connie Gustafson, CKD
Minneapolis, MN
612/338-3991

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