

“Company’s Coming”

Kitchens that Ease Entertaining

by Paul Foresman

photos courtesy of Merillat.com

Many of the best times of our lives revolve around being with family and friends. But did you ever stop to think about the influence your home’s design has on your entertaining? Whether it’s hosting formal get-togethers, holiday dinners or your children’s birthday parties, the kitchen is the hub of activity. A little extra attention spent planning flow, layout and product selections will reward you with a kitchen that is more functional and efficient.

Due to the popularity of today’s open floor plans with kitchens in full view, designing kitchens is all about zones related to the flow of activity. *Her Home* talked with Faith Allen, Senior Product Manager for Merillat Cabinets, to identify those zones and innovative ways to enhance your entertaining experiences.



KITCHENS



This gracious dining area features a counter for buffet serving and open display areas for pretty dishes. A multi-level island accommodates different tasks with ease.

“LaBelle Square” cabinetry by Merillat

“With a little extra forethought and planning, our kitchens will beckon to entertain a simple family dinner or an extravagant gala!”



STORAGE is the initial zone. According to Allen, “It’s all about having a convenient place for everything. With formal entertaining, you’re going to want your good dishes, glassware, and silverware stored near the serving or dining area. If wine is on the menu, you’ll enjoy a wine rack or wine cooler nearby as well.” Then there are the table linens. Allen’s solution is a tall cabinet with a couple of roll-out trays near the bottom for placemats and napkins. Above, she suggests swing-out towel rods over which tablecloths can be hung – eliminating the need for ironing them before each use. A neat idea for one side of a butler’s pantry area!

In addition to storing items where they will be used, it’s also essential to reduce clutter, ease accessibility, and arrange items in an organized way. Include some roll-out drawers or trays. Drawer inserts keep small items, spices, silverware, and utensils organized. But what about small, frequently used appliances? Allen notes the popularity of countertop appliance garages. “Today many people are opting for straight, 12-inch deep appliance garages to store blenders, toasters, and coffee makers. But a big item, such as a bread machine, requires a larger appliance garage which sits in a corner.” On the other hand, if

you want to keep your counter space free, consider going underneath the counter. You can include a pull-out mixer shelf, which comes out of the cabinet and swings up – bringing your heavy mixer even with the countertop. For ultimate convenience, add another pull-out tray for mixer accessories.

An extra under-counter refrigerator offers additional food storage for entertaining, whether it’s used for special juices and pop for the grandchildren, or chilled beverages for larger parties.

The **FOOD PREPARATION ZONE** depends on lots of counter space, plus close proximity to the refrigerator, range/oven, and pantry. Ideally, this is a separate space from the serving area, allowing both areas to function simultaneously.

If you have a smaller island in your kitchen that will be used for food preparation, keeping the countertop a uniform height will provide the maximum work space. If your island is large enough to accommodate different levels, a 36-inch work level will be appreciated by bakers, while a taller side (usually 42 inches) shields work clutter from view and accommodates bar stools. A baker’s armoire is another

option. These cabinets have double doors that open to reveal a pull-out tray that serves as a workspace for rolling out cookie and pie dough.

You’ll want most of your pots and pans stored in this area. If you have attractive pots, you may want to incorporate a pot rack. In addition to providing visual interest, this also frees cabinet space for other items. Just make sure the rack doesn’t make the area look cluttered, and remember dust can collect on infrequently used items.

Vertical dividers in base cabinets work great for storing trays, cookie sheets, pizza pans, and muffin tins. Bakers will appreciate drawer dividers or spice trays for decorative sugars and sprinkles. Having a smaller prep sink is another popular trend.

Along with the storage zone, the food preparation area will often include heavy appliances that are difficult to lift from base cabinets. One solution is a tall cabinet with roll-out trays to hold things like toaster ovens. Be sure to have the electrician wire outlets at the back of this cabinet, so the appliances can remain plugged in – ready to use right where they are.

