

A Commanding Kitchen for Two Cooks



Two steps up, this kitchen overlooks the party and hides the clutter

BY CHRISTOPHER SIMMONDS

When Sarah asked me to design a house for a lot she had purchased along the banks of the Rideau River in Ottawa, I leafed through her scrapbook of home features. Thoughtful details characterized the exterior pictures she had gathered. Among interior shots, her favorite kitchens ran toward simple, clean lines, but the designs were modern and edgy. Today, Sarah has a kitchen inspired by those photos, one that allows two people to cook without interfering with each other while at the same time interacting with guests and enjoying views of the pool, the courtyard, and the river beyond.

A test run tweaks the design

Sarah and her family entertain often. The kitchen is an integral part of their entertaining, and they wanted to enjoy the company of their guests while they prepare the meal. We decided on an open floor plan that allows guests to cluster in the living and dining

rooms but still remain within sight and conversation range of cooks in the kitchen.

After the contractor finished framing the house, we set up sawhorses and cardboard templates to represent the counters and appliances. Then Sarah spent some time in the kitchen area. After moving around the space, she recommended putting the wall ovens in the corner. This location made much better use of the corner than cabinets with their inevitable dead space. By moving the ovens from their proposed location on the outside wall by the pantry entrance, we opened up storage space and a work area beside the sink. Plus, the move eliminated the possibility of an open oven door blocking entry to the pantry. Sarah also suggested moving the microwave to the pantry because it's not used very much. This change made it easier to locate the other appliances without overlapping work patterns in the kitchen.

Using the cardboard templates also gave the owners a feel for the kitchen's scale, especially



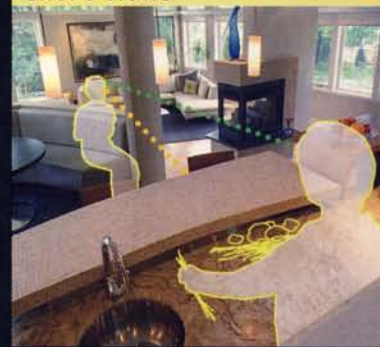
Cooks can work and entertain with an efficient layout. Wall ovens (facing page) make better use of corner space than cabinets and improve work flow. With a separate cooktop and prep sink, two cooks can work independently. Photo taken at A on floor plan. The open floor plan lets cooks see and talk with their guests. Photo at left taken at B on floor plan.



SIGHTLINES DESIGNED FOR ENTERTAINING

Open kitchens are great for entertaining because the cook can interact with visitors. Guests, however, should not be able to see the mess of food preparation. My strategy for screening the view was to raise the kitchen two steps above the living and dining rooms and to vary the countertop heights. Elevating the kitchen helps to define the social and work areas, keeping guests from getting underfoot while the cooks are at work.

Chef's views



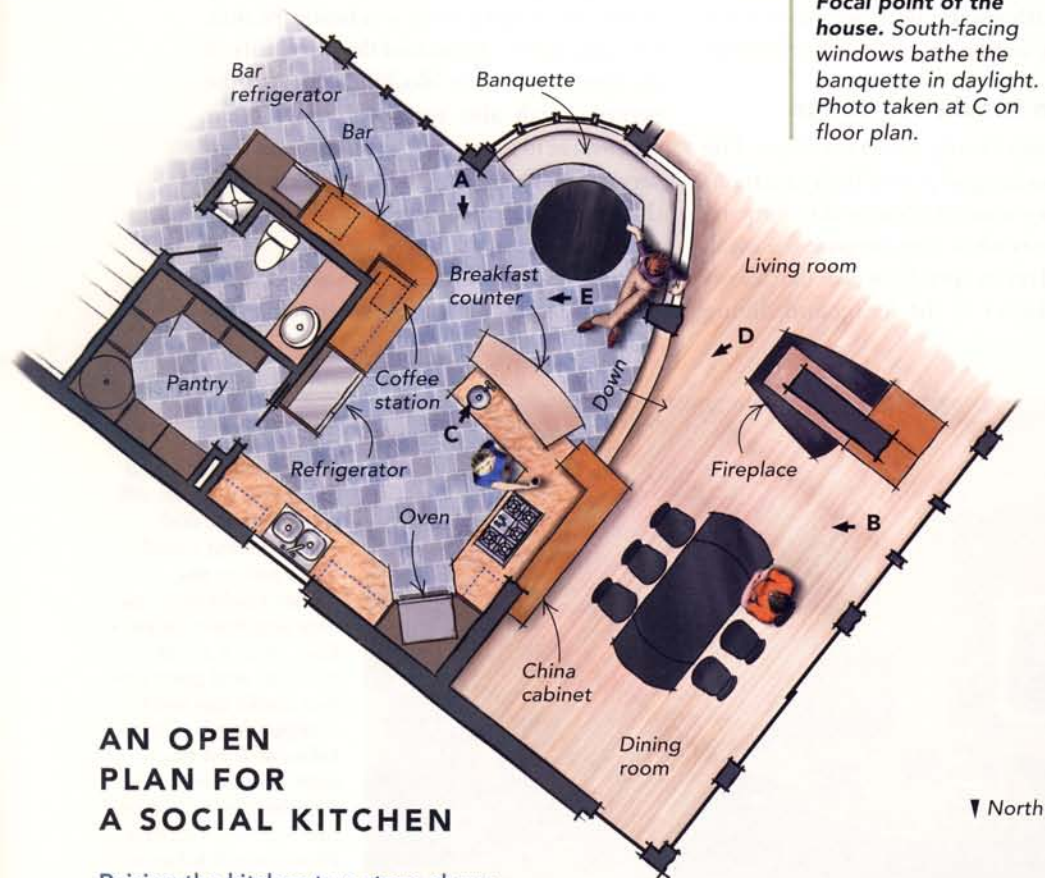
From the high ground in the kitchen, the cooks have a commanding view and are not left out of the party's conversations. Because people at the banquette will be seated, the breakfast bar rises only 6 in. to hide the counter.

