



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF BRIGGS DESIGN ASSOCIATES

*This pantry is designed with shallow shelves for easier access to stored items.*

# Kitchens Should Work for You

AS SOON AS YOU BEGAN DREAMING about remodeling your kitchen, your first impulse was most likely to look at cabinet styles and colors. But that is the last step to take, not the first. In fact, a great working kitchen can be created with orange crates and plywood counters if you have a well-designed layout.

### ASSESS FAMILY NEEDS

Today's kitchens are multi-purpose to complete homework, check the computer, pay bills, or share a glass of wine with friends. So, while you consider what frustrates you most about your current kitchen, also thoroughly assess your family's needs and desires. For example:

- How many of you cook at the same time?
- How tall is the main cook? Right- or left-handed?
- If you have a formal dining room, how often is it used?
- Do you entertain buffet or family style?
- What type of cooking is done the most?

These small details influence the next step—planning the space.



*Briggs Design suggests having ample counter space near the microwave.*



Adjustable storage spaces are handy for cooking items.

### THE VALUE OF PRIME REAL ESTATE

The cook's working space is the "prime real estate" of the kitchen. As you cook, pay attention to how you move and where you stop to work. The refrigerator, sink, and cooktop, the critical pieces needed to create a meal, should form a triangular traffic pattern. Because the refrigerator is the most-used appliance in the kitchen, allow enough space in front of it for traffic and a countertop landing space nearby. Include a continuous work top (five feet or so) for chopping, mixing, and food assembly. Avoid placing chairs or locating the main traffic pattern in this area. The microwave can stay. The double oven should not. Typically, we spend time there only depositing food, setting the timer, then walking away. Leave enough counter space next door to land the hot 20-pound turkey when you return.

### KITCHEN TOOLS AND STORAGE

Kitchen tools need to be within easy reach of the task at hand. In the prime work area keep the spices, oils, pots, pans, knives, cooking tools, hot pads, and mixing bowls that are involved the most in food prep. Store mugs and cups near where you serve hot beverages and glasses where you serve cold. Serving pieces, plates, bowls, silverware, and napkins should be closest to the table. Store the toaster near where you keep the bread, jam, or butter.



These pots and pans storage shelves are next to the cooking range.

Organize your pantry with shallow shelves waist-high or higher, as with deep shelves, food can be pushed back and forgotten until long expired. Below waist height, use drawers for bulkier items. Create a kid's space for everyday items like cereal and snacks that are within their reach. Find an area for occasionally or seasonally used appliances (waffle iron, crock pot) or the large stock pot used for the annual chili cook-off.

### THE LONG AND SHORT OF CABINETRY

With this kind of attention to detail, it's time to consider cabinet configuration. Shallow drawers work best for easy access to small items, cooking and baking utensils, kitchen gadgets, silverware, napkins, and placemats, and long cardboard boxes for plastic wrap and foil. Deep drawers are great for tall or stacking items like plastic storage containers, colanders, and mixing bowls.

Adjustable rollout shelves work well for heavy items like baking dishes, pots and pans, and small appliances. Store baking sheets, cutting boards, and muffin tins vertically between dividers. If you have the space and budget, custom options include a lift for a Mixmaster, a cabinet for the garbage and recycle bins, and revolving trays.



Finally, with functional design in hand, start exploring cabinet styles and colors. Whether you select modern, traditional, or country, you can be confident your kitchen will work for you. 

Architectural Engineers Kerry and John Briggs own Briggs Design Associates of North Barrington. Kerry Briggs specializes in residential interior architecture and design, while John's specialty is lighting and dimming systems. For more, see [www.briggs.design](http://www.briggs.design).