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UPPER LEFT: This pull-down knife rack reserves drawer space for other items and keeps knives out of sight – until they're needed.

UPPER MIDDLE: Merillat's Marsett Square cabinetry provides a nostalgic look – with dishes and staples on display.

UPPER RIGHT: Hinged shelving units provide maximum, readily accessible storage in this well-organized pantry.

BOTTOM LEFT: No need to lift a heavy mixer with Merillat's pull-out mixer shelf. The shelf comes out of the cabinet and swings up – bringing the mixer even with the countertop.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Here, the mixer is plugged in and ready to use on a roll-out tray.





RIGHT: Merillat's tray divider roll-out keeps platters, cookie sheets and trays neat.

FAR RIGHT: Slicing rolls and bread is a breeze with a cutting board above a bread box.

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Your **COOKING ZONE** is simply what the name implies. Convenient to the food prep area, it is centered around your cooktop and ovens. If you are fortunate enough to have two cooks in the home, arrange your kitchen layout and amenities around both working in the kitchen at the same time. Two cooks will require more utensils, pots, and pans, so plan storage accordingly. In addition, you may opt for separate counter spaces, cooking areas, and sinks. Common ovens and waste containment may need wider corridors around a central working area.

Warming drawers are great features for entertaining. They allow you to warm multiple dishes simultaneously, keep hot cooked foods at serving temperature and save time when proofing bread (allowing the dough to rise).

Some **SERVING ZONES** are more formal, such as a built-in buffet in the dining area, or a butler's pantry along the path from the kitchen. For casual entertaining, islands or peninsulas may be just the ticket. If your guests are usually adults, consider a 42-inch height for the serving bar area.

"Smaller islands with casters are available which can be moved into position as a server. They're similar to a modern day tea-cart," Allen notes. She also suggests base cabinets in serving areas have a few deep drawers to accommodate taller items such as large bowls.

Your **EATING ZONE** may consist of a formal dining area, an informal breakfast nook, a snack bar, or some combination of all three. This will be dictated by your home's layout and the type of entertaining you enjoy.

Many folks find themselves most often dining at a snack bar and rarely using their dinette – even if it's just a few steps away. If that's you, carefully consider what height best suits your family. If you have small children, they won't be able to get up on higher stools – or worse yet, they may fall off them!

CLEAN-UP is the final, but very important, zone when planning for entertaining. As two sinks have gained popularity, so have second dishwashers. In front of sinks, consider a small tilt-out tray to keep unsightly sponges and pot scrubbers out of view. Another item that can reduce clutter in your entertaining kitchen is a liquid soap dispenser that comes up through the countertop next to the sink.

What about trash? Typical solutions have been the unsightly tall kitchen wastebasket openly on display...or a smaller wastebasket under the kitchen sink. Besides having to bend over to use the latter, ever notice how much stuff misses the wastebasket? Allen is particularly proud of Merillat's new top-mount wastebasket which pulls out from a base cabinet. Similarly, a cabinet which houses your recycling center in or near the

kitchen is a wonderful answer for disposing of recyclables and being kind to Mother Nature.

Though not part of the activity flow, Allen identified an additional zone to be planned for – the **DISPLAY ZONE**. It's a shame to conceal pretty dishes, glassware and serving bowls when they're not in use. The traditional approach has been a formal hutch in the dining room, and/or glass front cabinet doors for selected kitchen cabinets. "Today, glass panels run the gamut from simple to intricate," Allen comments. "An increasingly popular look is textured or etched glass which may also be somewhat opaque. Homeowners with 42-inch tall islands often put glass doors on the side that faces out toward the eating or entertaining space." This display hutch can be wired for interior lighting to create a soft ambiance for evening entertaining while displaying beautiful glassware.

We cherish relationships. We take pride in a functional and orderly kitchen. With a little extra forethought and planning, our kitchens will beckon to entertain a simple family dinner or an extravagant gala! ■