

Compact Kitchens

Smart design moves make these four small-house kitchens feel comfortable, not cramped

COMPILED BY DEBRA JUDGE SILBER

Regardless of the size of your home, if your kitchen is small, life inside that home is likely to feel cramped. The activities centered in today's kitchens—cooking, socializing, paying bills, doing homework—are not easily relegated to other areas of the house. Luckily, making the right design moves in a small kitchen can be almost as effective as adding square footage. The four projects highlighted here demonstrate several techniques that their architects and designers use to create airy, comfortable kitchens, even when space is at a premium.



THIS ISLAND SWAMPED ITS SMALL POND

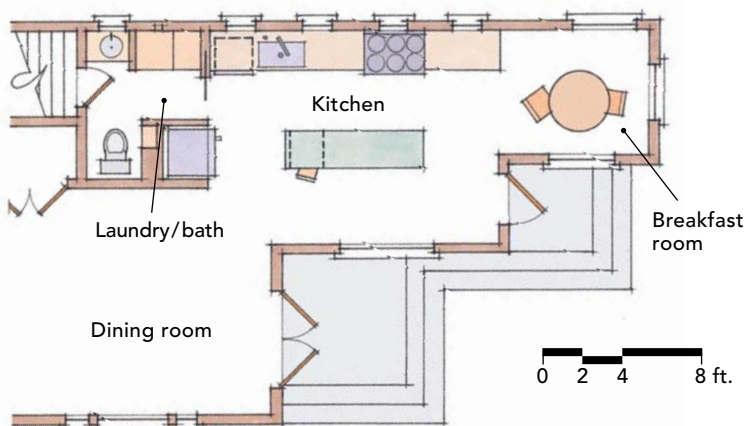
This kitchen, in an 1800-sq.-ft. Craftsman home in San Francisco, suffered from a poorly conceived remodel done in the 1980s. Work areas, including the range, were piled into an oversize island, leaving little room for additional prep areas or seating (photo left). A remodel by architect Jace Levinson and associate Gordon Popaduk trimmed the size of the island and enhanced the small space with open shelving, a calming palette, and a more graceful connection to the open spaces around it. Elements from the old kitchen that worked to expand the space visually—the clerestory windows and coffered ceiling—were justifiably retained in the remodel.





Smart design moves

1. Upper cabinets stop short of the ceiling, making them less imposing.
2. A coffered ceiling visually expands the room's dimensions.
3. A spot of color enlivens the area without overpowering it.
4. Views to the outdoors help the room feel more expansive.
5. A slender island provides a prep area in proportion to the space.
6. The small sink is the right size for the room.



BETTER FLOW LEADS TO BETTER FUNCTION

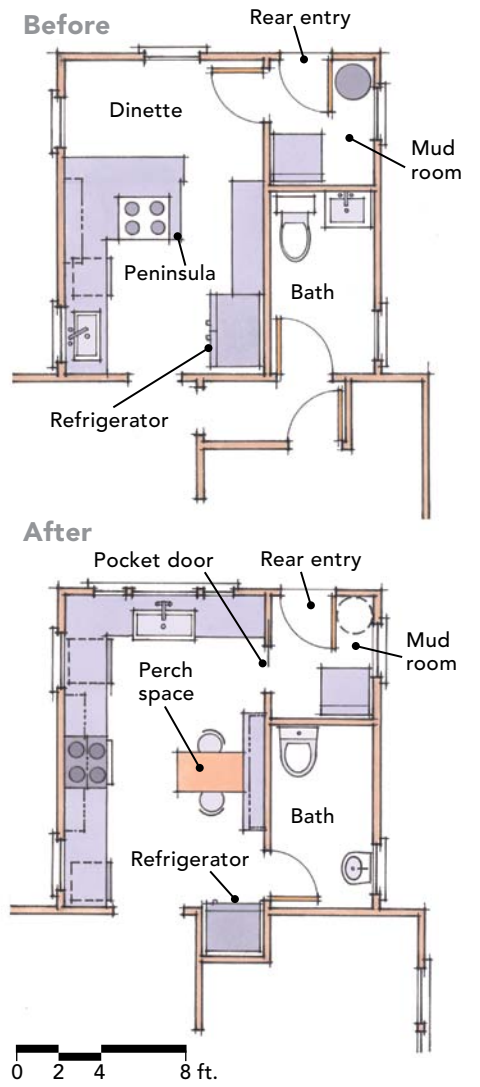


Although Toni-Ann and Neil had the energy to cook for family and friends five nights a week, the kitchen in their century-old, 1420-sq.-ft. Seattle house was hardly up to the task. The kitchen's poor layout, bad ventilation, minimal light, and cramped spaces made cooking a challenge. To cure these ills, architect Nicole Starnes Taylor first eliminated a peninsula that had separated the cooking area from the dining area. She then repositioned a bathroom door and recessed the fridge into an adjacent hallway to improve circulation and open up the space even more. Replacing a swinging door with a pocket door and raising cabinets to the ceiling also helped make the most of the kitchen's limited footprint.



Smart design moves

1. A pocket door requires less floor space than a swinging door and doesn't interfere with cabinetry.
2. Glass-front cabinets add visual depth.
3. The peninsula's see-through structure makes it appear lighter.
4. The bright palette reflects light and enhances the open feel.



