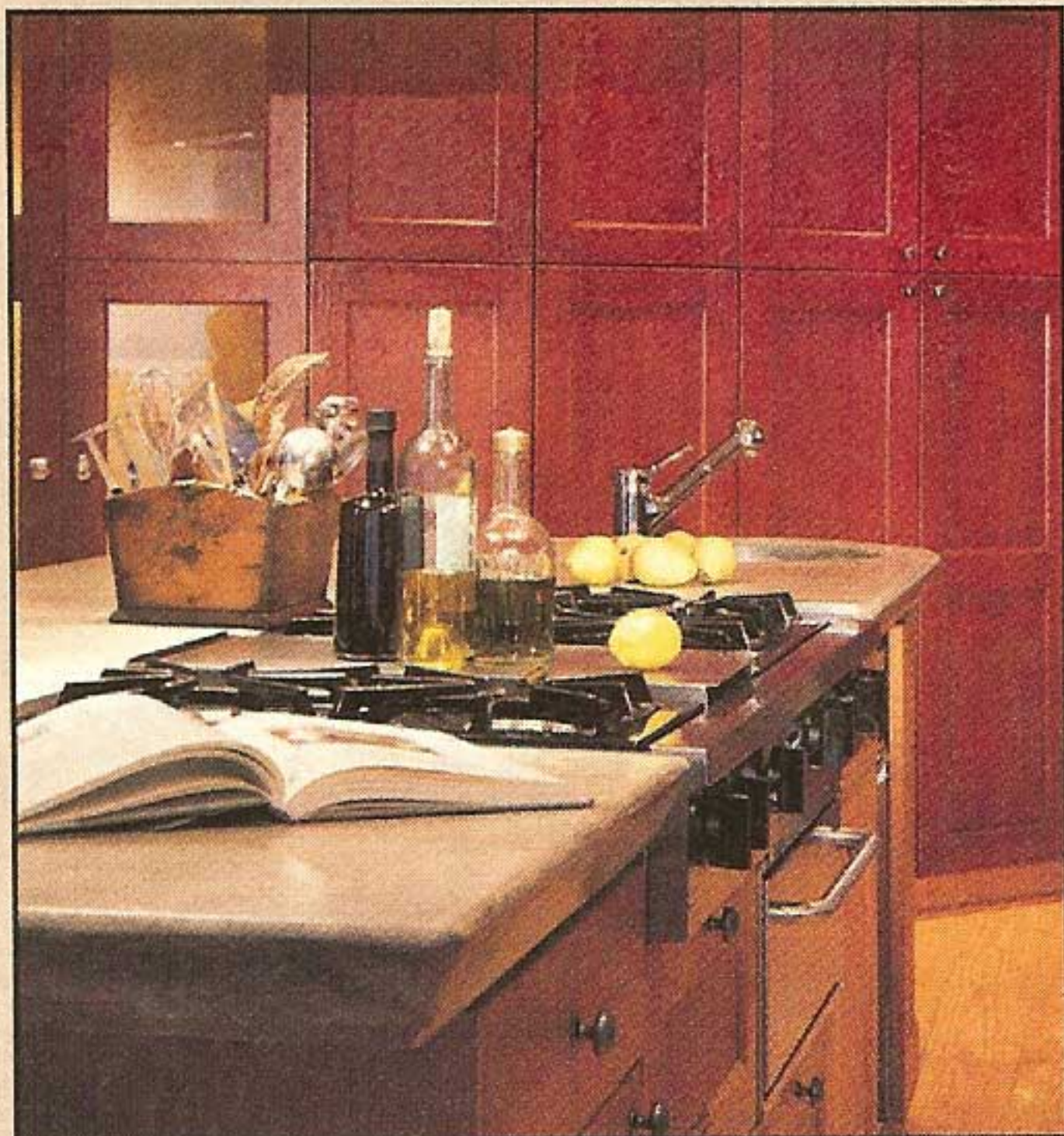


DESIGNER FYI: Maximizing kitchen work spaces



By Kris Linder

Most often in the frenzy of remodeling a kitchen, much thought is given to the design, colors and materials, and sometimes not enough thought to how the kitchen will be used. We live in a real world of cooking, serving and cleaning up — not the idealized picture world we all want our kitchens to look like.

Often forgotten are the actual work spaces where food preparation will be done. You should remember to plan enough space next to the food preparation area to hold the various ingredients taken out of the fridge or cupboard. Food prep can include everything from cleaning vegetables to rolling dough to handling meat products, so the type of surface and the size of space is important.

One work space that has become very popular (if you have the room for it) is a central island, which provides a focus in the center of the kitchen. These freestanding features enable the cook to face into the space as he or she works, which also facilitates casual conversation with guests. In terms of kitchen planning, islands provide a way of linking the features built against the walls, especially helpful in large kitchens. Islands should be situated so they are within reach of stored food, near the sink and close to the cooking zone.

An island arrangement helps to concentrate key activities to a small area so the cook does not waste time and energy moving around the kitchen. The island, as well as the other kitchen countertops, can be divided into zones

for different activities. The activity should determine the work top height and material for each zone.

A chopping block can be integrated into the island or counter top. Usually made of wood, the block should be positioned at the ideal height for cutting (a low block is good for jobs that require a lot of effort; it's easy to bear down on the block when you're poised above it). The beauty of wood makes it a popular choice; there are a wide range of colors and grains, it is a reasonably priced item, and sanding and a coat of oil restores its beauty. Some disadvantages are that chopping blocks can absorb strong food odors such as garlic, and repeated chopping can leave deep incisions in the surface.

A stovetop area can be incorporated in the island or the countertop. The advantage to a countertop cook area is you have a back wall to use as a design element or focal point. Consider setting the stove top six inches below the counter height so you can easily see into the pans. An adjacent stainless steel work top is heatproof, and can provide a "parking space" for heavy items.

An alternative to a center island is a large work table. Work tables are appropriate for kitchens where a built-in center island would make the space feel cramped. A work table can be purchased new or second hand, and some very beautiful worktables can be found in antique stores. These tables usually have a platform underneath for storing mixing bowls and pans.

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