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Creating an organized kitchen in an open-concept lifestyle



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Our relationship with our homes is continually evolving to better suit our lifestyles. There was a time when the kitchen was hidden away, thought only to serve the purpose of food preparation — certainly not meant to be on display, let alone a place for guests to mingle with their hosts.

Slowly, the kitchen moved from dark back corners to a more practical location. Then, as our family dynamics and parent-child relationships changed from the “*be seen, but not heard*” of the 1940s and 50s, to the always watchful and engaging (*at least, attempted engagement*) of us contemporary parents, so too did our relationship with our kitchen once again morph. We want connectedness in our lives and the removal of walls and visual barriers in our home is a physical representation of that desire. The kitchen is now the hub of the home where the engaged hosts and watchful parent alike can be busy with the business of food prep without missing out on the conversations of the day. This is a trend, as with most, that is born from an emotional necessity.

As a designer I am often asked to design open kitchen living spaces. I also live in an open-concept environment and understand the day-to-day challenges. The key to success from a design perspective is to anticipate the downfalls and implement solutions from the beginning. Here are my top five open-concept kitchen problems, solved.

1. Visual clutter on the counters: I make a point of planning a place in advance for all the larger items, like small appliances and microwaves. Consider putting the microwave below the counter for easy access by the littler family members while keeping it out of sight.

2. Open kitchens mean unwanted visitors under foot: Add a drink fridge on the outside edges of the kitchen. This allows both little ones and guests to grab a drink without getting in the way of the chef. Adding pre-dinner nibbles here, like cheese and grapes or juice boxes, allows them to fulfill their own hungry requests.

3. Fewer upper cabinets: Open kitchens look best when there is a nice amount of negative space. Planning a healthy-sized pantry cabinet easily replaces a full run of traditional upper cabinets and offers a more streamlined look.

4. A utilitarian look kills the cosy feel to adjacent spaces: Opt for integrated appliances and warm, natural materials like wood and stone. This will allow a glance from the family room to be less of a reminder the pan needs to be scrubbed. If you can't see the mess, you're less likely to be tormented by it.

5. Paperwork and homework will start to accumulate: The open kitchen means more of the daily functions will migrate in and inevitably be left on the counter. Plan ahead and add cabinets on the outside of the kitchen designated for homework supplies, magazines and household bills. Allocating a place will help condition the members of the family to pop things away instead of leaving it to be dealt with later.

Toronto-based celebrity designer and contractor Melissa Davis is known for her appearances, creative design and reno work produced for various HGTV programs and national print publications. With almost two decades of experience, her firm continues to service clientele throughout Ontario, specializing in value-adding ROI and resale consultations. Visit melissadavis.com, @melissadavis