

# Secrets of the Island

In the last couple of years, very few of the kitchens showcased in *Signature Kitchens & Baths* did not include an island or two. So, to get the inside scoop on this supremely popular element of kitchen equipment, we called half a dozen consistently successful designers and asked them some simple questions. Here are their secrets and insights on the kitchen feature you just can't seem to do without.

## ISLAND OR MAINLAND?

The designers we surveyed reported that 90 to 100 percent of their clients want a kitchen island. Of course, if you're building a new home or adding a kitchen, you can have an island. You can have whatever the budget tolerates. There are, however, times when the space you have to work with just isn't big enough. Not only must there be adequate walkway space around the island, but if you're going to incorporate appliances into it, even more space has to be allowed. A bare minimum of 36 inches is required around an island without appliances or a sink—and that measurement should be 42 inches at work stations, say most designers. Add sinks and appliances, and you need 48 inches. "The more, the better," says Michael Teipen, "especially for more than one cook." Then he told us a sad story of a new home he recently visited, where the door of the dishwasher hit the island each time it was opened. We don't want that!

"I'm a big advocate of islands," says Esther Golightly. "We started out with simple rectangles, but now we've got away from that—it's all curves and angles. I love that flexibility of shaping that you can do with islands."

Haskell Matheny sings the praises of varying heights. "I like two or three levels, if the room and island are large enough," he says. "A 30-inch height is good for working with pastry or for computer placement. And you might want 48 inches for a seating area." He also points out the aesthetic considerations of multiple levels. "It breaks up the surface. A big



flat island can look like an overturned boat."

Before you give up the island of your dreams because of space, however, consider an island on wheels or, as Matheny sometimes suggests to his clients, an L-shaped peninsula.

Forget about rectangles; islands offer major design opportunities. Here, a raised center section helps to separate prep area from lower eating space, while the overall shape terminates in a classic round table. Kitchen by Esther Golightly, Kitchen Gallery.

## SEATING

Some people incorporate a seating area into their islands; some don't. Reasons homeowners elect not to have stools or chairs around the island are space (when the room is just too small) and function (when a large work surface is more important). Generally people feel strongly one way or the other—either they want friends and family to have a place to be close to the action, or they want the clear space. Some homeowners with plenty of space plan for both: an island or peninsula for gathering around, another that's strictly business. Seating may be a couple of barstools or a row of more formal chairs.

## WHAT'S ON TOP?

How about countertop options for islands? Every designer we surveyed told us the same thing: This is the perfect place to use contrast, different colors or materials, a more expensive material than you'd choose for all the cabinet tops. Gone are the days when we wanted everything to match. "When you're looking for a focal point," says Haskell Matheny, "in 70 percent of cases, it's the island. It floats in the middle of the space; it can be strongly styled—by color, unusual elements or period elements. The Victorian era, for instance, had so much gingerbread. You can make your island reflect whatever style the room embodies."

Everybody loves granite, and the island countertop is frequently treated to a slab of this glamorous stone. Michael Teipen reports that wood isn't usually a big favorite with his clients but tells us of one who is very happy with her cherry wood-topped island in a Shaker-style kitchen. "She says she knows it'll take a beating." And, since the island can be a real kitchen workhorse, solid-surface materials can play starring roles. "I love to mix materials, so I enjoy this part," reports Esther Golightly. "Tile, solid surfaces, other materials—they can complement and coordinate with the rest of the kitchen surfaces."

## FOR EVERY STYLE?

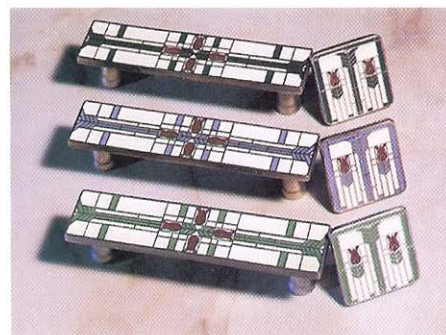
Do islands work for every style? We know they have huge design impact in sleek contemporary kitchens, take on the look of a kitchen table in country-style rooms and translate nicely into traditional ambiance. Is an island always the right



An island takes on a formal look with the right accessories. Countertop is Silestone's new Capri Limestone. Silestone, an engineered quartz surface, is hard, dense and resistant to heat, stains and scratches.



Blue and white country kitchen boasts multi-level island with raised area for dining. Big comfortable seats echo the country look. By Susie Rummel, Creative Solutions, Inc.



Accent hardware, used only on an island, can create a dramatic focal point. Prairie Tulips knobs and pulls from Notting Hill come in evergreen/brass, azure/brass and spring green/pewter.