Guest's views



Combine the elevation difference between the kitchen and dining room with the 5-ft.-high built-in china cabinet (which rises 1 ft. above the countertop), and pots on the stove and counter surfaces are hidden from view.

Focal point of the house. South-facing windows bathe the banquette in daylight. Photo taken at C on floor plan.



AN OPEN PLAN FOR A SOCIAL KITCHEN

Raising the kitchen two steps above the dining and living rooms screens the countertops from view but keeps sightlines for conversation between the three areas. With an open space and elevated position, the cooks preside over their guests inside the house while enjoying 180° views of the outdoors.

Photos taken at lettered positions.

0 2 4 8 ft.

Drawing: Paul Perreault

the distances between work areas and appliances. Without an island, I was concerned that the work patterns might be too stretched out, but we found that we had achieved two efficient work triangles: refrigerator, sink, oven; and refrigerator, prep sink, cooktop. There is ample room to work along the expansive counters, and the cabinets and a large walk-in pantry provide plenty of storage.

Cooks preside from an elevated kitchen

From their vantage point two steps above the living and dining rooms, the cooks preside over the interior space. They easily can maintain eye contact with guests in the living, dining, or banquette areas. The kitchen's height advantage helps to incorporate a 180° outdoor view that includes tiered decks cascading to the pool and the beautifully landscaped courtyard beyond the banquette.

The leather-upholstered banquette is the perfect place for someone to sit and talk with one of the cooks. Centered between the kitchen, dining room, living room, and courtyard, the banquette is the focal point of the

house. This nook bridges the indoor and outdoor spaces.

Coffee station and breakfast bar set an informal tone

The homeowners wouldn't dream of plopping down at the banquette to read the morning paper without a cup of coffee. They are so devoted to their brew that they needed a dedicated space for their favorite coffee machine. We installed the upper cabinets 21 in. above the countertop at the coffee station so that the coffee machine, mounted on a custom-fabricated stainless-steel stand, fits underneath. The stand is essentially a sliding tray that allows the machine to roll forward for easy cleaning. The counter at the coffee station wraps around the corner and extends into the hallway as a bar area. The under-counter fridge, stocked with juice, soda, and beer, allows guests to serve themselves without entering the kitchen's workspace.

The breakfast counter, which is mounted on a stainless-steel stand, appears to float above the main counter. Like the built-in china cabinet, the breakfast counter screens the view of the

kitchen's work areas. In addition to being a place to grab a bowl of cereal, the breakfast counter also functions as a serving buffet and a seating area where guests can perch on stools to visit with the cooks.

Materials differentiate work areas

The different counter materials serve as clues to their uses. Durable granite is associated with the work surfaces. The interior designer suggested a richly patterned slab for the primary counters. I chose cherry for the areas where food is served or where people gather because its warmth evokes a furniture feel.

Different materials also provide some relief from the expanse of granite (photo facing page). The neutral-colored tumbled-marble mosaic tile for the backsplash and breakfast counter has a strong tactile quality, and it helps to break up the vivid countertop and rich cherry and eucalyptus cabinets. □

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Form and function in the details. The china cabinet's display niche (photo left) provides visual relief on a large end panel. Photo taken at D on floor plan. The coffee station (photo above), designed around a favorite coffeemaker, wraps around a corner to form a bar in the hallway. Tempered glass protects the cherry counter. Photo taken at E on floor plan.