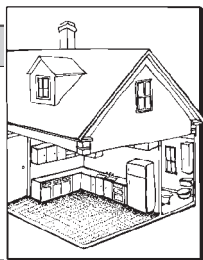


# Appliance Placement For Modern Times

by Nancy Thomas



Over the past century homemakers' lives have gone through many changes. Efficient and time-saving appliances, and packaged foods, freed homemakers from tasks which had consumed most of their time. Many homemakers found themselves mass producing food, clothing, and other goods in factories rather than working at home.

Today, more than 60 percent of women work outside the home. Daily cooking has been replaced by "heating up" left-overs, packaged foods, or deli take-outs. Sales of take-out foods is expected to skyrocket to \$7 billion by 1990. For those who have adopted this new concept in cooking, the microwave has become essential. Rarely found in homes only fifteen years ago, the microwave is now sometimes being specified in duplicate for large functional kitchens. Microwave cooking has changed the traffic and food-flow patterns in the kitchen.

## The Food/Mix Center

Today, refrigerators are more compact, and can be fitted into streamlined spaces. Freezers can be separated from the basic work area, and in some cases, small under-counter refrigerators can be used, singly or in tandem. This is particularly useful in "open-space" designs with lots of glass and little usable interior wall space.

The microwave is usually installed near the refrigerator, because it is more often used to reheat or defrost than to actually do the original cooking. For those who do use the microwave as a true cooking appliance, you may prefer to incorporate it into the cooking center (see section on "cooking center"), singly, or as a duplicate appliance. Regarding the actual placement of the microwave, kitchen industry standards indicate that the best location for the top of the microwave is approximately 3 inches below the user's height. In fact, the ideal location of the microwave is at counter height, exactly where we seem to try to eliminate its presence because it occupies so much counter space. There are several things to consider when placing the microwave: Microwave doors hinge left, and should have counter space to the right. Don't place them in a corner where removing food would cause the same grief and frustration as an inappropriately hinged refrigerator. There are a few microwaves that hinge down, and these might be a solution for the area that has no alternate position for the microwave.

When considering placing a microwave in a base cabinet, remember the controls are almost all placed in a vertical position and require close scrutiny, making them difficult to use at this height. If children are to use this item, the location might be appropriate. But

children do grow, and a good microwave might fast outgrow its usefulness in this location!

When looking to placement of the microwave over a range, in combination with a hood, consider the safety hazards, as well as the restrictions for large pots on back burners for most such arrangements. Children, in particular, but adults as well, will have difficulty getting hot items out of a microwave, the lower shelf of which might be 66 to 69 inches from the floor. Not only is there a considerable reach involved, but that reach is over a range that could be turned on and could cause burns, grease splatters, spillages, and many other undesirable occurrences.

Ideally, place the microwave at approximate counter height, on the counter, in a microwave cabinet, or in an oven cabinet. Some designers like to put a drawer below the microwave for potholders or utensils, or a pull-out shelf or butcher block on which to rest hot pots. Make sure there is handy counter space immediately adjacent to the microwave. If you are using the microwave cabinets that hang lower than normal kitchen wall cabinets, remember to explain to the client that this is landing space, and storage area for other low appliances. It will not be particularly efficient as an actual workspace, since the dimension from counter to cabinet is only nine to twelve inches high. If the backsplash area were to decrease beyond that, you might consider a drawer, or spice shelf, for the space will be too awkward for other uses.

There may be need in the food/mix center for a second sink, for the use of second or assistant cooks. In addition, think through where all the mixing equipment will be stored. It is best stored where it is used. Appliance garages, mixer lifts, roll-out shelves, and so forth are often handy ways to store all the processors, blenders, and gadgets that make our lives more complicated but more efficient. Back to the microwave! There are a host of dishes and storage containers, plastic wraps, and so on that are tied to the use of the microwave. These items, too, must be stored nearby for easy access and use.

## Cleanup Center

The sink or cleanup center, while working in conjunction with the other work centers, has its own particular need requirements. Well beyond the inclusion of running water and a sink, this center may include any of a wide assortment of sinks, with a variety of specialized designs. In addition, there are dishwashers, trash compactors, disposals, soap dispensers, and "instant hots," to name a few of the most common appliances to be included. Space limitations require that we look carefully for the most efficient sink option. The one-and-

a-half bowl has accommodated pan cleansing in a way that the standard double sink did not. Further improvements have led to full-depth sinks by off-centering the faucet. It is wise to remember that most homeowners no longer wash dishes, and do not need a second sink in this location; perhaps a more functional second sink should be located in the mix area, as mentioned earlier.

Dishwashers now come in a variety of sizes to accommodate those special needs. Try one under a sink, or use an 18-inch rather than a 24-inch model for tight areas. One manufacturer offers a single-unit dishwasher, cooktop, and oven combination that may be perfect for an apartment, in-law unit, or beach cottage.

Sinks do not have to be centered under the window. Move them to islands, or off-center them, or angle them into corners. Including much larger windows and more open spaces and islands has meant rethinking the way we organize kitchens and storage. However, the basic guidelines remain the same. For example, where should you store glasses and dishes previously kept near the sink? If you're using island configurations or window walls that eliminate the possibility of wall cabinets, try roll-out shelves with rubber mats to prevent dishes from moving about. Or suggest that dishes be stored closer to the table area. This will be equally as efficient and convenient as storing them at the sink/dishwasher area. And, realistically—how many people unload their dishwasher after each cleaning cycle? So many of us just go from dishwasher to table! But that doesn't mean we can avoid the problem; seek alternate areas to accomplish the task. Think through the operations and tasks performed to discern the best locations of the various dishes.

## Cooking Center

The cooking center is one of the fastest changing areas in the kitchen today. In the past, a range sufficed; this was then replaced by separate oven and cooktop. In spite of some drawbacks, this separation brought about two positive effects. First of all, the less used oven could be removed from the workspace, freeing up the area for storage and workspace. Secondly, the cooktop could be moved about the room more easily, and the height of the work counter adjusted to the requirements of the cook. With the advent of downdraft systems of venting, the cooktop could be rethought even further. Cooktops are not only vented in a variety of ways, but are becoming more attractive as engineers and designers coordinate their efforts.

The homeowner is faced with a multitude of cooking methods, from gas, to electric-coil burners, to cast-iron burners, glass-top cookers, halogen-light hobs, rectangular burners, ovens that offer conventional baking in combination with microwave cooking, or convection cooking, broiling, and so many other varieties. Woks and grills, fryers, griddles and commercial-appearing ranges are widely available.

Care must be taken in the placement of any cooktop, such that it meets all code requirements, and does not create potential splattering or

spillage problems. Real commercial installations are not advisable, since they normally do not meet code outside the confines of a true restaurant setup. Viking and Wolf are now producing "commercial" ranges fully insulated for residential use—without firewalls, stainless-steel cabinets, and the many other requirements of a commercial installation.

One final note, as we look to the broad spectrum of appliances: Manufacturers have begun responding to the need for quieter operation of all appliances. Now that this space is open to the rest of the house, the occupants are exposed to a beehive of activity with whirring and buzzing, churning and chopping, popping and swishing! Keep this potential for noise and confusion in mind when planning a kitchen. ■

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