10 Kitchen Design Mistakes & How to Avoid Them
Imagine your dream kitchen at project’s end.

The new cabinets, countertops, sink, range and dishwasher are installed and absolutely beautiful. Gently, cautiously, the crew slides your refrigerator into place – and you realize you can no longer open the dishwasher! What now?

Every day customers send us kitchen plans, including those created by interior design firms, home improvement stores and the customers. Many contain errors that, if the kitchens are built, will cause headaches and endless regret. The following are ten of the most common.

1. Forcing an island into the space
2. Failure to use crown molding
3. Too many appliances (wall ovens)
4. Missing an opportunity to customize
5. Crowding the cooking zone
6. Narrow or unsafe passageways
7. Asymmetrical wall cabinets
8. Reusing a problem footprint
9. Colliding doors and drawers
10. Poorly fitted appliance cabinet
Forcing an island into the space

An island, the most requested kitchen feature, requires 36 to 44 inches of clearance on every side and, with four finished sides and a special base, adds to construction costs. For some homes, a peninsula, rolling cart or half wall is a better solution.

This layout has inadequate clearance between counters and only offers seating for two.

A peninsula provides seating for five, more prep space and a half wall to conceal clutter.
Failure to use crown molding

More than decoration, crown molding is an essential accessory. Chosen to complement the cabinetry and blend with the style of the home, it transforms wall cabinets into graceful architectural features and conceals irregularities in the soffit or ceiling surface.

With no crown molding, the cabinets would be starkly utilitarian and disproportionately tall. The upper edge of the cabinets would reveal irregularities in the ceiling surface.

A graceful crown complements the home’s style and trims the ceiling edge. Add furniture feet and the bank of cabinets becomes a beautiful built-in buffet.
Too many appliances (wall ovens)

Your kitchen wish list may include a wall oven (or two). An oven stack, however, displaces countertop that may be needed for prep or unloading a cooktop or refrigerator. If you have a small or mid-sized kitchen, consider integrating cooking and baking into a single or double-oven range.

Forcing wall ovens into this small kitchen cramps the area by the pro cooktop.

Eliminating the wall oven in favor of a range creates a broad expanse of counter for prep and serving.
Missing an opportunity to customize

As one of our designers tells her customers, “Do it once and do it right!” Storage solutions are critical to personalizing your work space. Customize your new kitchen now and enjoy it for years to come.

Keep trash and recycling out of sight and safe from pets and toddlers.

Pull-out shelves keep canned goods, spices and small appliances neat and at hand.

No bending and kneeling required! Pull-out trays bring everything into the light.

What a workhorse! The pot-and-pan storage drawer should top every kitchen wish list.
Crowding the cooking zone

Safety and efficiency guidelines require a minimum of 12 inches of counter on one side of a cooktop, 15 inches on the other, and a 9-inch buffer between a heat source and combustible material.

In this design, hearth surround cabinets are directly adjacent to gas burners. Safety requires at least nine inches of horizontal clearance between a burner and cabinet.

Replacing the hearth surround cabinets with standard wall cabinets solves the problem. Another solution would have been to broaden the surround space by 18 inches, allowing safe clearance between burners and cabinets on either side.
Narrow or unsafe passageways

Tried and true recommended distances between counters, bars and tables allow traffic to move freely. Failure to follow those guidelines will create a frustrating and possibly dangerous space.

A kitchen aisle should be 42” wide for one cook and 48” for multiple cooks. The narrow clearance in front of the range creates a hazardous roadblock.

Expanding the aisle to 48 inches means food prep, cooking and baking can be family affairs.
Asymmetrical wall cabinets

A common mistake is to align cabinet widths vertically, despite the fact the eye tracks horizontally. The result is a choppy and unbalanced look. A group of upper cabinets should be symmetric in width and in the orientation of hardware.

Here the designer aligns cabinet widths vertically, wrapping upper cabinets around the corner at the same angle as the lower cabinets. The effect is an unbalanced, awkward bank of wall cabinets around the range hood.

Positioning equal-width cabinets on either side of the range hood draws the eye to what is now a symmetrical furniture-look feature above the hearth.
Reusing a problem footprint

Before replacing cabinets, flooring and appliances, consult with a professional kitchen designer. The pro may identify opportunities for low or no-cost improvements to your layout. Something as simple as moving the dishwasher to the other side of the sink or relocating pot and pan storage closer to the cooking zone can have a major impact on how the space will work for you.

This breakfast nook, rarely used by the homeowners, takes up more than one-third of the space in an already compact kitchen.

Replacing the nook with a low counter (shown) and beverage center peninsula (not shown) is a much better use of the space.
Colliding doors and drawers

A small design error can have a huge impact, particularly on an inside corner, where cabinet and appliance doors and drawers need extra clearance to open freely. Unfortunately, the corner-collision error, very common, is nearly impossible to correct post-installation.

Try to open one of the top drawers and crash! It will collide with the drawer pull on the opposing cabinet.

A spacer on the left and a door-only cabinet on the right ensure all will open without obstruction.
A kitchen design should be created for specific appliance models and include detailed installation instructions. A one-size-fits-all cabinet layout risks unsightly gaps or a cabinet too small for the microwave, range or refrigerator.

A standard refrigerator cabinet is 24” deep – and a standard refrigerator is between 31” and 35” deep. The cabinet and side panel must be modified to extend to the appliance door.

A good design will include installer instructions on how to pull the cabinet above the refrigerator forward and extend the side panel to create a custom-fit refrigerator cabinet.
We hope you found this material interesting. It is important to catch any design problems before you order materials or begin construction.

If you would like a professional kitchen designer to review a kitchen plan or create a design for you, contact our studio at 888-350-1242 or cliqstudios.com/free-kitchen-design.

We never charge for design services, and there is no obligation to buy. We just want you to love your new kitchen!