



The Multipurpose Kitchen

Ann Marie Ragan, M.S., ASID, IDEC, NCIDQ Cert. No. 023436,
Senior Lecturer, Department of Apparel, Design and Hospitality Management, NDSU

Providing a kitchen design that supports the many activities of a busy family provides a much-needed location for families to come together and reconnect at the end of a long day.

Families are busier than ever, and finding time to fit everything into an already packed family schedule can be tricky at times.

More often than not, families are negotiating a schedule full of after-school activities, homework and meal preparation, so homes are being designed to be better-equipped to support this new family lifestyle.

One specific location in the home that truly has evolved is the kitchen. Designing your family kitchen to be a multipurpose space has the potential to make the kitchen the “hub” of your home and a place to come together as a family.

Here are some ways to do that:

■ **The kitchen island** – The increased use of islands in residential kitchens is an excellent example of how furniture placement or built-in cabinetry can contribute to a multipurpose design solution. Designing for more than one activity can lead to a space that adapts and morphs to the needs of the users at any given time.

An effective kitchen island can come in many forms. Determining the many activities that might happen at a kitchen island is the first step to designing an island that will function well for your family. Parents often are preparing meals and assisting with homework simultaneously. Providing an island that allows a child to work on homework closer to where the parent is during meal preparation or cleanup lowers stress levels and provides an opportunity for more impromptu conversations beyond homework.

Islands can be designed to have more accessible seating solutions for older individuals and smaller children, such as banquette seating connected to the backside of an island with a table, an attached table that is a standard table height with chairs, or a lower counter height instead of the higher, more typical counter height.

■ **Family organization stations** – The key to managing extracurricular activities, social and work events, and homework is to have a dedicated space for organization. The kitchen is an ideal location for an organization station. Having a family calendar, places to post RSVPs or invitations to upcoming events, hooks for coats and a charging station for electronic devices in the kitchen allows for easy access at the start and end of every day.

Cubbies or slots can be used for a variety of organizational needs, including homework to be completed, backpacks, mail and bills. A family organization station can be as simple as one cabinet dedicated to the family calendar or as complex as an entire wall of built-in cabinetry fully equipped with everything from storage cubbies to benches. The incorporation of an organization station allows children to gain an understanding of the benefits of being organized and responsible individuals.

■ **Incorporating technology** – We can’t discuss a multipurpose kitchen without including ways to incorporate technology into the space. Small modifications to a kitchen can make it more user friendly for the technologically advanced family. Rails mounted directly under wall cabinets have the potential to include stands for portable media players (iPods), cellphones or charging stations.

■ **Small sitting areas and adjacent family rooms** – These spaces might include more comfortable lounge furniture, desk(s) for studying or even a television. Family rooms often are considered to be separate rooms; however, proximity to the kitchen blurs the lines between where one room begins and the other ends.

Having a comfortable, dedicated space for the family included in the kitchen design, that is, a small nook with two larger lounge chairs or an area placed by a window, allows for intimate family conversations to happen between a couple of members of the family and for families to be close but still have the necessary space to work or relax.

The NDSU Extension Service does not endorse commercial products or companies even though reference may be made to tradenames, trademarks or service names. NDSU encourages you to use and share this content, but please do so under the conditions of our Creative Commons license. You may copy, distribute, transmit and adapt this work as long as you give full attribution, don't use the work for commercial purposes and share your resulting work similarly. For more information, visit www.ag.ndsu.edu/agcomm/creative-commons.

County commissions, North Dakota State University and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. NDSU does not discriminate in its programs and activities on the basis of age, color, gender expression/identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, participation in lawful off-campus activity, physical or mental disability, pregnancy, public assistance status, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, spousal relationship to current employee, or veteran status, as applicable. Direct inquiries to Vice Provost for Title IX/ADA Coordinator, Old Main 201, NDSU Main Campus, 701-231-7708, ndsu.eoaa@ndsu.edu. This publication will be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities upon request, 701-231-7881.