

THE KITCHEN

“The kitchen is where the best conversations happen,” says Joan Marcus-Colvin, senior vice president of sales, marketing, and design at The New Home Co., in Aliso Viejo, Calif. But if kitchens have long been the places that pull people together, they represent a challenge for the builder: offering something current that satisfies classic needs. “Kitchens tend to be one of the more dynamic spaces in the home,” Marcus-Colvin observes. “We’re constantly focusing on what’s next, asking ourselves what we’ve missed in our previous designs. We’re never satisfied,” she adds.

FANTASY ISLAND

“An island needs to be more than just a box that’s a cutting board and a table,” says Nick Lehnert, executive director at KTG Y Group and head of the firm’s R + D Lab in Irvine, Calif. Whether there’s a break in the surface so that the sink and cooking zone are separated from the dining area is up for grabs. But the design needs to show the capability for being an activity area: prep, cooking, homework, and hanging out. “The good ones take on a bit of architecture,” says Lehnert, in the form of a waterfall countertop, standing legs, and possessing a bit of scale.

Marcus-Colvin says that if there’s space, double islands are worth it. “If you’re going to have a party in the kitchen, you need space for people to prep, or at least to pretend that they’re prepping.” Islands need proper knee clearance for sitting, deep drawers for pots and pans, and, if they contain a cooktop, a heatproof surface on both sides of the burners for landing.

While ample islands spark dreams of good parties and great meals, they’re not always feasible. For clever island ideas in challenging spaces, see “Island Living,” at right.

STAY CONNECTED

A smooth connection between kitchen and outdoor space goes a long way, even if the outdoors is just a small deck with a table, chairs, and pots for herbs and cherry tomatoes. “It’s another way we’re creating romance,” Marcus-Colvin says. “Those indoor-outdoor relationships speak to the farm-to-table revolution.”

Marcio Decker, an interior designer in Truckee, Calif., sees connectivity as essential, too, because large families and friends spend holidays together. “If the kitchen is integral to the living spaces, the room isn’t isolated,” he says, adding that it requires that the room “blend in with the architecture,” so appliances are hidden behind panels.

SHED LIGHT

Because the kitchen is the hub, it serves many functions. Multiple sources of lighting—recessed lights in the ceiling and pendants over the island that are both on dimmers, cabinets

PASSING FANCY

A wall separates dining area and kitchen, delineating the cook’s place. The doorway and pass-through (to the right of the doorway) connect the rooms, and the pass-through makes serving and clearing a cinch.

LIT UP

Kitchen lighting should be able to go from task to ambient. A pendant and recessed halogens provide illumination to work by; glass-front cabinets lit from within contrast with the wood and add ambient light. Windows, of course, admit natural light.

ROLL WITH IT

A breakaway wooden cart on wheels offers options. Part of the island, it can be a place for milk and cookies or can serve as a moveable prep area.



STEALTH STORAGE

The deep drawers underneath the cooktop hold pots and pans and roll out quietly and smoothly. They’re a more streamlined solution than doors that conceal a rollout shelf. Passage space in the kitchen is narrow, so every half-inch counts: Pull-holes eliminate the need for cabinet hardware that would protrude into the circulation area.

COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE

A mix of materials separates this 20-foot-long island into sections for cleanup, prep, cooking, and sitting. A quartz countertop provides an attractive and hardy work surface that’s also a heatproof landing for hot pots and pans on either side of the cooktop.

ISLAND LIVING

Builders, architects, and designers alike agree that a great island (if not two) is essential. What’s more, that island has to be as handsome as it is hardworking, including a seating area, storage, prep space, possibly a sink, an appealing countertop, and smashing design.

Yes, this San Francisco-area kitchen is custom, and its creators—kitchen designer Leslie Lamarre and her husband, architect Randy Grange of TRG Architects, in Burlingame, Calif.—are based in a part of the country that’s booming. But in such a pricey area, Lamarre and Grange often work on small houses, with many of the same challenges as anyone else: creating inviting, efficient kitchens with modest footprints.

This kitchen, at roughly 20 by 13 feet, was too narrow to accommodate a normal island but too wide to function as a galley setup. The solution: anchor the room with a 2 ½-by-6 ½-foot island. Longer and slimmer than standard, the island is as chockablock with great ideas as the rest of the kitchen.

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