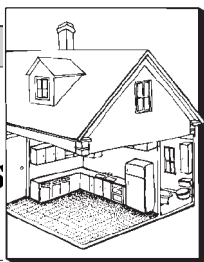


Room to Move: Kitchen Clearances

by Nancy Thomas



Cozy kitchens are warm and charming, and evoke emotional responses similar to those elicited by a crackling fire in mid-winter. But coziness is not always welcome; particularly if it means opening the dishwasher into someone's hind quarters or two people colliding while trying to reach a pot that's boiling over. These sort of problems arise when we fail to follow the fundamental rules of layout and clearances. This month, we'll look at the basic clearances to keep in mind when designing a kitchen.

First, let's look at counter surface areas. In general, a range or cooktop should have at least 12 inches of counter on each side. This is mainly for safety: a place to accommodate pot handles protruding from the cooktop. When the range is located in an island or peninsula, we must also remember to leave a sufficient width of counter behind the range to serve as a splash area and a barrier against burns. It can also serve as a deeper snack counter. A separate wall oven should have 18 inches of counter space for a landing area, but this needn't be directly adjacent, as long as it's within one step—for example, on an island or peninsula.

The sink area needs at least 24 inches of counter on the dishwasher side, with a minimum of 18 inches on the other side. The workspace next to the refrigerator needs 36 inches. Where two work areas are combined, however, you don't need to add the two required clearances. Simply add 12 inches to the larger of the two areas being combined. For example, consider the space between sink and

refrigerator on the dishwasher side: 24 inches for the sink, 36 inches for the fridge. Take the 36 inches and add 12 to get 48 inches for the counter space needed.

Stuck in a Corner

Now we can move to the less obvious, but still crucial clearances. Dishwashers, when open, need 42 inches from face to the opposite obstacle (such as a base cabinet). In addition, dishwashers need a minimum of 20 inches on each side to allow people to load and unload. In many households today, several people assist in cleaning up, making it more important that dishwashers not be installed in corners. Note also, that dishwashers should be in the same counter run as the sink, not around a corner in a U- or L-shaped kitchen.

If you must install a dishwasher into a corner, don't jam it in. Always install fillers into the corner (on both cabinet runs), so that the dishwasher door clears drawer and door handles and other appliances, such as refrigerators (which can protrude 30 to 33 inches from the wall) or ranges, which can have 4- to 6-inch-deep handles.

Remember, also, that the dishwasher protrudes beyond the cabinet fronts, and can interfere with other appliances or blind base cabinets. If possible, plan a 12-inch return space on each side of a corner before any appliance begins. This rule is one of the reasons base lazy-susans are so popular. Further, if a refrigerator or other tall cabinet is near a corner, try to increase the

counter length to 15 or 18 inches before turning the corner. Otherwise, the corner counter space becomes inaccessible "dead space."

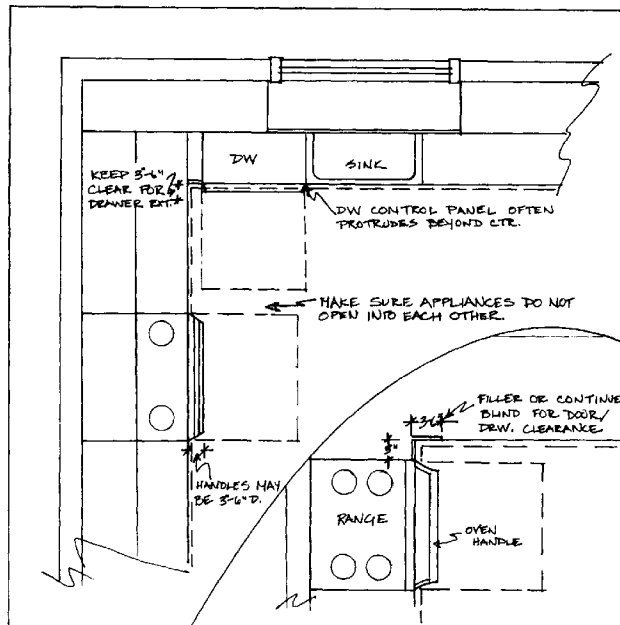
The 42-Inch Rule

A range needs 38 inches minimum from cabinet face to cabinet face for clients to open and remove food or racks. Most refrigerators can get by with 36 inches clearance, but some built-in or very large refrigerators have 34- to 36-inch-wide doors. In addition, with only 36 inches clearance, the actual walking space may be as little as 29 to 30 inches since some refrigerators protrude 30 to 33 inches from the wall. A kitchen functions much better with 42-inches or more between cabinet runs.

