

Inside Chefs' Kitchens

Design, organization, and material ideas from three professionals

BY CHARLES MILLER

After trekking around the country for more than 30 years for *Fine Homebuilding*, photographing some of the most beautifully crafted homes in North America, I hung up my frequent-flyer pass and moved into semiretirement in California. I'm pleased to say it's more *semi* than *retired*. I still get to work for *Fine Homebuilding*, and for the past couple of years, I've been helping our sister magazine, *Fine Cooking*, on a project called "Behind the Kitchen Door." I visit food professionals, photograph their home kitchens, and report on how they've shaped them to be as efficient as a workshop and as inviting as a cherished getaway.

I've seen a lot of great kitchens over the years. Most of them were designed for people who love to cook but are not involved in the food business. It has been instructive to see the differences between the pro and nonpro kitchens. It's not the appliances—but it can be their placement. The pro is far more likely to put the stove center stage. And the pro's kitchen will have all manner of storage solutions; multiple workstations; durable, non-fussy materials; and plenty of room for dinner parties and all the gear that goes along with them. Here, I'll tease out the tips that will make for better cooking spaces in your home, even if your Sunday dinners are a bit more modest than those of the chefs featured here. After all, the food business is part of the hospitality business, and I'm hard-pressed to think of anything more hospitable than a dining table decked out with lovingly prepared food surrounded by an appreciative gathering of friends.

Charles Miller is an editor at large. Photos and drawings by the author.

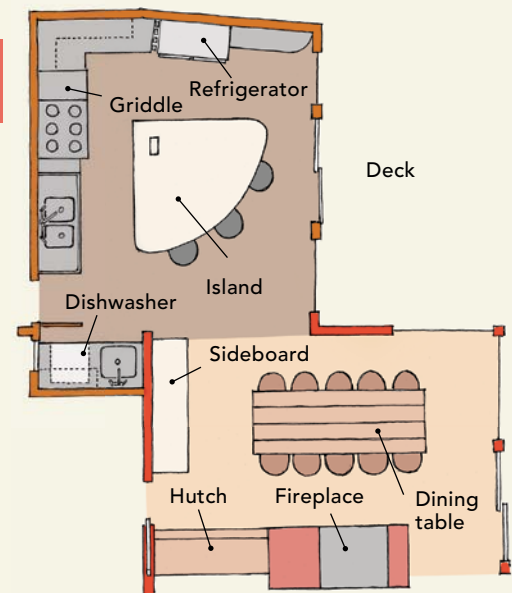
TIP

MOBILE ISLAND

Mounted on heavy-duty casters, the island can be rolled toward the refrigerator wall, turning the curved edge of the island into a buffet under pendant lights and opening the kitchen for big crowds. Every cubic foot of the island cabinet is storage space, with drawers on the refrigerator side serving as pullout pantries. Tom chops herbs and vegetables right on the maple top, and he scrapes the remains into a rectangular opening in the island top that leads to the compost bin.



THE ENTERTAINER'S KITCHEN



Tom's *Big Dinners* is one of Tom Douglas's cookbooks, and it also describes the typical weekend events Tom and his wife and partner, Jackie Cross, host at their Seattle home. In addition to creating 13 successful restaurants in Seattle, Tom and Jackie are known for their community-service participation. Dinners at their house are perennial favorites at charity auctions, and their dining room and kitchen are tailored to preparing meals for large gatherings, with plenty of counter space for kitchen helpers.

When they bought the '50s-era ranch-style house, Tom and Jackie converted the original family room into what is now the

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TIP DISHWARE ON DISPLAY

Instead of hiding a lifetime's collection of lovely platters, plates, and dishware behind closed doors, a three-tiered built-in hutch in the dining room keeps the china both accessible and part of the decor.





TIP EASY-TO-FIND UTENSILS

"I hate searching through drawers for things," says Tom. Consequently, pots, pans, and ladles hang within reach from hooks, while knives, spatulas, and a host of other specialty utensils stick to 24-in. magnetic knife bars screwed to the wall.



