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Hor

Hot kitchens

By JOHN BYRD
Special to The Times

Many years ago, it was determined that every kitchen should be laid out as a triangle.

The sink, stove and refrigerator were the points of the triangle, and the cook was in the middle. This held true whether it was a U-shaped, L-shaped or galley kitchen.

This "chef's triangle" was deemed most efficient after a study in the 1950s concluded that the average cook worked alone in the kitchen, prepared meals from scratch and needed storage space for about 400 items.

Conducted at the height of the baby boom, the study also found that most cooks were stay-at-home moms.

Times have changed for real, says the National Kitchen and Bath Association, which recently conducted a "follow-up" study. Many cooks now share the kitchen — they arrive from work or school, late or early, and almost never cook from scratch. They get in each other's way, knock over trays, and spoil the broth.

Plus, they now need storage space for some 800 items. The association's sad conclusion: everybody must remodel their kitchen.

Of course, you knew that. The kitchen is not just a kitchen anymore; it's an activity hub, the beating heart of your house.

"The trick is to design it so you don't get in each other's way," says Sonny Nazemian, CEO and president of Michael Nash Custom Kitchens and Homes in Fairfax. "We allow for multiple work centers, whether it's preparing food or working at the kitchen computer."

The kitchen computer ... a very modern concept. And, yet, according to Nazemian, people have come to expect it — along with many other amenities. Last year, Michael Nash won a slew of remodeling prizes for meeting such expectations.

"The key to any kitchen makeover is organization, and, for us, that starts with the cabinets," Nazemian said. "You have to find a place for everything the client says they want."

For a COTY Award-winning project in Fairfax Station, Nazemian even made the refrigerator look like a cabinet. Contractor of the Year (COTY) Awards are given annually by local chapters of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. Nash won 10 in the recently concluded competition, three in Fairfax County.

"We paneled the double doors to match the surrounding woodwork," he said. "It gave the kitchen a high-end appearance, but it also proved my point — everything starts with cabinets. The color scheme, the countertop material, even the floor plan."

In this case, the owner's needs were somewhat contradictory. They wanted to enlarge the opening from the foyer to the kitchen, which meant tearing out the foyer closets. But, at the same time, they desperately needed more storage space.

Nazemian's solution was a perfect union of form and function: a two-tier island that cordons off the food preparation area and provides valuable storage and countertop space. While the upper tier doubles as a lunch counter, the lower tier functions as a separate work station for the various chefs (in keeping with Nash's multi-station approach).

Aesthetically, the mahogany-stained cherry cabinets inevitably led to dark granite countertops, black appliances, and hardwood floors. In a small corner of the kitchen, the Nash team custom-designed a computer desk to match the rest of the woodwork. Above the desk is an opulent glass-faced display cabinet, also a Nash design.

The resulting amenities: three separate food preparation areas, two places to dine (the island bar and the kitchen table), 340 cubic feet of cabinet space, and an elegant computer work station. Not bad for a kitchen originally put into commission in the 1980s.

Nash's two other COTY-winning projects last year are even more "cabinet-intensive," to coin a bad phrase for smart design. The first ("Best Kitchen under \$30,000, Grand Award") was a stunning makeover of a tiny U-shaped kitchen in Lorton that was almost 40 years old.

One of the first things Nazemian noticed about it was the empty wall separating the kitchen from the family room. "It served no purpose," he said. "What they needed was a curving glass cabinet and counter to replace the wall."

With the wall removed, the envelope of the kitchen could expand into an adjacent, and much wider, eating area. Nazemian created his curving display case out of maple in a contemporary Shaker style with L-crown moulding.

Next to it, just inside the kitchen, he built a massive cabinet to house a Kitchen-Aid refrigerator/freezer. He then built a second rounded display for the other side of the refrigerator cabinet. Beneath each of these "bookend" display cases, he installed custom cabinets with dark granite countertops. Together, they serve as a perfect staging area for the dining room.

"The owners were clearly ready for a bigger kitchen," Nazemian said. "Which is why long, custom-made cabinets occupy most of the wall space."

The dark granite counters, maple hardwood floors and stainless steel appliances are all design elements "dictated" by the style and color of the cabinetry. In the middle of it all is a simple 63-square-foot food preparation island, with storage space below. A pair of pendant Progresso lamps supplement recessed halogen lights in the ceiling. Who could have imagined such a thing in the 1970s?

Several of Michael Nash's COTY Awards are hanging in the company's Kitchen and Bath showroom, housed adjacent to their Fairfax offices. Here, 15 or so different kitchen and bath "scenarios" are on display, most designed by Nazemian and his associates, who execute all the creative and construction phases of a project in-house.

By the 1990s, the large kitchen was commonplace, if not quite thought through. Michael Nash won the third COTY in 2006 for a renovation to a Centreville home executed on a fairly grand scale: "Best Kitchen \$30,000 to \$60,000, Merit Award."

"To be blunt, it really needed a makeover," Nazemian said, "especially given the overall quality of the house." Vinyl flooring and old floral wallpaper ran from the kitchen to the adjacent dining area. The kitchen window was small, and the cabinets were dark and short.