

Great Kitchens

Three Dream Kitchens

How Homeowners With Different Needs Got the Kitchens They Wanted

By **Sara Wildberger**

Sara Wildberger (swildberger@rcn.com) is a DC writer with a one-year-old. She has laminate counters and floors, both covered with Cheerios.

Custom Look, Affordable Price

This Mclean couple—both cooks and wine lovers—wanted a new kitchen but had a toddler, so they needed to keep costs down.

To turn what one of the owners calls a “narrow, dark box” into a light, open space, Bonnie Harrison of Custom Made in Springfield helped pick colors that were homey and warm yet light.

Birch cabinets and light-flecked granite counters fit the home’s Tuscan decor—and birch can be less expensive than cherry and other woods.

Using semicustom cabinets—which allow for some variation in sizes, woods, and finishes but aren’t built to custom specifications—gave less-expensive access to touches, such as lazy Susans, often found in custom lines.

“There are a lot of cabinet lines out there that are overpriced,” Harrison says. Look for good construction, including dovetailed hardwood in the drawers, and a high-quality finish. In this kitchen, the end cabinet in a row is angled to keep a stark side from breaking the room’s visual flow; crown molding is an added enhancement.

Harrison recommends clear or frosted glass if you want to display what’s inside cabinets; this kitchen has clear glass. Etched and leaded are more expensive and hide the contents.

The designer suggests putting as much thought into hardware as you do into other parts of the kitchen: “Hardware is like jewelry. Would you pick out your jewelry before you’ve got your outfit on?”

When you find the style you like, search manufacturers’ catalogs to find a good price, but beware of getting cheap hardware whose finish will rub off.

For counters, Harrison prefers granite, Corian-brand solid surfacing, and Silestone quartz surfacing. To control costs, use standard edging and avoid complicated, multipiece backsplashes. Extending the backsplash down to the counter instead of running a “ledge“ of counter up into the backsplash area is less expensive, and the result is easier to clean. This couple chose a handpainted Italian tile backsplash from Expo Design Center.

Although they like to serve wine, they know the kitchen isn’t a good place to store it. They have a small collection in a “cellar“ under the stairs and use the kitchen space for a phone/message/work center.

For floors, Harrison says the best surfaces for the money are ceramic tile and hardwood. In tile, simpler designs are both less expensive and better looking.

Harrison likes stainless-steel appliances for wearability and unobstrusiveness. But these owners wanted to save,

so she sent them to Bray & Scarff, an appliance store with a range of brands and prices. They waited until the end of the month, when dealers try to reduce inventory, and bought on sale. They got a bargain on a white refrigerator, a less-popular color. Because it's covered with play magnets and photos, it suits them fine.

The Art of The Kitchen

ringing art into the kitchen isn't a trend to these Bethesda homeowners. They're artists, so it was a given that paintings and ceramics would be there.

Because their home is architecturally interesting, the challenge was to create a comfortable place where socializing is as important as cooking yet one that harmonizes with the whole.

Designer Ann Unal of Tunis Kitchens and Baths played off the architecture's Mediterranean feel as she and the owners chose crown molding and hardware.

"The cabinets are traditional, yet the overall feel is more contemporary," Unal says. "It's important that the kitchen have a relationship to other areas. That doesn't mean you can't have a contemporary kitchen in a traditional home, but it has to reflect the rest of the home in some way."

One of the owners uses a lot of black in her paintings and gravitated toward Artcraft of Canada cabinets she'd seen in a decorator's showhouse and in the Tunis showroom. The distressed finish is warmer and softer than might be expected of black. She also picked out the walls' sunflower shade with the help of a friend and interior designer, Marlene Weiss.

Distressed finish softens black cabinets
Owners kept original refrigerator
Cooktop island has generous limestone counter

The kitchen has two Asko dishwashers—one for dirty dishes, one for clean. The owner hates unloading the dishwasher, so she uses the "clean" dishwasher as an extra cabinet, unloading it gradually as dishes are needed, and fills the other with dirty dishes so they don't pile up in the sink—though there's plenty of room for them in there, with a "bowl and a half" Elkay sink.

