



DESIGNING A FAMILY FRIENDLY KITCHEN

The modern family home has a kitchen that functions as far more than a kitchen – it is a meeting place for friends and family that needs to be designed as a multi-functional space that facilitates cooking and parenting.

How do you achieve this elusive combination of practicality and adaptability without losing the aesthetic?

The layout of the kitchen is vital – an open plan design where the kitchen can merge with the other living spaces works best. A well-designed family kitchen places ergonomics and flow as paramount as the space will be used by multiple people for multiple purposes simultaneously. A lot more thought will need to go into what should be stored where and why. Safety comes first, as while you want your children to be able to be self-sufficient in the kitchen you don't want accesses to anything that may harm them. Think about how and where your knives and other sharp utensils will be stored, how you will store expensive glass or china and where cleaning materials will be stored. You may have to consider cabinets with child locks for these areas with younger children.

To make sure your children can operate independently in the space ensure the items you are happy for them to access unsupervised are placed in easily accessible cupboards and drawers near a clear work surface so that plates and cups can easily be put down on a flat surface.

Workflow is especially important for a busy family kitchen. If you are opting for the inclusion of an island look at how and where you are positioning appliances like fridges and dishwashers so that when in use with doors open, they are not inhibiting main traffic routes in the kitchen. When you plan your kitchen layout think about the way in which your family uses the kitchen and the way they move through the space to get from A to B. An island is a good feature for a family kitchen but ensure that it is not so big it overwhelms the space and that the space between the island and other counters / workspaces is big enough to comfortably allow two people to pass or work alongside one another.



It is vital that durable finishes are chosen that are easy to clean and can withstand the chaos of little black bikes in the kitchen and children wanting to sit or climb onto countertops. This does not only apply to your kitchen finishes but also your choice in wall paint and flooring. Finishes like melamine, high pressure laminate, wrap, veneer, granite, Formica and quartz surfacing work well, whereas duco, solid timber and sintered surfacing that need a little more TLC may not be ideal options for you.



The inclusion of key design elements is vital for an effective family kitchen. A seating area where the family can eat together or eat on the go while doing homework or overseeing baking is vital. This will be one of the most important parts of the kitchen as it will facilitate the multi-functional nature of the space allowing it to be for eating, working, playing. This can be an active kitchen island with bar seating or a separate seating area. Whatever you opt for give thought to your seating choices. Are bar stools secure enough for small children? Is the finish of the seating easy to clean and maintain. Will the seats tipple over easily. This area should have easy access to plug points and cell phone charging stations so that computers can be plugged in, and devices charged. If you enjoy cooking and baking with your children an island is a good suggestion as it offers a large area of work surface for multiple people to gather round and will allow the whole family to be involved in the food preparation. The inclusion of a prep bowl on the island is also a great idea for the quick washing of sticky hands once cooking is done.

Ease of access is important especially for kids. Consider a step mechanism included in your kick plate at various key points in the kitchen to allow children extra height to easily see and use surfaces. Consider split level work surfaces with

some areas lower than others. Consider pull out drawers and shelves integrated into your cabinetry so that children can safely access contents. Ensure that nothing heavy or hot can be pulled off a work surface and that all countertop appliances are stored or plugged in so that they don't easily pull off the work surface.



Give thought to the quality and type of hardware you are going to use. A family kitchen will have its doors and drawers opened millions of times in its lifespan. Good quality hardware with a lifetime warranty is the sensible choice. Consider soft close mechanisms to ensure doors and drawers can't be slammed and banged. Avoid touch to open as these can be temperamental and will encourage sticky fingerprints on doors. Hardware storage solutions will also help you keep you space more organised and accessible – consider these for pantry and corner unit storage solutions as well as in your drawers to stop your drawer spaces becoming a messy tangle of forks and knives. Ensure you have generous dustbin space. Encourage recycling – it is the responsible thing to do. Make sure your bins are a good size – a family generates a lot of waste, and you don't want to have to empty the bin every day.

Pay attention to your appliance selection. Look at a fridge that has an in-door access to drinks and snacks – this will save you electricity and mean the kids can access what they need without ransacking the whole fridge. Also make sure it has an alarm to notify you if the door hasn't been closed properly. For a busy family, smart appliances are a good option – they can be programmed to start cooking independently, can remind you to buy groceries and make menu suggestions. All appliances should be eco-friendly with low electricity and water usage. You might consider an induction hob. These are economical but also ensure there is no chance of children getting burned on the hob while it is in use.

Be prepared for loadshedding – have loadshedding lighting set up as part of the kitchen, have a means of cooking during load shedding and try and ensure you can at least keep the WIFI going – this way the family has something to do while you cook.

When choosing your sink and tap consider a sink with a deep bowl for pots and pans. Look at a double bowl or two bowls side by side so that children can help you wash up. Consider a tap with a pull-out spray nozzle for ease of cleaning.

Include layered lighting so that key work areas have a good main light source but that there is also feature lighting for key cupboards and to illuminate floor line and eye level cupboards – this will help with ambiance as well as avoiding bumped heads and stubbed toes.

Make sure you have wall space to include kids' art and a family planner to help everyone stay on top of their day. While not all parents are fans of putting their kids in front of a TV the addition of one in the kitchen can help entertain children while you are cooking and can also be a great educational tool as well as allowing access to recipes and online content while you are working in the kitchen space.



To finish your family friendly kitchen, remember that natural light is important as is access to the garden. A good family kitchen links indoors and outdoors allowing the space to transition between entertaining, braaing and formal meals. As South Africans we live outdoors a lot, and it should be easy to transition food from indoors to outdoors. The kitchen must be able to withstand wet, sometimes dirty children running through it for a snack. A successful family kitchen is truly the heart of the home – the space that connects the whole house and those within it.

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