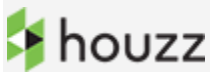




# How to Avoid the 10 Most Common Kitchen Design Dilemmas



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When it comes to kitchen planning, designers hear the same complaints from homeowners about what's wrong or frustrating about their kitchens. Most of these recurring problems — and their resulting complaints — stem from a kitchen not having been designed with the owners' needs in mind (often the case, of course, with inherited kitchens). If you hire good designers, they'll spend time asking you how you live in your home; how you use, or would like to use, your kitchen; and about your lifestyle, tastes and habits. You could get a head start by making a list of

your kitchen likes and dislikes, frustrations and wishes, to help you avoid the issues outlined below.

**Not enough storage.** One of the most common kitchen design problems resulting from poor planning is insufficient storage. This can easily lead to clutter, mess and frustration. Yet even in really small kitchens, generous upper and lower cabinets should be achievable — you just need careful and sometimes imaginative planning to fully maximize the space. Kitchen corner units, for example, can make use of otherwise unused space. Pullout corner organizers keep contents accessible.

Similarly, drawers offer more generous storage for pans than cabinets do and are easier to access. Another option for a small kitchen is upper cabinets that extend to the ceiling, with a stool nearby for reaching the highest items.

There are also lots of clever storage options to consider, such as secret drawers or hidden spice racks, and many kitchen storage options are specifically designed for smaller items, such as gadgets, handheld appliances and utensils.

Carefully thinking about your storage needs from an early stage of the design process will ensure that you include enough of it and, in the long term, make for a much happier kitchen environment.

**Badly planned layout and workflow.** A poor kitchen layout will make you work much harder than necessary and ultimately stop you from enjoying it. Your kitchen should work specifically for you, with a workflow and layout designed to cater to your individual needs.

For this to happen, your designer must enquire about your lifestyle, habits and kitchen requirements, as well as how many people live in your house, who likes to cook and what your preferred cooking style is. All this information should be used in the planning of your layout.

While a lot of designers still plan using the traditional kitchen triangle, I think defining separate areas or zones for prepping, washing and cooking can result in a more efficient and personalized design. This approach allows fluidity in the positioning of the different areas of the kitchen.

And your kitchen should look good too!

**Insufficient counter space where needed.** A lack of countertop space, or counters not being positioned where you need them, is a common design problem. It can also prove to be one of the most frustrating, since your counter is needed for just about every activity you'll carry out in your kitchen.

The countertop forms part of the kitchen workflow, so this will help to determine where and how much of it you need. A common mistake is not leaving sufficient space next to or opposite a fridge or an oven. With a fridge, this counter space is merely convenient, but having space next to or opposite an oven and a cooktop is also important for safety. This way, you shouldn't find yourself carrying piping-hot food across your kitchen, looking for a counter on which to set it down.

During planning, it's important to think about all the ways in which you currently use, or intend to use, your countertops. For example, you may want space for more than one person to cook at once, or maybe an area where your partner can sit and chat to you while you cook, or it may be important to include somewhere for the kids to do their homework.

**Traffic through your working area.** As suggested, you may want enough countertop space for more than one person to operate in your kitchen at once. However, you need to consider how to achieve this so that users don't get under one another's feet while trying to reach the fridge, oven or sink.

Similarly, if you have children, you may want to ensure that they won't come charging past as you're carrying hot food or handling sharp knives. Both are examples of how traffic can become a problem in a kitchen's work area, but they are preventable through careful planning.

This may mean setting up two separate and well-spaced prep zones or ensuring that there's only one kitchen entry point, so you can easily see who's coming or going. You can also make sure that frequently used appliances, such as the fridge, are on the periphery of your kitchen, so other household members can still get things out of them without having to fully enter the kitchen.

**Badly spaced cabinets and appliances.** It's important that cabinets and appliances, while well-positioned for easy use, are also well-spaced. For example, walkways should be about 36 inches wide so that doors and drawers can open clear of one another.

Similarly, they shouldn't be too far apart: For the sake of a smooth workflow, you shouldn't have to take more steps between appliances than is necessary. Similarly, it's important not to place wall ovens and microwaves so high that you can't safely remove hot food from them.

Think also about which way your cabinet and appliance doors open. For maximum ease of use, and where it's possible, these should swing according to the surrounding kitchen space.

**Poor ventilation.** Appropriate ventilation — such as with a range hood — allows the removal of grease, steam and cooking smells. These can otherwise linger on you, your clothes or any furniture, which is especially unpleasant in open-plan spaces.

Choose the best-quality model you can afford, and ensure that you pick the right size of ducting to fit your chosen hood. This should make for quieter, more effective extraction that's also more energy-efficient and less likely to break. Consider, too, how much noise your potential range hood will make; another common mistake is not choosing a model with a quiet motor.

This is particularly relevant if your kitchen is part of an open-plan living space, or is big enough that everyone frequently gathers in it. They should comfortably be able to have a conversation or hear the TV while someone else is cooking.

**Inadequate room for trash and recycling.** Including sufficient trash space to suit a household's needs is something that's often overlooked.

Often a trash bin is present and fits neatly within a cabinet so that it maintains the kitchen's clean aesthetic (and conceals smells). But the reality is that the container is too small and fills up too quickly, meaning constant emptying. Or another common problem is that there's no provision for separating and storing recyclables.

As with many of the other design problems covered here, this one usually comes about because the designer hasn't understood the homeowners' requirements, dictated by how many people are in the house, how often they cook, their style of cooking, and whether recycling is important to them.

Providing a container with a larger capacity, one with separate compartments or a kitchen waste disposal unit are effective solutions to consider.

**Insufficient task lighting.** Another common complaint is not having enough task lighting. This kind of lighting is important, as it focuses direct light onto specific sites. These are mainly areas where you're preparing and cooking food, such as the countertop, stove and sink areas. Counters used for food preparation are often positioned directly under upper cabinets, so without additional lighting here, these cabinets can easily cast shadows and darken the surface, making cutting, slicing and other food preparation more challenging than it should be, or even potentially dangerous.

Again, this one is easily avoidable. Solutions include spotlights recessed into the underside of upper cabinets, or cabinet lighting to let you easily see the full contents of your cabinets. You may also make a focal point of your task lighting, such as installing statement pendants over an island, successfully combining practicality with high visual impact.

**Poorly planned outlets and switches.** Often, you don't realize that electrical switches and outlets aren't where you need them until after a kitchen is finished.

We all use our kitchens differently, and your designer should take your needs into account when positioning these items. So don't be afraid to convey your wishes. If you'd like additional outlets or a particular finish for the switch plate besides the standard white, this needs to be established during the planning stage.

Keep in mind, though, that the placement of electrical outlets is subject to safety regulations. Your designer should be able to advise you on these rules during the planning stage.

**Irreversible trend-led design choices.** Finally, a trap that no homeowner wants to fall into is over-designing a kitchen or succumbing to "of the moment" trends that may not last.

That's not to say that you shouldn't include your favorite trend or unusual feature, but consider adding these in the form of accessories and furnishings, which are easier and cheaper to change at a later date than built-in furniture and countertops.

Although everyone wants an impressive look, most people also want a kitchen that will stand the test of time. So look ahead and consider whether you'll still be happy with your design five, 10 or 15 years from now.