Out of the way. Recessing the refrigerator into a former hallway was instrumental to improving traffic flow.



before

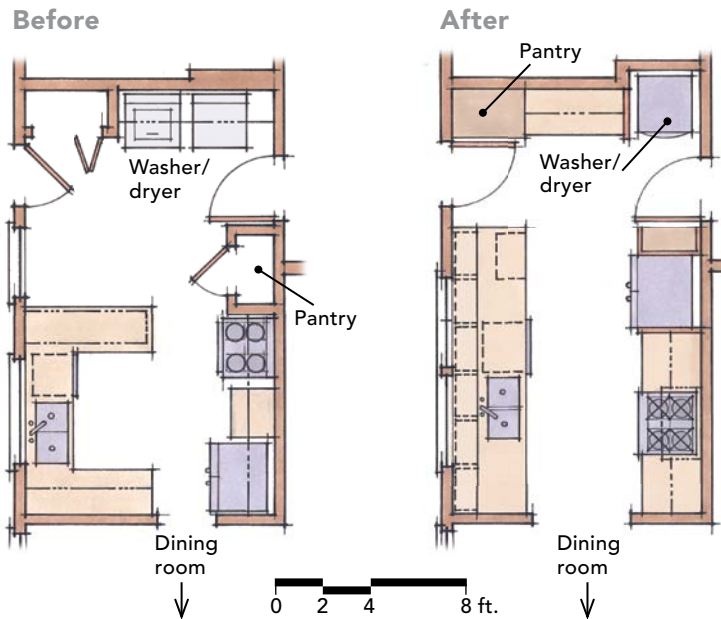
A GALLEY APPROACH SETS THIS SMALL KITCHEN STRAIGHT

People generally don't undergo the expense and disruption of remodeling to convert their kitchen into a galley arrangement, but that's just what architect Cindy Black prescribed as the ideal solution to the dysfunctional rectangular kitchen in Laura and

Blake's 1260-sq.-ft. midcentury home. A cramped, U-shaped work area with sparse counter space and hard-to-access corner cabinets divided the long room into a kitchen area and a breakfast area, neither of which was adequately sized. Black smoothed out the kinks with a

Smart design moves

1. Clean, uncomplicated surfaces keep the view tranquil.
2. Deep cabinets offer enough storage to keep clutter out of sight.
3. Wide windows expand the view of the outside.
4. A refrigerator placed at the end of the room keeps grab-and-go traffic out of the prep area.
5. A linear traffic pattern eases traffic flow.



straightforward galley plan, widening the cabinetry a bit on each side to create a larger worksurface and deeper storage as well as a comfortable 4-ft. 8-in. space in the middle. Although the kitchen's footprint didn't change, reimagining the space as a straightforward galley kitchen actually made it function better and feel much larger.

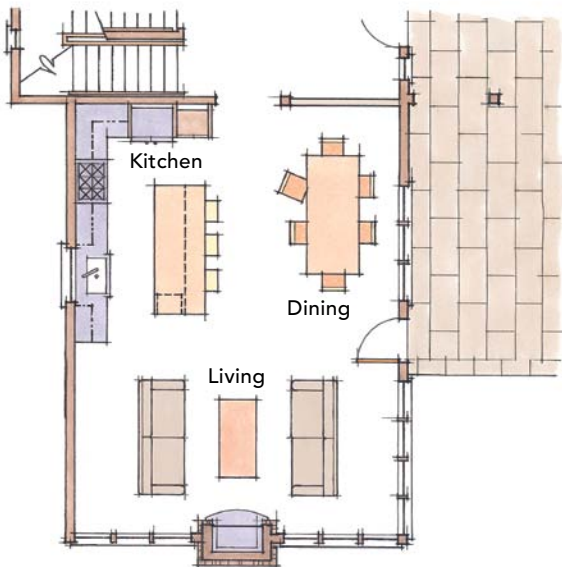
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Under the radar. Cubbies created by the deeper-than-usual counters keep dishes tucked out of the way.

A KITCHEN CARVED OUT OF A CORNER

In designing a kitchen for a new 2000-sq.-ft. home overlooking Lake Champlain, architect Ernie Ruskey sought to create a compact space that would accommodate his clients' passion for cooking while allowing a connection to views and activities in the great room. He chose to tuck the kitchen in the northwest corner of the larger room, defining the space with a maple-topped island that enables guests to socialize with those working in the kitchen without crowding them. The kitchen's layout is simple and includes well-organized work zones. Prep areas are contained in a tight triangle-shaped work pattern in the corner of the kitchen, while the cleanup zone is closer to the living room—an arrangement that prevents collisions when two people are working at the same time. Open shelving keeps wall storage from appearing monolithic, while the island base—a combination of drawers, cabinets, and shelving for cookbooks—handles the bulk of the kitchen's day-to-day storage demands.



0 2 4 8 ft.



Smart design moves

1. Prep and cleanup areas are side by side but wide enough to prevent collisions.

2. Out-of-the-way soffit cabinets hold items that get only occasional or seasonal use.

3. Seating outside of the work area invites visitors without crowding the space.

4. Shared flooring material (in this case maple hardwood) provides a visual link between the kitchen and surrounding spaces, making the kitchen feel unbound.

5. The open-ended circulation pattern lets people enter and exit easily.



Connective colors. A palette of soft blues and browns ties the narrow kitchen to expansive lake views through the abundant windows.