TIP CLEVER USE OF SPACE

A vertical spice library of mostly 4-oz. tin containers with clear lids (specialtybottle.com) keeps spices organized on the side of the refrigerator cabinet. Steel washers glued to the bottoms of the tins keep them stuck to the magnetic knife strips.

kitchen. The old kitchen became the new dining room with a picnic-style table big enough for 10. The two spaces are open to one another, but there's a cleanup corner tucked away behind a wing wall where dirty dishes can remain out of sight until it's time to load the dishwasher.

When I visited Tom and Jackie's kitchen, it reminded me of my trips to a restaurant-supply house. Stainless steel abounds in the Lambert prep and cleanup sinks, worktable counters, backsplashes, and the Metro shelving between the range and the refrigerator and above the cleanup sink. A six-burner Garland range with double ovens and a raised griddle anchors the cooking wall. They got the Garland after Tom realized that their original stove arrangement, which included a 120,000-Btu wok burner, had a problem: One day, Tom walked into the kitchen, and the burner was on full blast. "We discovered that our dog could turn on the wok burner with her tail," he says.

A prodigious island serves multiple functions in this kitchen. Its maple butcher-block top overhangs the curved side, providing legroom when it's in bar-top mode. Take away the barstools, and the island is large enough for multiple helpers to do food prep.



TIP MULTITASK ISLAND

Wrapped in cherry veneer and topped with soapstone, the island perches on a stainless-steel frame on delicate adjustable feet. Every cubic foot of its cabinet is storage space. Overhangs for stools and outlets at each end ensure plenty of laptop activity. Shelves at one end for books, magazines, and writing implements turn the island into a big desk when that's what's needed.

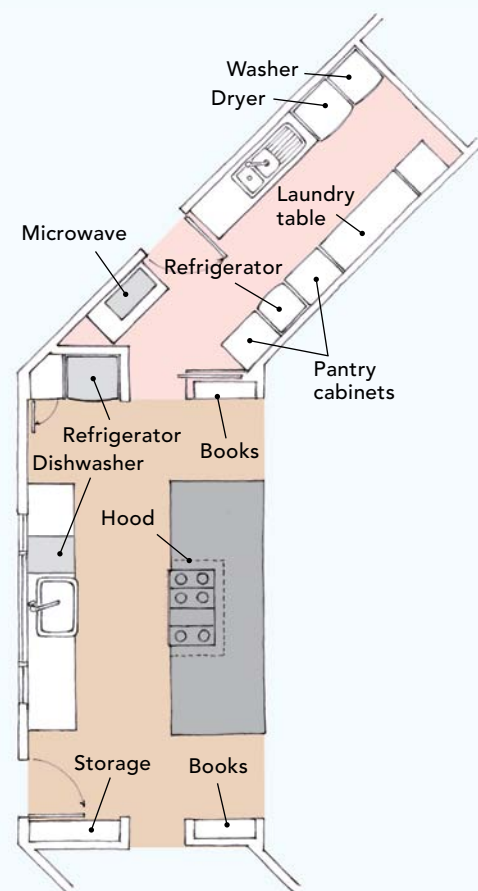


A KITCHEN FOR FRIENDS

Before she graduated from UCLA's film school in the early 1970s, Anna Thomas had already made a big splash in the food world. Her first cookbook, *The Vegetarian Epicure*, turned the common perception of vegetarian cooking on its head, from a cuisine of denial into one of nourishment and pleasure. Her latest cookbook, *Love Soup*, took home a James Beard Award in 2010. In her other job as a filmmaker and screenwriter, Anna received an Academy Award nomination for her work on the movie *El Norte*.

A few years ago, Anna remodeled her house in the Ojai Valley to make the kitchen even more welcoming for parties. As one guest remarked to me as others were preparing appetizers and pulling corks, "If you're invited to one of Anna's parties and you don't go, you're either stupid or dead."

Anna wanted the new kitchen to feel like an art gallery, with no upper cabinets and lots of light. Reconfiguring several adjacent closets into a long, sky-lit combo pantry/laundry room made up for the lost cabinet space.



