



KELLY'S KITCHEN SYNC





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*Insider kitchen design
and remodeling tips
from an award-winning
kitchen expert*



Kelly Morisseau

Certified Master Kitchen Designer



Kelly's Kitchen Sync

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[see page 6 to view the quote.]

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



— PART 1 —

EVERYONE NEEDS A LITTLE DESIGN HELP— THE EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY

Everyone needs a little design help	3
Let's start at the very beginning	11

— PART 2 —

GETTING STARTED: COSTS, WHERE TO GO, AND WHO YOU NEED

How much will it cost?	29
DIY—where are the savings?	36
Assembling your Team (even if it's only you!)	52

— PART 3 —

THE INSIDER SECRETS FOR MAKING YOUR KITCHEN WORK

Cabinets tips and tricks	69
Thinking inside the cabinet box—roll-outs, pull-outs and other fittings	87

Getting a grip on knobs, handles, and hinges	100
Heads-up on Counters	109
We've got your back (splash)	121
Faucet wedgies and other plumbing oversights	131
Cold, wet truths about refrigerators and dishwashers	141
Sizzling tips for ranges, cook tops, and ovens	151
Mopping up floor mistakes	169
Lighting tips to keep you on track	177
Open and shut cases—doors and windows	188

— PART 4 —

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER —

CASE STUDIES

Putting it together—one kitchen, four scenarios	197
Congratulations, you're a pro (or at least, thinking like one!)	209

*For my mom, who always held the other end
of the tape measure so it didn't snap back,
and my dad, who always laughed when it did.*

— PART 1 —
EVERYONE NEEDS
A LITTLE DESIGN HELP—
THE EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY



— CHAPTER 1 —

EVERYONE NEEDS A LITTLE DESIGN HELP



Ready to remodel your kitchen?

Great! It sounds so easy — buy a few cabinets, some appliances, and perhaps even replace a worn counter. Then you discover the dishwasher handle blocks a drawer, the refrigerator door hits the cabinets, and the dishwasher won't fit under the new counter.

Some of you may think you'll never run into this — after all, your kitchen is pretty simple without a lot of changes, right?

Here's the reality: designing the kitchen of today is like stacking dominoes. Every choice, every product, and every finish you add to your kitchen impacts the design, simple or not. One piece can send the rest tumbling if not thought out — and there are a lot of pieces!

I'm not trying to scare you, but rather provide a bit of hope — with the help of this book, you'll sail past all this. You'll learn how to spot those errors — and many others — long before you ever get to the installation stage.

This isn't a typical kitchen design book

I wrote this book for two reasons:

1. Most kitchen design books don't go beyond basic. By basic, I mean, you'll learn all about 'L'-shaped islands and the difference between gas or electric ranges. They don't mention how if you design two appliances at right angles into the corner of said 'L'-shaped kitchen, you won't ever be

able to open the corner cabinet. Or, if you have children under 5, purchasing the ultra-high-heat power of professional gas ranges might not be the safest idea for your family. That's what I wanted to tackle with this book.

2. Both my clients and my blog readers mentioned tales of woe by neighbors and on internet consumer forums, but it took all of them a bit of time to convince me. (What do I know? I don't get out of the showroom much!)

Although those of us in the design profession think there are thousands of us who specialize in kitchen design, my readers were letting me know by email that they couldn't find anyone.

So, here you go. If you're looking for insider information because you want to avoid the most common and expensive mistakes in kitchen design, this could be the book for you.

This is the second stage of design, the insider companion book that answers:

- 1) Who's out there and when do you need to hire them?
- 2) How to avoid the most common installation errors.
- 3) How French door refrigerators require different design techniques versus single-door refrigerators.
- 4) And more.

I'm a professional kitchen designer. The expertise in this book comes from over two decades of kitchen design experience, training, and yes, mistakes.

