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By Michele Lerner SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES Thursday, June 21, 2012



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If you are a fan of home-makeover shows, you may have become accustomed to homeowners taking a sledgehammer to the walls of their tiny kitchens and somehow doubling the size of the space, transforming it into a showplace of light and space.

In reality, not every homeowner has the budget or the land available to turn a galley kitchen into a chef's dream space. Yet local designers and remodelers say there are plenty of options available to maximize the efficiency and the appeal of a smaller kitchen.

"A lot of the housing stock in our area has small, dark kitchens that are closed off from the rest of the house," said [Patricia Tetro](#), a principal and owner of BOWA in McLean. "Not everyone has the means or even the desire to expand their house, but there are ways to create the perception of a larger space and to steal little bits of space from nearby areas."

In one kitchen project, for example, [Ms. Tetro](#) was able to open up an adjacent foyer entrance from a garage to add extra cabinets and a longer line of sight.

[Liz St. Rain](#), a kitchen designer with [Four Brothers LLC](#) in the District, added light to her kitchen while hiding an unattractive view directly into a neighboring home.

"We replaced the window and covered it with decorative open shelving with a collection of hand-blown glass, so you have the light reflecting and bouncing around the room," [Ms. St. Rain](#) said.

She wanted friends and family to be able to socialize while cooking, but she doesn't have the space for seating in her kitchen.

"I added a 27-by-30-inch island with a 3-inch-thick butcher-block top so that several people can chop at once," [Ms. St. Rain](#) said.

[Allie Mann](#), a project designer at [Case Design/Remodeling](#) in Bethesda, worked with one family to expand the kitchen by removing the wall between the kitchen and the adjacent dining room. In that same project, [Ms. Mann](#) added storage by extending the cabinets to the ceiling, and she installed a space-saver microwave and built-in organizers for knives and spices.

"They wanted the two spaces to be larger and more connected, so we removed the wall and then we added built-in storage in the dining room with cabinets and granite counters that match the kitchen," [Ms. Mann](#) said. "The glass-front cabinets reflect light and increase the sense of depth and volume in the room. We also did as much as possible to increase the natural light in the space coming in through the door and the windows."

In one project, [Ms. Tetro](#) increased the size of the kitchen window to visually increase the space and make the connection to the green backyard.

"We reconfigured the cabinets to allow for a bigger window and yet to have enough storage," [Ms. Tetro](#) said. "We used light marble counters and light-colored walls to visually reflect the outdoors and then used hardwood flooring that matched the adjacent rooms so that the kitchen didn't feel so enclosed."

Another option is to open part of a kitchen wall to create a pass-through from an enclosed kitchen.

In addition to these visual cues that can make a kitchen feel larger,



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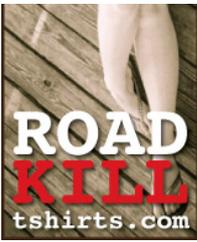
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homeowners can increase the efficiency of their storage and counter space.

"In a condo in the city, a moderately long space like a galley with a back wall, we added a very shallow pantry with lots of glass at the top," Ms. St. Rain said. "The pantry became a focal point for the kitchen, and the light is very pleasing to the eye. It also added a lot of usable storage space."

Ms. Tetro said many cabinets are available with rollout or pullout shelves that effectively increase their storage capacity by making items more accessible.

"We can create pantry space with shelves on the doors and regular shelves inside, or use a 12- or 15-inch-deep space for extra storage," Ms. Tetro said.

Spice drawers, knife drawers and adjustable shelves all can be used to increase efficiency in a small kitchen.

"It's important to clean up the clutter on the countertops so your kitchen doesn't look like it's too small," Ms. Mann said.

New designs in appliances also can add efficiency and improve the look of your kitchen.

"Dishwasher drawers and microwave drawers free up more space than traditional appliances, Ms. Tetro said. "There are even refrigerator drawers that can be built in to increase your fridge space without the need for a second refrigerator."

Microwaves can be installed below a cabinet or on a center island. Ms. Mann suggested opting for an 18-inch-wide dishwasher over the standard 24-inch models to gain an extra 6 inches of cabinet space.

"Stainless steel appliances offer a reflective surface that bounces light around and can make your kitchen look larger," Ms. Mann said. "You can also use appliance panel fronts that look like cabinets to trick the eye."

Ms. St. Rain said that while some people prefer a separate cooktop and oven, a range is not only less costly but also offers a more efficient use of space.

Cabinets and counters also can be chosen with an eye toward visually improving the sense of space in a small kitchen.

"It's important to avoid a lot of dark and heavy choices for cabinets and counters, but you also need to layer in color to maintain interest," Ms. Tetro said. "An all-white kitchen may not wind up as interesting and won't necessarily give the impression of something larger unless it has an interesting backsplash or other focal point. Moving from light to medium to dark colors gives the perception of more space."

In general, Ms. Mann said, white, off-white or light maple cabinets work best in a small space, with glass inserts instead of solid doors.

Ms. St. Rain recommended avoiding using a lot of big patterns in a small space or a variety of different surfaces.

"I think the colors should just be what you like, with good task lighting, but you do need to be careful of having too many different patterns," Ms. St. Rain said.

Hardwood flooring is the preference for many kitchen designers and works particularly well if it matches the flooring in an adjacent room because it can extend the connection between the rooms.

"If you choose tile flooring in a small kitchen, it's best to use a larger format of tile, such as 12-by-14, so that you have minimal grout," Ms. Mann said. "You can also use 12-by-12 tiles on the diagonal to give the appearance of width."

The most important step in redesigning a small kitchen is to realize you can't fit everything in a small space, Ms. St. Rain said.

"You need to prioritize and decide if it's more important to have seating, room for multiple cooks or lots of countertop space for baking," she said.

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