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By John Filippelli

What's In STORE

With kitchen space at a premium, designers are being challenged to provide more creative storage solutions.

In today's more budget-conscious kitchens, space is increasingly at a premium. And that means designing effective storage is more critical than ever.

While even the most talented designer can't magically create extra square footage, designers are getting increasingly creative in rethinking standard storage philosophies to find more effective solutions for avoiding clutter in the kitchen.

Laura L. Orfield-Skrivseth, co-owner, partner, designer and project manager with Minnetonka, MN-based Orfield Design and Construction, explains: "We're seeing a lack of sufficient square footage in smaller kitchens, so we will use hooks on walls or ceilings, as well as shelves above windows,

deep uppers above refrigerators and drawers and spice racks."

Cheryl Hamilton-Gray, CKD of Hamilton-Gray Design in Carlsbad, CA, adds: "As more customers prefer minimizing wall cabinet storage, items typically housed in wall cabinetry need to be accommodated elsewhere. This requires fitting base cabinetry with accessories to create storage such as with drawer pegs to house dishes and plates, cubbies to store glasses upside down and pull-outs for spice and bottle storage."

Amy L. Hinck, kitchen and bath designer and project manager, also with Orfield Design and Construction, adds: "We're seeing built-in breakfast areas [that] provide storage for kids' art

supplies, tablecloths, pet food or little used holiday dishes."

Orfield-Skrivseth says that other storage solutions she's done include pull out toe-kick drawers for hidden pet dish storage, a step stool inside a toe-kick and rolling carts that serve as mini-islands.

STEP BY STEP

To achieve maximum storage, designers need to be well versed in the client's – and space's – needs.

"We'll ask clients to show us pictures or magazine clippings of anything they want to include in particular – then we can attempt to design that into the space," says Orfield-Skrivseth.

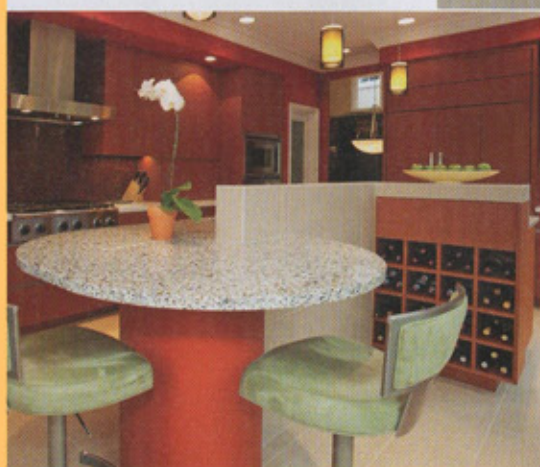
Hamilton-Gray agrees: "The first thing is to inventory their

storage requirements in the existing kitchen and review what is falling short. Designers should consider family growth intentions as well as ergonomics of storage for main family members involved in food preparation and clean up."

Tiare Noelani Cowan, CKD, Allied ASID and president of Kailua, HI-based Archipelago Hawaii adds: "We have an in-depth questionnaire that we give each client and it goes over every storage need they have and their preferences for storage space for each upper cabinet, lower cabinet, pantry, drawer and appliance garage."

These steps are very important, adds Matt Hegemier, designer with Bay Area Kitchens in Webster, TX, because often designers will

Left: This kitchen, designed by Cheryl Hamilton-Gray, CKD, reflects the integration of hidden lower cabinetry with cubbies for wine storage (below) and ample docking and charging stations for electronics (at right).



Photos: PreviewFirst.com



encounter problems with corners and small spaces.

"With corners, people are limited to what their cabinet line offers. However, I've seen a number of different solutions for [when there's an extra] 3", 6" or 9" of space, such as using pull-out units to offer extra [accessibility]" he says.

Noelani Cowan agrees: "Corners are always tricky, but today there are many great solutions. For instance, if you don't have 12" on either side of your corner for a Lazy Susan, you can use a 'blind corner' that snakes out and allows for use of the dead space in the corner."

In a recent project, Hegemier made use of some formerly wasted space by incorporating a 9" frameless unit that holds utensils, a steel knife sharpener and large knives, with storage below for large items.

He concludes: "In my experience, there are three things every kitchen needs: vertical cookie sheet dividers (located above the ovens, refrigerator or built-in microwave), pot dividers (used in large drawers to store Teflon pots and pans) and cutlery dividers for silverware."

CLIENT REQUESTS

While designers have plenty of ideas about what their clients need, storage wise, consumers are also making their own requests based on how they use the kitchen.

For example, Hegemier explains: "I've seen a trend toward getting rid of the desk and filing drawers in the kitchen to make room for more traditional storage. Additionally, people are realizing

that frameless cabinetry can be a space-saver in smaller kitchens. More clients are asking for frameless cabinets."