Meet your behind-the-scenes designer

My name is Kelly Morisseau, and I'm a Certified Master Kitchen and Bath Designer (CMKBD) and a Certified Interior Design (CID) in California. A CMKBD is a designer with substantial experience and training in both kitchen and bath design as it relates to construction, ergonomics, and safety. The "master" part of the designation is for designers who have held both the kitchen and bath designer certification for a minimum of 10 years.

I've been a professional kitchen designer for over 25 years and a second-generation designer as well. In the late 1970s, my father worked with my uncle running a custom cabinet shop. My mother started a kitchen design business at the same time. They were kitchen designers long before

people even understood the term and when the first kitchen design course became available, they took it.

They operated a successful award-winning showroom for over 20 years in Canada, which was a large part of my life. I learned on the job and took every class on kitchen and bath design I could. In 1999, the economy forced us to close our showroom. My design mother and I were lured by the promise of sunshine and palm trees to Silicon Valley and eventually to an award-winning design/build firm in the East Bay just outside of San Francisco.

Over the years, I've designed kitchens for both new and existing homes, and in a variety of fascinating locations — beautiful log homes on the West Coast, a minuscule kitchen in a 200-year-old home blocks from the Bastille in Paris, an Australian kitchen near the Great Barrier Reef, as well as hundreds of kitchens of all types and descriptions in both Canada and the U.S. I've also been a judge for Canadian and U.S. national design competitions, as well as a 2-time judge for regional competitions.

In my spare time (between midnight and six), I write a blog on my website, *Kelly's Kitchen Sync*, where I discuss remodeling and design tips. In fact, that's where the idea for this book came from. If you've already visited my blog and recognize some of the tips, great and welcome! I hope you'll find many more to help you here.

The most important fact you'll ever learn about kitchen design

If you can take away anything from this book, paste these two sentences in big red letters somewhere you'll see them every day, and repeat them with every purchase you make:

*Not all products work well in every kitchen.
Not all products are compatible with each other.*

Almost every mistake, every "I-wish-I'd-known-before-I-bought" originates from those two facts. Whether it's flooring, a handle, or a ceiling light, every item has some quirk that eventually needs some attention to make your project run smoothly. Appliances change models every year, cabinetry lines vary, and some materials come and go.

“...not all repairs or remodeling projects went smoothly for DIY respondents, with over one third (34%) having at least one regret stemming from trying to fix a broken appliance, installing tile, floors or cabinets...”

— **Consumer Reports study of 1,000 Consumers.**

[Used with permission by Consumer Reports]

If you're thinking, “Boy, this isn't something the home improvement shows ever mention”, you're right. In this day and age of sunshine-y advertising, everything is perfect, isn't it? When a show only has 24 minutes plus commercials, time's short. No one wants to say, “Look, this is going to be a bit tricky. Let's be careful here.”

Not that I'm here to be the Voice o' Doom. My clients have heard me chirp, “Kitchen design should be fun!” for years, and it is. If you understand the properties of all your kitchen products and how they interact with other products, you'll own the world (or at least your kitchen!)

Test Your Knowledge

Before we get started, let's get a sense of where you're at with the following questionnaire:

Read the question and circle the answer you think fits best

1. **What goodies are you planning for your new kitchen?**
 - a) The basics. My counter is falling apart and I need to fix it now. I don't want to think about anything else for now.
 - b) Some paint, a few knobs, maybe change light fixtures? Nothing huge.
 - c) We're updating the cabinets, counters, appliances, floors, but not changing the walls...I don't think. I'm still figuring out the details.
 - d) I want everything — and do I really need other rooms in the house?
2. **What grade of products are you planning to purchase?**
 - a) Whatever I find at the local big store and/or the best deal.

