

# *Kitchen Design*

The decisions that determine whether a kitchen functions as well as it looks — and lasts as long as the house.

---

A GUIDE FROM HARMONY HOUSE

# *The Harmony House Guide to Kitchen Design*

---

The kitchen is the room that receives the most design attention and the most daily use — a combination that makes every decision consequential. A kitchen that is beautiful but poorly planned will frustrate its owners every morning. A kitchen that is functional but visually underresolved will feel like a missed opportunity in a home that is otherwise well considered. This guide addresses the six decisions that determine whether a kitchen achieves both.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is organised around the decisions that most determine whether a kitchen design project succeeds. Each section addresses a distinct design consideration — the questions to ask, the trade-offs to understand, and the principles that guide our approach. Use it as a framework for your own project conversations.

---

01

## Flow, Sequence, and the Work Triangle

---

Every kitchen organises around three primary zones: storage (refrigerator), preparation (counter and sink), and cooking (range). The relationship between these three points — historically called the work triangle — determines how efficiently the kitchen functions in daily use. The total perimeter of the triangle should fall between 12 and 26 feet; anything shorter crowds the cook, anything longer wastes steps.

Equally important is the flow of other people through the kitchen. A kitchen that reads as a thoroughfare for the rest of the house will never feel calm when someone is cooking. Understanding how guests, family, and the cook will move through the space — and designing zones that accommodate multiple people simultaneously — is the spatial brief that precedes any material decision.

- Establish the work triangle before fixing cabinetry layouts
  - Plan for a minimum 42-inch aisle for single-cook kitchens; 48 inches for two
  - Separate the primary cooking zone from the main circulation path where possible
  - Consider a secondary prep sink for large kitchens — it reduces conflict during entertaining
-

*“A kitchen that is beautiful but poorly planned will frustrate its owners every morning.”*

---

02

## Cabinetry: Custom, Semi-Custom, and the Difference It Makes

---

Cabinetry accounts for the majority of kitchen budget and defines more of its visual character than any other element. The decision between stock, semi-custom, and custom cabinetry is therefore a design decision as much as a cost one.

Custom cabinetry allows proportions, details, and storage solutions to be designed specifically for the room and the household. Glass-front uppers that show curated objects while lightening the upper half of the room; integrated tower storage that maximises height; a mix of drawer banks and shelved cabinets calibrated to actual storage needs — these are the interventions that distinguish a considered kitchen from a standard one.

- Full-height cabinetry (to ceiling) reads as more considered than cabinets with a gap above
- Glass-front uppers require curation of what is stored — plan this before specifying
- Drawer banks outperform door-and-shelf lower cabinets for daily usability
- Integrated appliances (panel-front refrigerator, dishwasher) create visual coherence
- Interior cabinet finishes and lighting are small costs that significantly improve daily use

03

## The Island: Scale, Seating, and Function

---

The island is the most consequential layout decision in a kitchen. Too small and it disappears functionally; too large and it obstructs circulation and creates a room that feels crowded rather than generous. The correct size is determined by the room's dimensions, the number of people who will use it simultaneously, and what the island is primarily for: prep, seating, or both.

A genuine seating island — one that can comfortably seat four to six — requires a minimum of 4 feet in length per seating side, a counter overhang of 12 to 15 inches, and bar-height or counter-height seating selected for the specific overhang dimension. An island that is designed for six but can only seat four without cramping is a compromise that reads as inadequate every time guests arrive.

- Minimum comfortable circulation around an island: 42 inches on working sides, 36 inches on seating sides
- Specify seating before finalising counter height and overhang dimensions
- Consider the island's storage function: drawer banks, open shelving, or concealed cabinetry
- A waterfall edge (countertop continuing down the side) is a strong visual statement — and adds cost
- Pendant lighting over the island should be specified in relation to island dimensions, not the room

---

*“An island designed for six that seats four comfortably is a compromise that registers every time guests arrive.”*

---

04

## Countertop Material: Performance, Appearance, and Honesty

---

The countertop is where performance and aesthetics meet most directly — and where the most buyer's remorse occurs when the two are not reconciled in advance. Natural stone (marble, quartzite, granite) is beautiful, requires ongoing maintenance, and will mark. Engineered quartz is extremely durable, requires minimal maintenance, and has improved dramatically in appearance. Soapstone and concrete offer distinctive aesthetics with specific care requirements.

