

No more chaotic kitchen

Kitchens are the family's hub of activity. Get it organized to keep life from grinding to a halt

BY JEFF SCHNAUFER, CTW FEATURES APRIL 27, 2013

If the kitchen is the most-used room in the house, doesn't it make sense that it should be the most organized? Yet many kitchens exist in an organizational no man's land, where a mish-mash of storage functions often creates more questions than answers: such as, "Hey, where's the can opener?"

If there's a key to making kitchens more organized, it may come in one word: versatility.

In the book *The Organized Kitchen* (Adams Media, 2012), author Brette Sember writes that organizing a kitchen can save time, money and sanity. "I like storage that can be versatile," she said. That means storage should accommodate all the big and little things found in the kitchen - from tiny teaspoons to a jumbo-sized wok. It should adapt to the ever-changing needs of the family that uses it.

KraftMaid, a custom cabinet company, recently commissioned a study focused on generational differences in kitchen use that found some common themes.

"We found that homeowners want more storage in a clean design style," said Sarah Reep, the company's director of design relation and education.

Increasingly, people are looking for storage solutions that are accessible, safe and aesthetically pleasing.

PULLING OFF PULL-OUTS

Across the board, experts recommend pull-out cabinets for spaces big and small, high and low. Sember recommends slim pull-out cabinets that save space but can hold kitchen necessities. "This kind of storage space works for spices, medications, cooking oils, vinegars, flavoured salts, honey and much more," she said.

Alison Victoria, interior designer and host of DIY Network's *Kitchen Crashers*, agrees. The pull-out construction makes it easier to reach items stored at the back of the cabinet. "Pull-out spice drawers are essential for any kitchen," Victoria added. "I was so sick of trying to dig and find things in my upper cabinets and this was a quick fix."

She also favours roll-out shelves, as well as replacing "the common lower cabinets with large pull-out drawers for easy access for large pots, pans and cooking sheets."

Reep said that KraftMaid's tiered pan-and-lid storage pullout is popular for keeping the bulky items organized and easy to retrieve.

"It's very tidy," Reep said. "Sometimes kitchens aren't really large and using your space vertically is a

way to use more of the cabinet effectively."

GET ATTACHED

It helps to condense a kitchen by choosing storage products that attach and fit easily together. Sember suggests using in-drawer butcher blocks or butcher blocks that attach to the side of a cabinet to keep parts of the counter space stashed away.

She also recommends baskets/containers that clip onto the front of pantry shelf and glass food storage containers designed to fit together or stack. The former adds storage space while the latter discourages precarious stacking that could lead to an even bigger mess.

Another smart solution is to use food storage containers designed to hold specific things like cupcakes and deviled eggs, Sember said. These will keep these foods from getting damaged when someone tries to cram a few extra Lunchables in the fridge. Customized food storage has gotten steadily more popular in recent years, both for its usefulness and typically colourful presentation.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

If the kitchen is the hub of family activity, then it must accommodate the needs of everyone in the family, including the young and the old.

"When it comes to elderly clients, I make sure that everything is at arm's length," Victoria said.

"Locating all essential appliances in a seamless layout is what matters most. Centre islands for prep with the sink and fridge on the left and right with the stove behind is ideal."

Sember also cautions against using upper cabinet shelves. "This may mean bringing in an additional freestanding cabinet. The lowest shelves of bottom cabinets are also problematic, so installing pull-out drawers there can help," she said.

As for appliances, Victoria recommends side-by-side refrigerators with water and ice dispensers, "so [elderly clients] aren't bending over to find the things they need."

For children, Sember said, "the first consideration is safety. The second consideration is making a kitchen child-friendly with the addition of a box of children's cookware, stepstool and child-appropriate cooking activities."

Checking the safety of all cabinets and making sure cutlery and any other dangerous utensils are out of reach is essential, Victoria added.

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SOME CHEAP TWEAKS

While achieving the perfectly organized kitchen might take some heavy investment, Brette Sember, author of *The Organized Kitchen*, (Adams Media, 2012) said that "the key is not to spring for the

latest, greatest organizational products." Instead, Sember said, "look for cheap ways to organize that are not so highly specialized. You can do an awful lot with drawer dividers, metal standing shelves added to existing shelves and plastic organizer boxes."

DIY enthusiasts can repurpose things like kitchen towel racks on the back of doors to hold pot lids and baking sheets stacked on top of glassware for additional shelving.

Another low-cost solution is a pot rack, but it's not for everyone, warns Alison Victoria of DIY Network's Kitchen Crashers. She said, "Make sure your kitchen space is open and airy, and that your cooktop is not directly below the pot rack."

As for hard-to-reach areas, "There is no better solution for a corner cabinet than a lazy Susan," said cabinet design consultant Dara Barber. "There are tons of other pull-out tray systems on the market, but I feel like there is so much mechanism involved that it just gets in the way of the storage. Who wants two extra steps to pull out their storage when you can just push through the lazy Susan and find what you need?" - Jeff Schnauffer

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