- b) Something decent that won't fall apart in the first 3 years.
 - c) Brand names I recognize.
 - d) As high-end and luxurious as I can get — integrated (built-in) appliances, custom counters and splashes. Not that I have an unlimited budget, but this is BIG!
3. **If you're planning on doing some of it yourself, what tools do you have?**
 - a) I have a hammer, I hammer in the morning, I hammer...wait. That's all I have.
 - b) A slick toolkit, a cordless drill and a couple other toys. I don't do too badly.
 - c) Some people call it the garage, but why keep cars, when you can have compound miter saws, air nailers, and enough tools to make *This Old House* crew weep.
 - d) The world is a safer place if I never touch a tool in my lifetime.
4. **How much of the design work do you want to be involved in?**
 - a) Not my interest. That's what other people are for.
 - b) I like looking at the magazines and I'm interested in knowing enough details to educate myself.
 - c) I'm fascinated about everything related to my kitchen. I know every TV show, participate in forums, and dream of the day my kitchen will be a reality.
 - d) I'm excited and involved, but my real goal is to be informed enough about all the terminology and processes to understand what my designer, contractor, and trade professionals are talking about.
5. **How much of the work are you planning to do yourself?**
 - a) Whatever's easy. Perhaps demolition, maybe painting. I've done that before.
 - b) I've done some work around the house, replacing light fixtures and I once tiled my vanity backsplash. It was okay.
 - c) I've got killer wood-working skills and the knowledge to install my own cabinets. Go me!
 - d) Ha ha ha! That's what professionals are for. I'm here to learn what they're doing and why.

truck and freight train. As long as you're aware of the possibilities, you can mentally prepare yourself and adjust your schedule accordingly.

#2. Saving money for Enthusiastic DIY-ers

I know a few enthusiastic DIY-ers. Some are even so skilled they could set up shop. Their favorite fascination is their home and how to make it better using their own talent and sweat equity. *For those of you with years of wood-working and carpentry skills, you might tackle the following projects:*

Cabinet installation

Cabinets aren't as easy to install as most people think. For very simple projects — a galley kitchen or a small L-shape with an island — cabinet installation is do-able, especially with a stock or semi-custom cabinet, but I'd definitely classify most kitchen layouts as intermediate and advanced DIY. Cabinets have to be set square even if the walls and floor aren't (if they aren't, you'll never be able to adjust the doors and drawers). I've seen a lot of first-timers run into difficulty with installing an entire kitchen. If you don't know how to deal with square cabinets and crooked walls and/or don't have the compression nail-guns, or table — and compound-miter saws for the job, strongly consider hiring an installer.

Tip: 20%–50% of the cabinetry is a rough rule of thumb for the installation costs you might save — the more complex, the higher the price. The easiest kitchens are the ones with no corners — walls don't form a perfect 90-degree corner, and fitting the cabinets and counters can sometimes be a challenge even for the experienced. Installation can be priced in a couple of ways — per piece or as a complete job.

Wood or laminate installation

Wood butcher block and pre-formed laminate (that's the counter with the rolled front edges) are relatively inexpensive and easy to install compared to stone, tile, or quartz. The wood can be cut on-site by anyone while the laminates can be cut to fit by a counter top shop for minimal cost.

Tip: Surprisingly, you're not saving a lot on installation; the main reason people select these tops is a) the materials themselves are much cheaper than stone, and b) they're relatively easy to install (again, providing the corners of the kitchen are a perfect 90-degrees and the walls aren't wavy.) If money is the priority here, focus on how much money you're saving on material choice instead.

Complex tile backsplash

Adding borders, inlays and other details might not worry you, but you should do some drawings first to make sure that your details are worked out before starting. You don't want the electrical outlets or switch plates, for example, covering your decorative tile or liner, and you may need to calculate if the outlets will need to be raised or lowered.

Tip: Complex tile installations vary from \$ 600–\$1800 for particularly ornate splashes in a 12×14 u-shaped kitchen, depending on backsplash heights, the type of tiles, and how ornate the splash is.

Flooring

Installing anything from vinyl to stain-in-place wood won't be too much of a challenge for your experience, and again, less expensive (and complex) if the room is square and there aren't a lot of doors or radiators, or room transitions. Some of the flooring options, such as click-lock or snap in place laminate flooring are more DIY-friendly than say, installing and refinishing a ¾" solid wood floor (although some of you out there could definitely handle it).