"We're definitely seeing a trend toward lower cabinets and fewer traditional upper cabinets," says Noelani Cowan. "We are also using a lot of interior organizational inserts such as spice racks, pull-outs, cutlery inserts, recycling centers and lower cabinet drawers for dish storage."

While designers say their clients often struggle with having more "stuff" than they have space, separate pantries seem to be less in favor these days among consumers. This may be because of greater space limitations than in years past, or it may be because pantries don't always fit into the open floor plans many clients desire.

And, those who do have pantries don't seem to be as inclined to expand them, but

Lower organizational storage is a popular request among many clients, as seen in this kitchen designed by Tiare Noelani Cowan.



rather they are choosing to rethink their organization.

According to Hegemier, "Clients don't necessarily want more pantry space, they want a pantry that works better. Ideally, they want one with pull-out shelves and drawers that are adjustable that still has room for bulk items."

But while pantries may be less in vogue, electronics stations are hot, hot, hot. Orfield-Skrivseth gets many client requests for more tech charging areas, such as laptop docking stations and cell phone charging areas.

Trudy Tripple, kitchen designer for Glenview, IL-based DDK Kitchen Design Group agrees: "We've seen requests for storing and charging electronics and a place for storing a computer or laptop."

Hamilton-Gray concludes: "Storage of electronic equipment with charging stations has definitely gotten popular; we do not find the request for a desk area as prevalent as an area for laptops."

OUT OF SIGHT

One of the keys to effective storage is keeping items out of sight – but still in mind – says Hinck.

"Most chefs-at-heart deal with mixers and other items that are larger [which can cause clutter]. They don't want these items on the counter, yet they want them to be accessible. Therefore we have to



Above: Tight corners in small spaces lend themselves to pull-out units, as seen in this design by Matt Hegemier.

find and create storage for these items using appliance garages and flip up doors," she offers.

One kitchen project Noelani Cowan designed featured a separate walk-in pantry and a custom pass thru from the kitchen to the pantry, where the appliance garage was set at the back of the countertop.

"The appliances sit in the pantry and don't take up any counter space, but they are accessible and can be slid out when needed," she says.

Orfield-Skrivseth adds: "Clients also want [hidden] spice storage, either on doors or in drawers. They like interior systems, such as adding shelving under the sink or on the doors, as well as drawer tilt-outs to maximize function."

MORE DRAWERS

Designers agree that more drawer storage is always a positive.

Hinck explains: "We think that drawers are the best option for

most every situation. They are very user friendly and provide great accessibility."

She adds that clients are realizing that putting pots and pans, or Tupperware, in drawers – rather than in roll-outs – is better, because lids and items tend to fall off roll-outs.

"We are definitely seeing more drawer storage," says Hegemier. "I've also seen a move toward open shelving on the island, [which] used to be confined to open book shelves. Now islands are turning into more furniture-style pieces."

According to Tripple, there is a simple reason for this trend.

"Since today's kitchens are open into other rooms, there are fewer wall cabinets. So, we need to store items in base cabinets. In an open plan, we provide storage in a drawer and typically there is a peg board bottom so the pegs can be arranged and the dishes can be stacked in them."

"Open shelving versus closed storage is a personal preference, but we do find most clients want a little open storage to display items," says Orfield-Skrivseth.

"Since the kitchen is the hub of the home, most people are opening up their space and creating Great Rooms, so we try to make the space look more integrated with the interior of the home and less 'kitchen-y,'" Noelani Cowan concludes.

ACCESS APPROVED

Of course even the most clever and creative storage in the world is only beneficial if clients can access it. With an aging population, this can be problematic – particularly as many traditional storage options don't take accessibility into consideration. Storage may also need to take into account the needs of children.

Tripple offers: "We strive to have the most commonly used items in the most accessible area. That changes for each client. For example, in households with small children, the client may request that the children can access beverages or snacks more easily. Meanwhile an elderly person may

not want to bend or reach very high for items used on a daily basis."

Noelani Cowan adds: "Accessibility issues dictate that things be placed at a certain level in the space. We need to be aware of how the cabinets open and whether we can get a wheelchair up to them. We also need to take into consideration the reach of the client so we don't design storage that is placed too high [to be truly useful to the client]."

To address this, Orfield-Skrivseth says her firm incorporates Universal Design principles whenever possible to accommodate varying client heights and reaches.

Hinck adds: "In instances where our clients are in a wheelchair or have an illness that causes a rapid decline in function, we will design lower countertop heights with open roll-under areas at cooktops and sinks, and primary storage at base levels."

Hegemier concludes that, in designing effective kitchen storage, the designer needs to consider "both the available space and any limitations [that might exist in] the client's ability to access them."

KBDN

Right: Deep upper cabinets placed above the refrigerator offer extra storage, as seen in this kitchen by Laura Orfield-Skrivseth.

