

small wonders

Is your kitchen more cupboard than cooking area? These practical tips can help you make the most of a petite space without skimping on functionality and good looks

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CREATE A 'NEEDS' LIST

Forget the wish list – when planning a small kitchen, the most important consideration is knowing what you can do *without*. If you bring in all the latest appliances, you'll end up sacrificing bench and storage space. Your needs list will determine the layout which, in turn, will impact on the kitchen's functionality and ergonomics. "Write down what you really need in order to survive in your kitchen," advises Michael Kitchener, managing director of Kitcheners Kitchens in Sydney. "Opt for compact or multifunctional appliances to help save space. For example, can you use a microwave that doubles as an oven? And bench space is vital, so consider whether a two-burner cooktop could meet your needs." In this eat-in galley kitchen by Ikea, the bench doubles as extra preparation space, with stools stowing neatly underneath when not in use. >



MAXIMUM STORAGE, MINIMUM FUSS

Clutter emphasises a small area, so store everything behind cabinetry. Extend cupboards to the ceiling (**top left**) and create drawer spaces in the kickboards. To maximise storage space, install extra internal shelves in overhead cabinetry, deep pot drawers below the bench and a pull-out pantry. Pull-out storage (**top right**) is more expensive than traditional cupboards but worth the extra money for the space you'll gain. And, forget hanging racks. "Rather than hanging utensils and crockery along the splashback, hang hooks inside cabinetry doors," advises interior designer and colour consultant Elisabeth VanDyk of European Colours & Interiors.

KEY MATERIALS

Keeping colours light and textural detail to a minimum narrows down your choice of materials. "A satin polyurethane finish on cabinetry, rather than laminate, reduces visual and joinery lines. A quartz composite product can also integrate benchtops and splashbacks," says interior designer and colour consultant Danielle James of Janssen James.

If you really want timber, opt for ultra-light tones. Stainless steel (**top right**) is a good option in a room with plenty of light, as it will take on a more reflective or mirror-like quality, opening up the space.

WORK THE TRIANGLE

Position the oven/cooktop, fridge and sink at three points of a four- to seven-metre triangle for maximum ergonomics and efficiency – an easy task in small kitchens, such as this cleverly designed space by Max May Architects (**left**). "But keep in mind that the total length of the triangle shouldn't be less than 3.6 metres – anything smaller would be too cramped to work in," says Elisabeth. "The distance between the cooktop and sink should be the shortest."

BIGGER BENCH SPACE

Max out your bench space by opting for more compact benchtop items, such as a single-bowl sink and two-burner cooktop (**right**). "Consider an under-counter fridge and freezer," Elisabeth says. Want extra bench space on demand? Then try trolleys on castors that can be wheeled in from another room, extension benches or boards that fit over your sink.

GO FOR GALLEY

The galley design – two rows of cabinets/appliances separated by a walk-through space – works best in a tight spot, as seen here in an example by builder Richard Heath of Create Construction. Its openness is conducive to entertaining and takes up little room, but think carefully about where your fridge and cupboards will go. “It’s often best to position your fridge or pantry in the corner, instead of having it take up lots of space near a doorway,” Michael says.

A long island bench and a wall of cabinetry is still a galley, advises Elisabeth. “With high stools around the island bench, it does double-duty as a dining table. The stools act as a boundary between the eating and living area.” >

“Don't go for TINY DETAILS, SUCH AS A MOSAIC-TILED WALL. TO MAKE THE SPACE APPEAR LARGER THAN IT IS, GO BIG – BIG TILES AND BIG PATTERNS”
~ ELISABETH VANDYK

AVOID COLOUR AND CLUTTER

Apply the 'less is more' rule. "Use light colours for the all the main surfaces," says Danielle. To make the space appear larger, "ensure your ceiling is the lightest colour of the room and the floor is the darkest." In this kitchen by White Box Architects, visual lines are kept to a minimum. "Fewer joins and surfaces streamline the look and reduce visual clutter," says Danielle. "One way to do this is to create continuous surfaces: use the same material for the benchtop and splashback." An integrated fridge, dishwasher and rangehood will complete the effect.



"If you intend TO CREATE A VISUAL FEATURE, MAKE IT DELIBERATE AND MAKE IT JUST ONE: ONE AMAZING LIGHT FITTING, ONE FEATURE WALL, ONE BRIGHT SPLASHBACK" ~ DANIELLE JAMES

OPEN OR CLOSED?

Kitchens integrated with living and dining areas appear larger but if you're planning to knock out a wall to achieve this, you'll be skimping on storage. "I've seen kitchens where people have created holes in walls or even removed them to create the illusion of a larger area, but they've lost precious cupboard space," says Michael. "It's not the best decision for families needing storage."

FLOW ON YOUR FLOOR

Create a continuous floor surface to up the feeling of space. "Use large tiles with matching coloured grout; wide, dark floorboards with near-invisible joins; or poured and sealed polished concrete," Danielle says. Ensuring the flooring of your living and dining flow into your kitchen can do the trick, too.

FOCUS YOUR LIGHTING

As small kitchens often come with small windows, skylights or good task lighting is necessary (right). Focus your task lights on your main work zones: the sink, cooktop and prep areas. Go for halogen lights fitted flush with the ceiling – pendant or lowered lights are visually distracting and can create shadows. **bb**

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