Potential trouble-spots

Electrical and Plumbing

For those of you who know where the plumbing shut-off valves are, or for those of you who can identify a shut-off valve in the first place, removing and installing a new sink and/or hooking up a dishwasher might not be a challenge. Same goes for those of you who understand rudimentary electricity — it's not difficult to re-wire a new ceiling fixture.

cookie sheets or cooling racks — the interior of a wall cabinet is 11" deep at most (unless specified deeper). I rarely recommend providing dividers above your head, esp. if we're storing heavy marble baking blocks or bulky butcher blocks.

Clear as glass:

Glass doors have always been a popular choice that have never really come and gone like most trends. Over the years, we've seen glass range from the original poured glass with the bubbles still showing (think "antique" or "water" glass) to clear glass to textured (think "reed" or the lined glass of the 1940s) to today — where it's all over the place depending on regional preferences.

Some cabinet companies supply various styles of glass, and some don't. While you can get clear, obscure, or textured glass directly from them, you don't have to order the glass from the cabinet company. Visit a stained glass shop in your town (if you have one). Some of the types of glass with colors or swirls can be beautiful.

Think about your shelves inside your glass-fronted cabinets

While a lot of people give serious consideration to the types and styles of glass for the door, many don't think about the shelves. This can be disappointing for someone who wants the entire focus to be on the glass and not what is behind it.

Whether the shelves are wood or painted, if your door glass is clear or only partially obscure, the shelves will become a strong line element to the look — unless you consider adding glass shelves.

Here's a note: glass shelves cost extra, and, no, you don't get a credit for the existing wood shelves that come with a stock factory cabinet. (In the case of most stock cabinets, the boxes are made and stored in advance, and pulled off the shelves for your order. It's more trouble for them to remove and store the shelves somewhere and then figure out which size shelves go

with which new cabinet. For custom cabinets, the cabinets are made when you order them, so there are no extra shelves.)

An example of the prairie-style mullions with glass shelves. The design would have been lost if the shelves had been matching wood.



If you're planning on adding some mullions to your glass doors, which are strips of wood applied in a grid pattern as part of the door, then you really need to consider glass for the interior shelving. We add the mullions for a bit of design detail, and there's nothing worse than when your elegant Prairie style mullion doors (shown here) are crossed with multiple other lines that weren't part of the design.

There are two solutions:

- a) Glass shelves on the interior.
- b) Frosted or obscure glass on the door.

Think safety

Having glass on a wall cabinet isn't usually a concern — the cabinets are out of the way of elbows and knees. However, if you plan on having glass doors in the lower section of a pantry or a base cabinet — consider specifying tempered glass for your doors and shelves. Not all glass, especially textured, will come in a tempered glass, and your cabinet company might not be able to get it.

Insider Definition: Tempered glass is glass produced with either thermal or chemical processes to be stronger than regular glass. If the glass is hit hard enough, it breaks into chips instead of shards.

large-scale appliance handles, but there's always a future kitchen that will break my guidelines. A larger-scale kitchen "gets away" with more than a small kitchen does.

If you're truly stuck, study kitchen photos online or look in your favorite magazines.

Some of my handle combinations have been:

- knobs on all the upper cabinets, handles on the base cabinets.
- knobs on the top drawers with handles on the bases (handles or knobs on the top cabinets).
- handles everywhere with a smaller scale version only where the larger won't fit.
- all the same handles with something fun and unique on the glass door cabinets.

There is something fun and fresh about adding one or two pieces of hardware that are truly beautiful or works of art or simply amusing — especially knobs because they're so easy to change if you really wanted to. With all the great handles and knob choices available, why not add a piece or two just because you can?

