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Island *life*
Centre
 STAGE

by JESSICA CINNAMON

In today's kitchens, the island is more than just additional counter space – it's a central feature that defines the flow, function and personality of the entire space. Seamlessly blending utility with design, a kitchen island serves as a gathering place, a workspace and a visual

anchor all in one. It sets the tone for the kitchen and, by extension, the home.

Homeowners often request to make the island a signature element – one that enhances the day-to-day experience while elevating the overall aesthetic. Whether you're planning a renovation or starting from scratch,

here are five essential considerations to guide you in designing an island that truly performs.

1 | Buffer zone

An essential ingredient in a functional kitchen is ample breathing room. A minimum of 36 inches around the



Photo: Mike Chajewski

island, with 42 to 44 inches is the ideal standard. This ensures ease of movement and keeps the kitchen from feeling cramped. Don't forget to consider clearance to open appliance doors, such as dishwashers and ovens, to maintain a smooth, uninterrupted workflow.

2 | Counter depth

If your island includes a sink and counter stools, aim for a minimum depth of 36 inches. This typically means 24-inch-deep base cabinets with a 12-inch overhang for comfortable seating. For those who love entertaining, increasing the depth to 42 inches allows for expanded prep space and more generous seating, ideal for hosting informal dinners or morning coffee chats.

3 | Concealed storage solutions

Maximize functionality by utilizing the often-overlooked space on the backside of the island, beneath the

seating area. This hidden zone offers an ideal spot for storing occasionally used items, seasonal serving ware, or pantry overflow, all while maintaining a streamlined, clutter-free aesthetic. For those designing with sustainability in mind, consider integrating a discreet compost or recycling station into the island base. This offers convenience and a commitment to eco-conscious living without compromising on style.

4 | Integrated pulls

For a refined, modern aesthetic or in a compact kitchen, integrated cabinet pulls offer a sophisticated alternative to traditional hardware. By eliminating visual and physical bulk, these built-in details create a smooth, uninterrupted surface that enhances the functionality and elegance of your cabinetry. The result is a clean, contemporary look that allows materiality and craftsmanship to take centre stage, while minimizing visual clutter and maximizing flow within the kitchen.

Photo: Stephani Buchman



pro-tip
 Stone waterfalls cascading down the sides of the island are a gorgeous way to elevate the space. Opt for a full waterfall for maximum visual impact or a demi-waterfall for a more subtle, sophisticated touch. For added texture and interest, consider mixing materials, such as a wood base with a marble top, to create a layered, curated look.

Photo: Mike Chajewski





Photo: Stephani Buchman



Photo: Mike Chajacki

5 | Smart storage

Regardless of the home, the owner, or the lifestyle, everyone has storage needs. Here are a few smart ways to maximize your island to minimize clutter:

- Choose drawers over traditional cabinets for better organization and easier access to everyday items.
- Add cutlery drawers with shallow pullout compartments for utensils, keeping everything within easy reach.
- Install tray dividers for baking sheets, cutting boards and serving trays to prevent messy stacking.
- Dedicate a zone for oil and essentials to streamline your cooking process and keep countertops clear.
- Consider a lift-up mixer shelf for bulky appliances, saving counter space and making carrying heavy items a thing of the past.
- Don't forget hidden electrical outlets for appliances or personal tech for functionality without visual clutter.

To go a step further, incorporate deep drawers for pots and pans, spice pull-outs near prep zones and vertical



Photo: Stephani Buchman

slots for keeping wine or cookbooks. These thoughtful additions not only boost functionality, but also add a layer of personality to the design. With the right layout, your island can also double as a command centre, with a dedicated drawer for keys, mail, or charging stations, effortlessly bridging style with everyday convenience.

Elevate your experience

A kitchen island is more than a design feature – it's a lifestyle enhancer.

It becomes the setting for Sunday morning pancakes, late-night conversations and shared holiday memories. It's where functionality meets beauty and where thoughtful design transforms daily routines into joyful rituals. Whether you're crafting the perfect meal or simply catching up over coffee, a well-designed island makes those moments feel a little more special. When done right, the island isn't just an addition – it's the anchor of the home.



Jessica Cinnamon is the principal designer and founder of Toronto-based Jessica Cinnamon Design Inc., a multi-disciplinary design company that creates stylish and well-curated interiors, and provides complete bespoke residential design services in Toronto, the GTA, cottage country, Chicago, and Los Angeles.