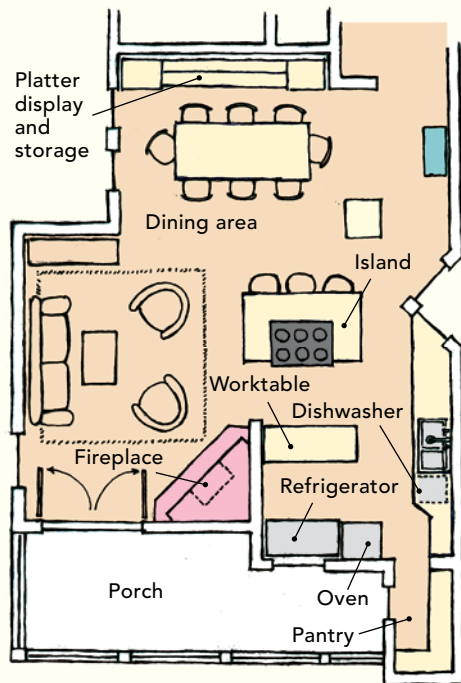
TIP STORAGE THAT MAKES THINGS EASY TO FIND

Anna keeps most stored items out of sight, but she made an exception for a set of open drawers. "I splurged on the custom stainless-steel drawers next to the range," says Anna. "Their full-extension heavy-duty drawer slides make it easy for my food-preparing friends to find the pot, pan, or lid that they need."

TIP ECONOMIZE IN THE PANTRY

The island, hood, and sink counter are all custom, and cost accordingly. The pantry, on the other hand, could be a page out of the Ikea catalog. The pantry cabinets, counters, sink, table, and faucet are from this retail titan. These affordable items work just fine and are in keeping with the contemporary style of the kitchen.

THE INSTRUCTOR'S KITCHEN



Her father said that she has the soul of a wandering gypsy, and it's pretty hard to argue with that. When she's not taping her popular PBS television show *Cooking Confidence* or writing her next cookbook (she's done 18 so far), Joanne Weir leads groups on culinary excursions and teaches cooking classes all over the world. Her home is a vintage Victorian house in San Francisco's Pacific Heights, where she tapes her TV show and teaches cooking classes to small groups of eager students.

Small rooms, high ceilings, and a tiny kitchen in the back describe the floor plan of just about every original Victorian row house in San Francisco. The house where Joanne and her husband, Joseph, live was no exception. The wide-open space that now includes the kitchen, the dining area, and the sitting room used to be three separate spaces walled off from one another. Opening the back of the house meant losing a small bedroom, but the trade-off was worth it. I was really struck by how columns and arches define the dining area without closing it off to the kitchen, and the long diagonal views make what isn't a large space feel expansive and light.



TIP**SHOW OFF YOUR COOKING CHOPS**

A freestanding island with a six-burner range and a butcher-block top is at the epicenter of Joanne Weir's kitchen. Along with the freestanding table behind it, the island provides abundant counter space and both drawer and open-shelf storage. A combination of cabinets—some with solid doors, some with glass doors, and some with open shelves—takes advantage of the high ceilings for cookware display space. Made of cherry, the cabinets echo the honey-colored, century-old Douglas-fir floors.

**TIP****CREATE A UNIQUE KITCHEN WITH ONE-OF-A-KIND DETAILS**

Right around the corner from the big island, a fireplace with a rotisserie is the perfect place to slow-roast a leg of lamb on a foggy San Francisco weekend. Weir hired San Francisco ironworker Jefferson Mack to customize the brick fireplace into a wood-burning indoor grill. A rotisserie motor mounted on the side of the fireplace turns a chain-driven spit cradled by forged-steel brackets. A pair of gas jets in the floor of the firebox makes it easy to light the logs without messing around with kindling. A custom-made copper pan atop the hearth catches drippings.

**TIP****EVEN SMALL PANTRIES ARE VALUABLE**

The pantry is just wide enough for shelves on one side, but they're deep enough for a row of small appliances and not too deep to lose things. A two-zone Sub-Zero wine fridge keeps reds and whites at optimum temperatures.