There's always a catch: the 6 places hardware snags your design

- 1) Remember our lazy Charlie? If you put a handle on the door and drawer of a lazy Charlie that is adjacent to a drawer on the opposite cabinet, the door/drawer opposite will not open. Well, it will — only until it hits the handle.
- 2) Rule number 1 applies if you're installing banks of drawers or base cabinets in both corners instead of a lazy susan. Give the handles room to move!
- 3) Beware of handles with sharp ends that can catch on clothes. Some decorative handles are lovely, but they're hard on pant pockets!
- 4) Test the installation of a door handle next to a bumped-out cabinet. Is there enough room between the cabinet and your grasp or do your fingers (or fingernails) scrape the side of the protruding cabinet when you grab the handle?

- 5) Do your knobs have a specific design other than circle? All knobs loosen at some point on the screw. You don't notice on a circle, but you do on any other shape. I once specified a pair of knobs shaped like martini glasses, which we joked that one could tell it was 5p.m. by the way the glass was tilted by the end of the day. If this will drive you crazy, avoid all oval, diamond, bar-shaped, or specialty knobs (unless you check the tip in the following box), or install them on lesser-used cabinets.
- 6) Avoid wall divots: A common mistake in handle design is not thinking through what happens when installing a straight cabinet in a corner and tight to a side wall. Hinges at 110-degrees open wider than the side wall at 90-degrees, so either your cabinet knob or your fist will hit the wall first. Do yourself a favor. Leave some space between the wall and the cabinet. Install a 3" cabinet filler between them. Or, if you can't do that, at least invest in a door stop or a wall bumper.

Locking your handle in place:

Check the back of your potential cabinet knobs for a pair of small bumps, like the two you see on either side of the screw hole. These small bumps indent into the cabinet door or drawer, and prevent the knob from turning or twisting.



How to size your handles correctly for your drawers

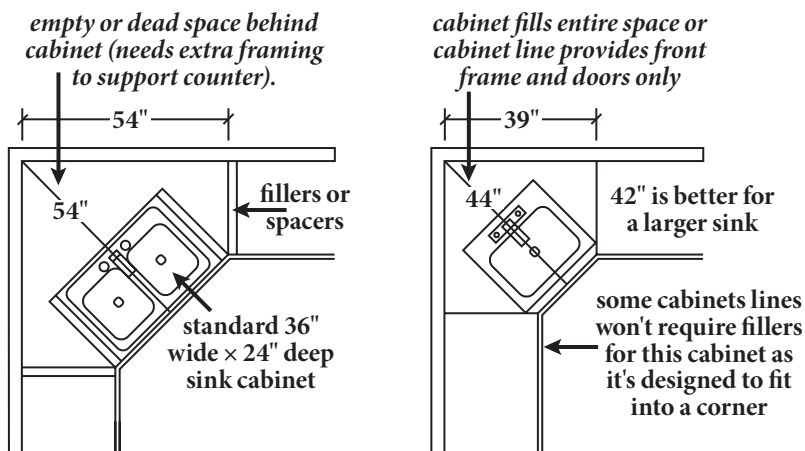
I wish there was a hard-and-fast rule, but there isn't. Here are my rules of thumb:

Before you buy, check the width of both your smallest and widest drawers. Buy a few sizes and see what looks best.

If the cabinet is larger than 27" wide and the handles are 4" or less, I sometimes recommend using 2 handles, spaced 3"-5" from each side of the drawer.

tall, you'll be climbing on the counter and over the faucet to clean that section of counter behind them.

- b) **If the cabinet company has a diagonal sink corner, how wide can the sink be?** Some might only fit a single-bowl 24" sink. Again, watch the size — if you want large double or triple sinks, this isn't the design for you. Even recessing or pushing the cabinet back into the corner has its pros and cons — it will create sharp corners at either side of the sink (and will add extra fabrication cost to your counters).
- c) **A small double-sink or single sink works best:** A 42" wide angled cabinet (42" both ways on the back wall; the angled corner door will be approx. 24" wide depending if the cabinets are frame or frameless) works best for design but not for the plumber who has to set the sink in the corner — the sides of the cabinet will need to be cut out at the front to accommodate a 32" wide sink. If you really have your heart set on a sink larger than that, then a corner sink design might not be your best option.



