



An island bench and spacious layout make this an ideal entertainer's kitchen



MORE THAN A KITCHEN

Some homeowners require a kitchen that goes above and beyond the norm. The masterchefs, social butterflies and multi-taskers of the world can reach their full potential with a kitchen out of the ordinary. Lara Bailey seeks out expert advice on what makes a kitchen extra-special.

Does your kitchen become a social hub on Saturday nights? Are you a keen cook who loves to whip up delectable dishes for family and friends? Or is it important to you that your kitchen provides the space and amenities for more than just cooking? If you fit into any of these categories, it pays to consider having a kitchen custom-designed to suit your specific requirements.

While it's well-known that a kitchen should suit your usage needs, lifestyle and family, if you spend a lot of time in your kitchen and regard it as much more than a modest food preparation and serving area, a gourmet design may be more to your liking than a simplified layout.

To introduce *Queensland Kitchen + Bathroom Design* readers to the world of the social/entertainer's kitchen, professional kitchen and living room kitchen, we've enlisted the help of multi-award-winning designer Darren James. As principal and design director of Interiors by Darren James, the Certified Kitchen Designer (CKD Au) and professional member of the Design Institute of Australia is well-versed on all types of kitchen design and has plenty of knowledge to impart on the topic.

SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

Many of us use our kitchens as meeting places, and contemporary design is keeping up with this trend. If, however – instead of merely using your kitchen to talk to the kids while they do their homework and you prepare dinner, your kitchen is the hottest spot in town every weekend – a design geared towards effortless and comfortable entertaining will be best.

"Every kitchen should be designed to include some element of entertaining, after all, food is social," says James.

"Generally, the most social kitchens [belong to homeowners] who have big families or simply love entertaining guests."

A functional layout is an essential component in a social/entertainer's kitchen. If the design discourages conversation, is too cramped or makes it difficult to access various parts of the

room when guests are present, it will make an impractical social hub.

"Whether you are the type of entertainer who likes gourmet cooking or prefers bringing in the caterers, your kitchen needs to be designed with effortless entertaining in mind.

"The ultimate entertainer's kitchen should centre on bringing people together and creating a space where people cook, eat, entertain and share life. It's all about engagement. The overall feel of the space needs to be welcoming and inviting. The layout has to encourage comfortable interaction, maximise usability and have great flow (which allows a few people to work in the space simultaneously). It's simple things like ensuring you are facing your guests while cooking [that matter]."

Engage And Congregate

James says there are key elements to a social/entertainer's kitchen that make it effective and easy to use, including having an island bench, a butler's pantry, multiple sinks and a beverage centre.

"Island benches generally adapt well to this type of kitchen since they are designed to gather around. The most successful island benches will allow diners to interact with each other easily. It's important not to stop there though – consider seats that not only look good but are comfortable, allowing guests to sit in them all evening and enjoy the hospitality."

A butler's pantry is also perfect for the social/entertainer's kitchen. Ideal for concealing mess, it means you can keep the party going without having to clear some sink space midway through your evening.

"[With a butler's pantry] the public face of the kitchen remains smart, clean and tidy. A lot of convenience can come with having a work room in the kitchen that is purely focused on function. Whether it is used for storing food or bulky everyday appliances, as an out-of-the-way preparation space or a spot to hide dirty dishes, it really is an asset to any kitchen," says James.

Having numerous sinks in a social/entertainer's kitchen is another advantage.

"Another must (if space permits) which is great for entertaining is having two sinks in your kitchen – even if they are in close proximity. [It's ideal] for entertaining, especially if you're short on space for a butler's pantry. Even just a small bar-sized sink will come in handy for washing hands and rinsing glasses when your other sink is full of dirty dishes by the end of the night."

Last but not least, James says that no entertainer's kitchen would be complete without a beverage centre.

"For [the project below] an area on the working wall devoted to the beverage bar worked out perfectly. An under-bench wine refrigerator with temperature control was chosen. Not only is the beverage centre close to the island bench, [providing] easy access, [but] we also ensured the clients' glassware was stored in this zone."

TRUE PROFESSIONAL

If cooking is your passion, a professional kitchen may be the best bet for you. Equipped with features and appliances once reserved for restaurants, professional kitchens provide everything you need to create a fine dining experience in your own home.

"Any gourmet chef who loves to cook deserves a restaurant-style kitchen to work their magic," says James.

"So many of my clients who love cooking are demanding all the bells and whistles, and why

not? These days a [residential] kitchen can hold everything a real chef could want. It doesn't necessarily need to be a large kitchen; it's more about planning the layout and taking advantage of the hardware and product options available."

An appropriate design is vital to making a professional kitchen work. When you need to access various work areas quickly and effortlessly, an efficient working space is an absolute must, to ensure minimal travel distance between different parts of the kitchen.