Our practice is to be honest about what each material requires before it is specified. A client who chooses marble fully understanding its maintenance demands will enjoy its beauty. A client who chooses marble expecting low maintenance will resent the same surface within a year.

- Marble: beautiful, distinctive veining; etches and stains without sealing and care
- Quartzite: natural stone with marble-like aesthetics and better performance than marble
- Engineered quartz: excellent durability, consistent appearance, no sealing required
- Granite: durable, varied, relatively low maintenance; great range of visual quality
- Soapstone: distinctive, very durable, develops a patina — oil regularly for even ageing
- Discuss maintenance expectations honestly before specification

05

## Lighting: Three Layers, Not One

---

Kitchen lighting is most commonly under-specified — a single layer of recessed ceiling fixtures that illuminates the room generally and the work surfaces poorly. The shadow cast by the cook's own body onto the counter directly below is a daily frustration in kitchens lit this way.

The solution is three distinct lighting layers: under-cabinet task lighting for work surfaces, ambient ceiling lighting for the general room, and accent or pendant lighting over the island. Pendants over the island serve both a functional and visual purpose — they lower the perceived ceiling height in that zone and create a focal point that anchors the island in the room.

- Under-cabinet lighting: LED strips, hardwired where possible for a clean installation
- Recessed ceiling fixtures: position them to illuminate counters, not the middle of the room
- Pendants over island: scale them to the island length — typically two or three fixtures
- Specify warm white (2700–3000K) throughout for a consistent, warm quality of light
- Separate circuits with dimmers allow the kitchen to transition from task to ambient mode

06

## Appliance Specification: Performance and Integration

---

Appliance specification in a high-end kitchen is a technical and aesthetic decision simultaneously. Professional-grade ranges (36 to 48 inches wide) make a strong visual statement and perform accordingly; they also require specific ventilation, gas supply, and clearance specifications that must be resolved in the design phase, not during installation.

The question of integration — panel-front appliances that blend with cabinetry, or stainless appliances that read as equipment — is a design philosophy decision. Integrated appliances create visual coherence and read as residential rather than commercial. Stainless appliances make a statement about performance and are appropriate in kitchens where the cooking equipment is itself part of the aesthetic.

- Ventilation must match range BTU output — specify together, not separately
  - Refrigerator depth: standard-depth refrigerators protrude beyond cabinetry; counter-depth does not
  - Dishwasher placement: beside the sink, on the dominant hand side of the person loading it
  - Panel-front appliances require precise cabinetry coordination — build in lead time
  - Microwave placement: in a drawer, built into a lower cabinet, or in an appliance garage — not above the range
-

*“Appliance specification is resolved in the design phase, not during installation. Changes mid-build are expensive.”*

---

OUR WORK

## Selected Projects

---

The following projects represent our applied work in this category. Each was approached as a unique design problem — shaped by the client, the site, the budget, and the brief. Visit [harmony-house.com](http://harmony-house.com) to see full photography.

---

### Cheltenham House — Kitchen

Texas

A custom kitchen designed for a 5,000 sq ft new construction home — floor-to-ceiling cabinetry with glass-front mullion uppers, a large island sized for genuine six-person seating, quartz countertops, and a professional-grade range with custom ventilation. Every detail was specified from the ground up.

---

### Beck Road Residence — Kitchen and Bar

Bainbridge Island, Washington

A whole-home residential commission in which the kitchen needed to work hard for a family that cooks seriously and entertains frequently — while belonging to the same visual language as the living spaces. Material continuity and a dedicated bar zone that hosts independently of the kitchen were the key design solutions.

READY TO BEGIN?

# *Let's Talk About Your Project*

---

A kitchen is the room that most determines how a home feels to live in. Harmony House brings the same design precision to kitchen projects as to every room in the house — from the spatial brief through the final fixture specification. We would love to hear about your project.

Website	harmony-house.com
Email	hello@harmony-house.com
Phone	206.207.2889
Location	Bainbridge Island, Washington