The standard sink cabinet installed in a corner takes up lot of space, both in width and depth. A 39"–42" angled cabinet might be a challenge for a plumber to install the sink, but it definitely saves more space.

There's another factor to watch when designing a sink in the corner — what happens to the dishwasher? That's what we'll talk about in the next chapter...

— CHAPTER 12 —

COLD, WET TRUTHS ABOUT REFRIGERATORS AND DISHWASHERS



Some of the costliest “didn't-think-through” errors are with appliances — especially refrigerators and dishwashers. It doesn't help that there are hundreds of models in varying sizes and styles and all requiring different methods of installation.

There's not much of an issue with “standard” refrigerators and dishwashers; it's the custom units which require complicated installation or factory-trained installers or custom cabinet doors and panels for an integrated look.

In this chapter, we'll discuss both what you need to know about the appliances themselves, and how some of the major styles can affect your kitchen layout.

How will you know what to watch for?

There are 4 basic styles of appliances, which range from low to high, simple to complex: in cost, options, and installation/design time.

Let's start with the basics:

- 1) **Standard.** In this case, a standard dishwasher or refrigerator means a unit which fits in the most popular widths and heights, with only the simplest of installations (slide in and hook-up/plug-in). Refrigerators are 32"–36" wide × 71" high. Dishwashers are 24" wide. Cabinet

If you're planning on the ultra-deluxe, most powerful BTU gas range or top on the market, plan your final backsplash materials with care. I have seen grout burn and some charring on the 2x4 studs behind the backsplash walls which leads me to suggest a) non-flammable concrete backer board instead of standard drywall, and b) selecting backsplash materials that can withstand high heat.

Also, professional gas ranges should be vented. There's a lot of gas fumes and smoke, some of which you could eliminate by cracking a window, but not all of it makes it outside, and spreads inside the home.

I've seen designs where a non-flammable 8"-12" backsplash was built behind the range and the window was installed above this and the design treatment was such so there would be no blinds or window treatments, but I usually see these in high-end remodels, and not in kitchens where the range is simply relocated under an existing window. If the range isn't super powerful, I can be swayed. Otherwise, professionals have seen too many scorch marks on walls to be comfortable with this as a standard. Forewarned is forearmed.

Hood Fans

Head-bangers or Spit-guards?

What you need to know about pro hoods

At one time, ventilation was a fan in the ceiling or a wall, which changed to the hood fans we see today. The only difference between the hoods of today and from 30-40 years ago is the big increase in depth. Under cabinet hoods are 16"-18" deep. Professional, or custom vents are 24"-27" deep.

This poses a dilemma: The engineers who design the venting ideally would like us to install hoods approximately 24"-30" off the counter for maximum performance. That's approximately 60"-66" off the floor—the height of my nose or a taller person's chin.

So we have a problem — do we sacrifice the ventilation capability by raising the hoods out of the way, or do we keep them low and hope for the best? Yes, this is dangerous. These hood fans are heavy and made out of superb stainless steel. I have heard stories of serious injuries from people hitting their heads on the front or corners of the hoods. Here's my answer: I've been specifying installing the professional hoods higher — between 69"-72" high off the floor — for a number of years now.

Always check the depth:

- If you're the main cook at 5'2" but need to raise the hood for a 6'0" significant other, can *you* still reach the controls? If not, you may want to consider a remote switch (ask your appliance person).
- If you're the main cook and you're taller than 6'0", you'll need to raise the hood higher. Of course, this depends on the existing ceiling height and the power of the hood. Raise it too high and you run the risk of it not working well. This is where I might suggest alternate options, such as the hoods that aren't as deep or at least have softened corners.



An example of a chimney-style hood over a peninsula. These hoods are 27"-30" deep. I wouldn't recommend this arch for someone tall unless we set the install height from the lowest points on the curve.

“I might replace the counter.”