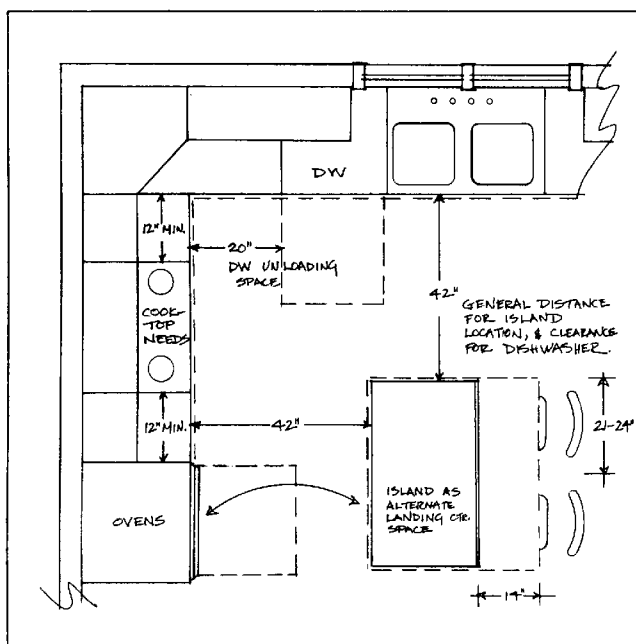
In fact, this 42-inch dimension is a practical rule of thumb for all

appliances, placement of islands, and walking space between snack counters and other walls or cabinets. However, this minimum clearance increases dramatically if the kitchen is going to be used by two cooks at once. The recommended minimum becomes 48 to 54 inches with a more generous working/walking space from 60 to 64 inches. These dimensions refer specifically to cooks working back to back. Other configurations require the designer to plan out each individual's work triangle.

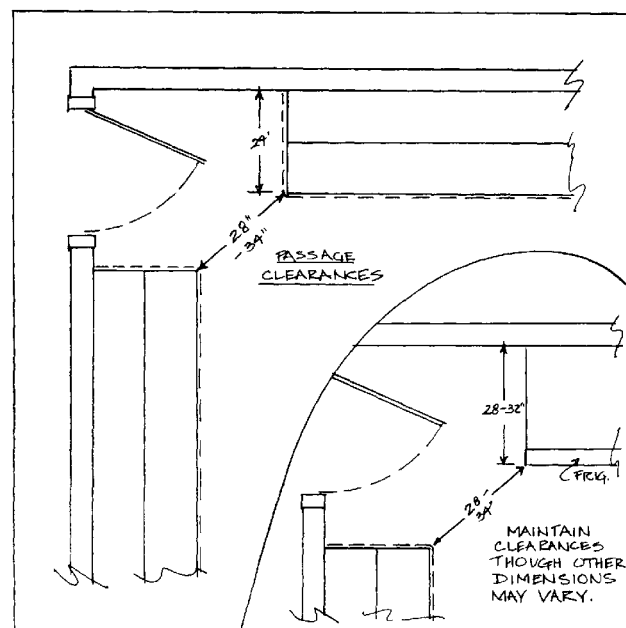
Another exception to the general use of 42 inches occurs if the space between counters acts as a passageway into the kitchen area. Now the designer can work with door opening requirements and get by with 28 to 34 inches—notably for a diagonal opening from cabinet corner to cabinet corner.



Make sure that appliance doors clear drawer and door handles and other appliances. Use fillers to keep appliances out of corners.



An island can provide an alternate "landing space" for a wall oven, but keep it 42 inches from other cabinets.



Usually, you should leave at least 42 inches between cabinets. However, 28 to 34 inches is where you pass between cabinets corner to corner.

Have a Seat

You must also leave enough space for chairs and seating. Though the kitchen may not have a central kitchen table, it may have a snack area, breakfast nook, or informal dining room. Each chair or stool requires 21 to 24 inches in width (it is wise to measure the leg spread of the chairs being used). Behind the chairs, you should typically leave 36 to 42 inches for clearance and access for serving food. This dimension can be as little as 32 inches for armless chairs, while armchairs may need 44 inches.

What about the heights of snack bars, desks, or tables? A good desk height is 28 1/2 to 30 inches for the average person. Typewriter or computer-desk tops should be lower to allow the elbow to flex more comfortably for long periods of time.

Table height is traditionally 30 inches, though very short persons may prefer a custom height of 28 1/2 to 29 inches. It's critical to match chair seat height to table height in all cases. For a 30-inch table, select a chair with an 18-inch-high seat. If drawers are planned under desks or tables, keep them very shallow or they will hit the sitter's legs.



The 42-inch-high counter may not be the most comfortable for people to eat at, but makes great bars, pass-throughs, or snack areas, adjoining an island or peninsula.



Snack counters, like work counters, often finish up at 36 inches. If so, the client must use a 24-inch-high stool. You should overhang the counter at least 14 inches for knee space, although 12 inches is acceptable when the counter is only for quick snacks.

Moving up to higher snack counters—commonly the 42-inch-high bar counter—we need a stool with a 30- to 32-inch seat height. For this height, suggest a foot rest on the stool 18 inches below the seat—or legs will dangle awkwardly.

Remember, a 42-inch-high counter may not be the most comfortable for people to eat at, but make great bars, pass-throughs, or snack areas adjoining an island or peninsula. Here, they create that small aesthetic barrier to camouflage dirty dishes or ranges. We should use them more, but appropriately.

At the Planning Stage

To make sure there is room for people to turn, bend, reach, and remove pots and pans from hot ovens, good detailing is imperative. A well-planned kitchen is carefully drafted, with all dimensions, door swings, and door openings fully drawn. It is at this stage you should discover that a 6-inch filler is needed in a corner, or that an island won't work, or that pot handles are going to be knocked by madly dashing children. Plan first for safety, comfort, and function; the frills come later. ■

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