Decor Score: Cutting down on kitchen clutter

by Rose_Bennett_Gilbert

Q: Now that the children have children who come to visit, we realize how cramped and inhospitable our old kitchen/breakfast room is. We are thinking about taking down the wall between the dining room and the kitchen, but that's a pretty bold move. Do we really want everyone in the kitchen at once, much as we love the grandchildren?

Where there was a wall, there's now a way cool open kitchen/great room space for entertaining. Photo courtesy of Wood-Mode. A: There are ways to have your open space and a modicum of apartness, too: They're called work islands. Not only does a free-floating counter give you another place to prepare foodstuffs, it will serve to divide the business part of the kitchen from the kibitzers. It can also serve, period: Most islands are built tall to act as eat-on counter spaces.

Your family and other guests can be in the kitchen with you spiritually, but not actually in your workspace. That's especially critical when the kitchen is really small (what cramped New Yorkers call a "one-tush kitchen." If you have to ask, your kitchen is plenty big!).

The open and inviting room we show here was designed for a family who likes to entertain, but also didn't want guests underfoot, according to Michael Graziano, the CKD (Certified Kitchen Designer) at Aladdin Remodelers who helped open up their century-old farmhouse to a more modern lifestyle. He took down dividing walls, but was careful to maintain the moldings and other architectural features that gave the old house its integrity.

Similarly, the new island, bright white cabinetry (by Wood-Mode, www.wood-mode.com) and blue touches make the space as fresh as the 21st century, without sacrificing yesterday's working-farm efficiency.

Q: How does one afford smart design in today's economy?

A: New York designer John Buscarello offers a one-word solution: mix.

"Don't be afraid to mix inexpensive things in with your better furniture," he advised his audience at the recent Architectural Digest Home Design Show in Manhattan. Just plan it out, think it through; and remember, you can go back to buying designer pieces when the economy improves, Buscarello said.

Another bit of sage professional design advice: If you fall in love with something too expensive, there are ways to make a little of it dress up an entire room. Like the expensive glass tile Buscarello found for a client newly on a budget. He tiled one wall only (inside the shower) of a bath, painted the others and got sparkling results.

"Paint is always a bargain," says the designer, who is known for almost always painting colors on the ceilings of his rooms. See more at www.buscarello.com.

California-based Barclay Butera brought yet another budget-friendly tip to the seminar: He believes in changing small inexpensive details to give your rooms a new look.

On his to-do list: Add pillows, piles of colorful pillows ("I'm a known pillow-holic," Butera confided). Layer things. Beds are an obvious candidate for layering with multicolored covers, throws and pillows. Butera also "layers" table vignettes, combining accessories of different heights and shapes. In fact, he even believes in layering walls to create different, interesting textures. One case in point: just one wall in a bedroom (behind the bed) layered in split bamboo. For more of his inspired ideas, click on www.barclaybuterahome.com.

Rose Bennett Gilbert is the co-author of "Hampton Style" and associate editor of Country Decorating Ideas.

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