"[People using] professional kitchens are often carrying out a variety of operations [preparation and cooking] simultaneously, therefore space planning, workflows and adequate bench space for preparation and plating up is essential.

"The first step is dividing your kitchen up into zones or workstations, dependent on your style of cooking. For example, those who love baking should have an organised baking station, where both baking equipment and baking ingredients can be stored together. This can apply to any type of cooking or preparation you do.

"Another important consideration is the performance of the kitchen. Not only do culinary experts need to ensure the performance of their cooking appliances but also that of the materials used in the design. While a professional kitchen is often designed for someone who loves cooking, it's also important to consider other factors such as seating in the kitchen for guests and ease of cleaning up after a meal."

Organised And Efficient

As for the essentials in this type of kitchen, James says professional equipment, durable materials and an organised preparation area are all indispensable.

"Appliances should be practical for the cook. Incorporating a warming drawer under the oven with adjustable racks is ideal for the cook who prepares many dishes at once. A large rangehood with plenty of air flow [ducted outside], a large refrigerator and large, deep, multiple professional sinks with a large tap or mixer with a pull-out spray [are important]."

When it comes to stocking a professional kitchen with products, you need items and surfaces that are hardy, effective and reliable.

"Durability of materials is so important. Stainless steel is often the material of choice in a gourmet kitchen, even if only for the preparation/cooking surface. Its heat-resistant and hygienic qualities – as well as the fact that it's easy to maintain and can handle bumps and scratches – means it's highly sought-after."

Lastly, an organised area is a must. When you're preparing a lavish meal, the last thing you need is to be rummaging through drawers or running around your kitchen to find an elusive utensil.

"Specific drawers can be designated for knives, trays, cooking utensils and spices," says James.



A beverage centre



A butler's pantry



Top-of-the range appliances

"The layout is critical when designing a gourmet kitchen. The brief becomes even more important here as you need to design the layout with each stage of the cooking process in mind. This is often specific to the user as every cook has [his or her] own unique processes."

LIVING LARGE

The living room kitchen can provide a range of benefits, and is selected by homeowners for a variety of reasons. If you have a small home with compact living areas and minimal space for a kitchen, or if you love the free-flowing nature of open-plan living, a living room kitchen can be a perfect option for you.

"The living room kitchen is born from the desire of clients wanting to have an all-encompassing space. This style of kitchen can be adopted by anyone who relates to that concept," says James.

"A living room kitchen focuses on creating a seamless flow between the kitchen and the living room [as well as] combining functions into one room where they traditionally would be separated."

Smooth And Subtle

Among the key elements for creating a living room kitchen are a smooth, clean appearance; efficient and effective multi-tasking, and concealed appliances.

The ethos behind a living room kitchen (apart from saving space) is that it enables you to

incorporate numerous functions in the one area, whether it's a living space, home office, or another purpose.

"The living room kitchen recognises that we are a multi-tasking society. The concept is particularly useful for small houses as it means that one common space can be used for multiple functions, especially if you simply don't have the floor space to cater for individual spaces for particular functions," says James.

"The living room kitchen focuses on personalisation. [You need to think about] what other 'living room' functions you want your kitchen to perform."

Next, it's important to consider the appearance of a living room kitchen. Combining the function of two or more spaces into one can mean having the clutter of multiple living spaces packed into the one area, so it helps to plan a clean space tending towards minimalism. If you do have products and accessories on show, you'll need to have a designated place for everything to prevent mess.

Another benefit of a minimalistic approach is that the space won't look purely like a kitchen. If you incorporate your home office into your kitchen area, think about creating an environment that will be conducive to work and concentration, as well as cooking.

"If space is limited, consider concealing appliances so it looks less like a kitchen

and more like built-in living room joinery," James advises.

"Handle-free units, multiple finishes and textures in open-plan kitchens integrate well with adjacent rooms. Smarter storage solutions coupled with [hidden] appliances will keep kitchen clutter to a minimum."

THE ONE FOR YOU

Committing to a kitchen design is a process best completed in collaboration with your designer, but getting a head start is simple. Focus on what will work with your house and achieving an aesthetic style that appeals to you, but remember to make functionality a priority.

James says identifying what is most important to you is the first step towards designing a kitchen you love.

"[Ask yourself], what functions do I need my kitchen to perform? How do I want/intend to use the space? This involves looking further than the primary function of a kitchen and delving into the unique functions specific to you and your family. This is the starting point for the allocation of space and workflows.

"If you are not looking to change the style of your existing house then consider the style of your home and ensure the kitchen design is in keeping."

Good luck!

Images courtesy of Interiors by Darren James



Durable stainless steel



A sleek concealed look



A moveable desk in a kitchen space