Photograph by Sara Wildberger

The sink is situated so a cook working there won't bump into someone working at the Jennair cooktop set into the island, but also so it's not a stretch for one cook.

A cooktop set into an island needs plenty of counter space around it for safety. These owners chose to forgo a range hood because such a strong visual focal point would compete with the conversation and eat-in space. That choice dictated downdraft ventilation, which meant sacrificing a higher-BTU cooktop—these usually require updraft ventilation and a hood.

The KitchenAid oven is around the corner in the combination home office and pantry. When appliance space is at a premium, the oven is the easiest thing to place out of traffic flow, Unal says, because a cook is generally bringing prepared dishes to and from it. "But what you have to have near the oven is a landing area to put hot dishes," she says.

The owners kept their 48-inch KitchenAid refrigerator's stainless panels rather than reface it to match the cabinets. Many people are motivated to remodel when appliances start to give, but if yours are newer or you're attached to them, you can often keep them in a remodeling, Unal says. Easiest are dishwashers, which can be refaced with a trim kit because they come in standard sizes. Built-in ovens are trickier—they come in a variety of sizes, and it might be hard to replace a built-in later.

Clean Lines, More Light

Can you turn a condominium's dark, cramped interior kitchen into a bright, sleek workspace without angering the condo association? This kitchen in downtown DC's Seventh Street district shows it can be done.

Designer Ann Unal worked with the owner's interior designer and architect, Robert Pahnke, to create a neutral color scheme that flows into the surrounding rooms. The big changes were structural: Getting rid of an entry closet created eat-in space, and a pass-through was knocked down to open up access into the living room. The owner kept her options open by including a set of pocket doors, which slide into the walls.

The biggest challenge in the typical interior condo kitchen is getting light. The mirrored backsplash here reflects and scatters light, and the owner says it's no harder to clean than any other surface. Pahnke added a beveled picture-frame trim to avoid a house-of-mirrors effect from too much reflection.

"The main thing is to have a good lighting plan," Unal says. "I usually use at least two or three sources: recessed lighting, halogen under-cabinet lights, plus lamps to give a warm and friendly feeling."

But this condo's rules restricted building much into the ceiling. So Unal and Pahnke dropped the ceiling around the perimeter, recessing the light in the resulting space, and left a soffit—or open space—in the center, creating the impression of a higher ceiling. Unal did without crown molding on the cabinets—it would have cut down on storage and impeded the vertical line.

Also to keep the streamlined look, the owner chose a Thermador cooktop and built-in oven rather than a range. The electric cooktop is dictated by condo rules, but its smooth-top burners are easy to clean. Electric cooktops have been making strides in temperature precision.

The high-end appliances—such as a Sub-Zero refrigerator and a Bosch dishwasher—are faced with wood and hardware that match the cabinets, again to keep lines unbroken.

The strongest impression of brightness is made by the cabinet finishes: The white-glazed, hand-wiped surface has a warm gray tone that's modern without being hard-edged and that blends with the limestone counters from Haifa.

Despite its good looks, the owner says, "this is a working kitchen." She got plenty of counter and storage space. For an efficient kitchen, Unal prefers more drawers and fewer roll-out-shelf cabinets, because you have to open a drawer only once, whereas with a cabinet you have to open the door, then roll out the shelves.

Flanking the oven are three-drawer base cabinets, with a narrow, slotted drawer on top for utensils and two deeper pot-and-pan drawers below.

From the August 2002 issue.

[Making It Over](#)

Remodeling a Kitchen Doesn't Have to Be Stressful. Here Are the Latest Trends, Mistakes to Avoid, and a Guide to the People to Make It All Happen.

[Three Dream Kitchens](#)

How Homeowners With Different Needs Got the Kitchens They Wanted.

[Cooking Like a Pro](#)

Here's What You Get for Your Money When You Buy High-End Appliances.

[Beyond Formica](#)

There Are More Materials Than Ever for Beautiful Counters and Floors.

“Do I Smell Smoke?”

We Wanted a Refrigerator With an Icemaker. Be Careful What You Wish For.

Subscribe [Site Index](#) [About the Washingtonian](#) [Reprints](#) [Contact Us](#) [Feedback](#) [Advertise](#)

Copyright ©2003 by Washington Magazine Inc.