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Space-Saving Solutions: Remodeling Small Kitchens

Storage room and functionality can be easily increased in a small kitchen with the right installations and utilization of space.

By: Laura Schlereth

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In this economy, nobody wants anything to go to waste—and that includes space.

Rather than expanding their kitchen to make it larger, many homeowners are scaling back and trying to make better use of the space they already have. Steve Jaron, owner of custom building and remodeling firms Renovate and Restore, LLC and Echelon Construction Co., LLC, based in Naples, Fla., says that the original layout of a kitchen is not usually the best layout.

Many kitchens 20 to 30 years ago were built with very standard designs, but now homeowners are asking for custom designs that meet their specific needs. The end goal is increased functionality and optimized use of available space.

To optimize the use of available space in a kitchen, **remodelers** should implement these space-saving solutions:

Install power outlets, sliding shelves in cabinets

Frank Wickstead, owner of Wickstead Works, an Atlanta-based remodeling company, says that by placing outlets inside cabinets, homeowners can store smaller appliances (like a toaster or blender) within and pull them out only during use rather than take up permanent counter space. For heat/steam-producing appliances such as steamers or coffee makers, Wickstead recommends installing counter surface mounted to a platform that rolls out on drawer glides when the appliance is needed. Installing cabinet doors that pocket and a plug in the rear allow homeowners to easily access appliances without sacrificing precious counter space.

Remove cabinet stiles

Beverly Ferguson, owner of ShelfGenie, a Glide Out™ shelving solutions company based in Marietta, Ga., says something that usually serves only a cosmetic purpose is the stile in between cabinet doors. Unless the stile functions as a support, Ferguson recommends cleanly cutting it from the cabinet frame and attaching it to one of the cabinet doors. This allows wider items to be placed in the cabinet, and saves homeowners the annoyance of maneuvering around it.

Install deeper single sinks

Many outdated homes have two sinks for washing and rinsing dishes. If the kitchen has a dishwasher, only one sink is necessary. A sink that's 16 inches deep and 24 inches wide will provide more room for dirty dishes and prevent overflow onto precious counter space, says Wickstead.

Customize cabinet shelving to specific uses

Many cabinets are built with 'half shelves,' says Ferguson; however, the same height for each shelf isn't always ideal for one homeowner's specific kitchen inventory. Ferguson highly recommends removal of the half shelf,

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followed by a detailed discussion with the client about where they plan on placing certain items. Then, says Ferguson, "start building [the shelves] from the bottom up." For instance, in a cabinet intended to host pots, she recommends putting in a shelf that will just clear the stack. This shelf will likely have room for all the lids. Clearance height of the items placed, stacked or nested, has to be evaluated, she says. "Most of the time the height of items designates where the pull-out shelf needs to be placed so that unoccupied vertical space can be utilized." Taking out the half shelf and replacing it with a full depth of the cabinet solution, such as a full length shelf replacement or full length 100 percent extension rail pull-out, can give you up to 50 percent more storage space, Ferguson says, so that utilization is at 100 percent.

Install hanging racks

One way to build on vertical space is to hang kitchen items. Certain racks can hold up to 300 pounds of pots and pans, says Wickstead. Large kitchen utensils like spatulas and tongs can easily be hung on a rack with hooks, allowing for easy access during cooking.

"It typically saves a drawer full of space and is easier to work with than a typical vase full of tools," says Wickstead.

Make recommendations to client based on their usage

Ferguson says sometimes the simplest space saver is placing items that are rarely used (like food processors and slow cookers) out of the kitchen, maybe in a hallway closet. "Talk with them about what their cooking priorities are," she says.

Recommend to your client that they keep regularly used appliances in the actual kitchen and store or donate those they don't. A good rule of thumb, says Ferguson, is if they haven't used it in a year, they probably won't use it at all.

Pay attention to the details

Every kitchen and homeowner is unique, so it's important to think outside the box and to do research on the most current space-saving solutions. Even the smallest update can increase functionality. For instance, installing drawers with metal gliding tracks mounted underneath rather than on the side can create one extra inch of horizontal space, says Jaron. And when it comes to storage, every inch counts.

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