

My Isle of Golden Dreams *

If it is true, that no man is an island, why is it that every woman desires one? And, when you think about it, it is not just women. Everyone seems to crave this “oasis” in the middle of the expanse they call their kitchen. Is a structure such as this a prerequisite to a perfect kitchen, or can you achieve a fruitful, rewarding life without one?

All of the gorgeous kitchens that you see in magazines and books seem to incorporate this singularly important structure, but upon close examination these kitchens are as big as the average home. (And not one of them has a toaster in view, but we will discuss that next month.) However, if you do have the space, an island is a great way to increase the functionality and aesthetics of your kitchen. They are so versatile that they can be designed as a workplace, an eating place, or both; and can be all one level or multi-level. They can also be used to house the primary sink, a cooktop, an oven, a dishwasher or a secondary sink.

But, alas, an island is not for everyone. The National Kitchen and Bath Association publishes some guidelines relating to islands. If there is one primary cook working in the kitchen the recommended space between each side of the island and the cabinets or walls should be a minimum of 42". This will ensure that ovens, dishwashers, etc. will not interfere with the walking space when their doors are open. If there are two chefs preparing meals in the kitchen there should be at least 48" around the island so they don't bump into each other, which can get ugly.

When you are planning to add seating around the island you must allow ample room. Again, the NKBA has recommendations. There should be a minimum width of 24" per diner. The space for knee room varies with the height of the island; 19" of knee clearance for a 30" surface; 15" for 36" and 12" for a 42" high island. And, if the area behind the seating will not be used as a walkway it can be a minimum of 36".

To ensure that you do have enough room to add an island to your existing kitchen, take out some masking tape and newspaper. Tape down the newspaper where you envision the island would be, and then make sure you do not walk on it for two weeks. (No cheating!) If you can pass this test, you are probably okay, but if you step all over the newspaper, you will have to consider alternatives.

If there is an island in your future, (and it is not in the Caribbean), careful consideration should be given to the design. It must be conceived as an integral part of the overall kitchen layout. Make a wish list of what you would like in the island, how many levels it should have, and how big it should be. Do not try to use the island for too much because it can negatively impact the overall efficiency of the kitchen. Discuss your ideas with your kitchen designer or architect, and with their help you should be able to devise the perfect island for your space.

However, if you are like many of us, and cannot fit an island in your kitchen, do not despair. Islands are not for everyone and a peninsula may be a viable alternative. Although a compromise, a peninsula can be used for many of the same functions as an island, but they take up less space and are less intrusive.

Unfortunately, many kitchens in some of the older homes in our area cannot support either of these options. Then it is up to your kitchen designer to maximize the space that you have. Even if you cannot fit an island or a peninsula in your kitchen, with the help of a creative designer you can still create a “Dream Kitchen” and find eternal happiness.

* “My Isle of Golden Dreams”, written by Walter Blaufuss and Gus Kahn, in 1919.