- Some of the older cabinets were designed only to bear the weight of the lighter laminate counters (in those days, it was Formica). Are the cabinets strong enough to add a 1¼" stone counter? How about a ¾" counter?
- Are the cabinets made of individual boxes or are they built as a frame with all the shelves running through the entire space? Some cabinets fall apart when the counters are removed.
- Are your cabinets in good shape now? Don't spend a lot of money if your drawers are already falling apart. Eventually you'll need to replace them and the counters don't always transfer well because cabinet sizes have changed over the years.

The Enthusiastic DIY-er

You're skilled enough to gut the kitchen and stay away from structural changes. You're keen to get going on the physical work, but you know that there's a bit more to the design and planning stages for a kitchen than almost anything else in the home. [see page 8.]

For you, the Enthusiastic DIY-er, you'll do your homework, because if you're gutting the kitchen, chances are you might be doing it in stages. Or it might take so long that you change your mind in mid-stream and get caught on a design detail. It happens to all of us.

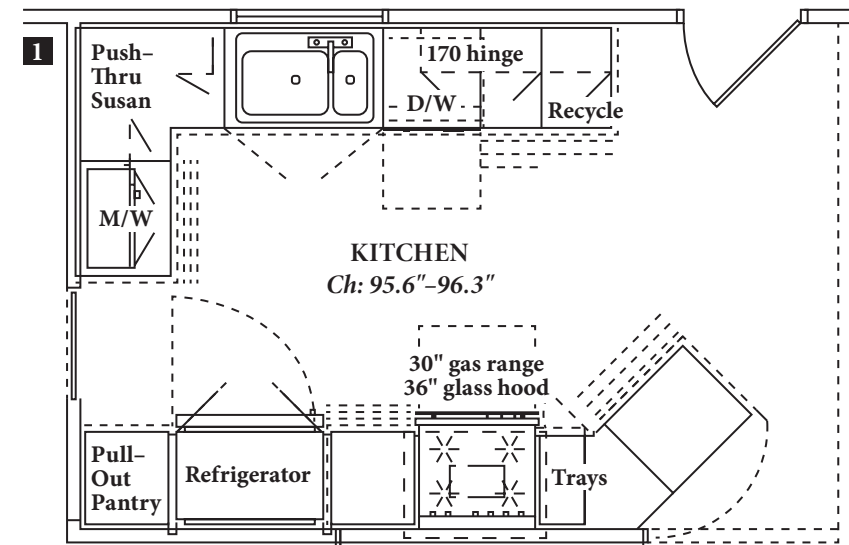
No one will oversee the big picture like you. So it's even more important to focus on the things you're about to accomplish, but let's go back to what I said in the beginning: “Not all products fit in every kitchen or with each other.”

You're going to be concerned with the new layout. Let's say you take the wall measurements and the layout came back like so: **1** [see next page.]

Here's where you (and any one else considering a kitchen plan) ask these questions:

“Is it easy to cook my favorite meal?”

- I sometimes suggest to my clients to mentally cook a dish in their new layout — where will they go for pots or reach for the cookie sheets? Where are the pot holders? Does the prep area seem within reach?



The previous kitchen revised and showing the open positions of all the drawers and doors

“How much do the appliances affect this layout?”

- This is the time to read the fine print in the appliance specifications. Is the pro range so deep that you can't get into the lazy susan beside it?
- Does the refrigerator door need a 135-degree door swing, and the plan places it next to a wall?

“Do any doors or drawers obstruct other openings, or bind them in any way?”

- Draw the door swings, the width and length of open appliance doors, and the swing of the interior and exterior doors in the room.

“Do any obstacles such as ceiling soffits or lighting pendants interfere with the cabinet placement?”

- I've heard plenty of tales over the years where someone forgot to measure the ceilings or forgot there were soffits above the existing cabinets — until the cabinets arrived.

“Does the durability and cleaning requirements fit with my lifestyle?”

- Some dark granites in front of windows show streaks — enough that one needs a wet wipe/dry wipe to remove the streaks — which isn't