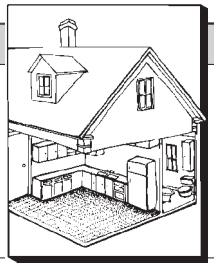

Discover An Island

by Patrick J. Galvin

The use of islands in kitchen design has become so popular that some consumer magazines now refer to "island" kitchens, as though this were one of the basic conformations, such as a "U" or "L" shape.

This might tempt builders—skilled in houses but not necessarily in kitchens—to put islands where they don't belong, or even where they don't fit.

Kitchen islands can be fine for design impact, but they should be thought of first as functional. The *functional* purpose of an island is to achieve a work triangle of less than 23 feet; that is, the distance from the center of the sink to the center of the range to the center of the refrigerator, and back to the center of the sink. A work triangle of between 12 and 23 feet is most efficient for work and movement in any kitchen.

An island can be a handy device for establishing a work triangle when the room is too big for an efficient triangle in an L or U shape. It is also a handy place to locate some essential part of the kitchen when the goal is a kitchen open to other living space. In such cases it is common to place the cooktop or sink (with dishwasher) in the island, plus some sort of eating counter outside the kitchen work area.

In any such installation, the planner must allow enough clearance to get around the island. There should be a minimum of 42 inches from any corner of the island to the nearest point of the kitchen proper, but 48 inches is better. And in planning this clearance it is important to note the door swings of appliances. An open dishwasher or oven door should not block traffic.

The island is normally 36 inches high, which allows for a standard range or dishwasher, and matches the rest of the kitchen. An added eating counter, however, is often raised 6 to 9 inches or lowered 6 inches. This is usually for comfort or design, but it also helps protect a bruncher from spatter or splatter from sink or cooktop. If there's no difference in height, it is advisable to add a low divider between appliances and the eating counter for this protection.

The island also should be 26 to 44 inches from the far wall—away from the kitchen—to allow for seating space and room to walk behind the seating. Its corners should be radiused to protect hips and hands from bruises.

In new-home kitchens, a study of the floor plan will make it obvious whether there is any need for an island for functional reasons. It will also show dimension limitations and the size the island can be. When the kitchen is carefully thought-out in the design stage, it is easy to provide plumbing and wiring to the island. Even if no appliance is included, this is a good time to think of convenience outlets, which can be a pleasant surprise to a prospective buyer.

Remodelers, however, are constrained by existing walls and, to some extent, existing plumbing and wiring. And the customer in a kitchen-remodeling job is often not the least of the problems. Some customers who have seen an island in a magazine—or in a friend's house—will insist on one whether it is needed or not, or whether there is even space for it. The floor-plan drawing should be enough to prove the point, but sometimes the customer won't accept that.

The easy answer is to make a simple template out of cardboard in the dimensions the customer demands. Place it on the floor. A little walking around can prove to a customer that the proposed island will or will not fit.

But when islands can be fitted in—and especially when they can solve a functional problem or fulfill a functional purpose in addition to their aesthetic value—they can add a lot to the salability of a house. ■

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