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Sociable Showcase

Entertaining thoughts of a more cordial kitchen? Find inspiration in this Kohler Co. showhouse space designed for gatherings large and small. The floor plan eases feeding and feting, while elegant materials and innovative products create people-friendly ambience.



The combination of an elegant pastry table and a concrete-top island helps delineate zones for cooking and mingling in the kitchen of Kohler Co.'s Ultimate Entertaining Home.



SUPPOSE A KITCHEN COULD EXPAND instantly to handle a crowd and contract effortlessly to coddle a couple. In effect, this kitchen in Kohler, Wisconsin, does just that, despite the fact that its walls, fixtures, cabinets, and appliances are as stationary as those in any other kitchen. The space took shape when Kohler Co. asked residential designer Stephen Fuller, builders H. Joel Boyd and Stephen Boyd, and interior designer Brian Gluckstein to design a kitchen for the company's Ultimate Entertaining Home. The objective was to devise a space as capable of feeding an army as easily as a family of five and in an atmosphere of unbridled elegance. "Although we agonized over where to put appliances, cabinets, fixtures, and furniture, our chief concern was always about where to put people," Gluckstein says. "This kitchen was envisioned as party central, and we were committed to the idea of providing space, especially during large gatherings, for people to linger, mingle, migrate, and circulate. We wanted to make it possible for guests to actively

participate in the cooking process or just to be spectators without getting in the cook's way."

Remarkably, by today's standards, the kitchen is not overly large—just 16x16 feet, with a 12x13-foot breakfast area adjoining. However, Fuller's floor plan extends the reach of the kitchen by allowing for natural annexation of adjacent areas on an as-needed basis. For example, in a space behind the range wall, a built-in desk in a home office doubles as a staging area for appetizers or desserts, minimizing the burden on kitchen work surfaces. Likewise, a utility sink in the nearby laundry room is used for scouring large pans and serving platters, freeing the main sink and counters for other tasks. A pantry in the same vicinity eliminated the need for upper cabinets in the kitchen.

Similarly, access from the kitchen to the adjacent family room and back porch allows partygoers to circulate freely. "This kitchen can serve a hundred people, but because they can socialize in adjoining spaces, they won't all be in the kitchen at the same time," says interior designer Kerry Fuller, who assisted with the project. "Instead, they can wander in and out, which is what people do at any large gathering."

ABOVE LEFT: Stainless steel gives a contemporary look to the apron-front design of the main sink. The gooseneck faucet accommodates large pots. ABOVE: Doorways on either side of the range lead to a home office, pantry, and laundry room—all of which can be utilized for extra prep space. OPPOSITE: A dual-oven range with an onyx backsplash anchors a powerful appliance lineup that includes stacked wall ovens.





Visually **appetizing** surfaces—some dark and rich, some light and creamy, some tastefully colorful and patterned—create a veritable **feast** for the eyes.

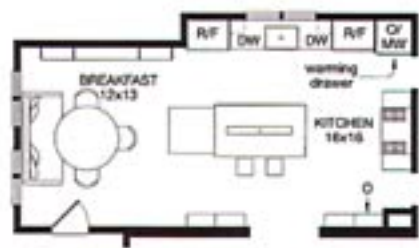


1 Iridescent glass tiles add color, pattern, and a tightly woven texture to most of the open wall space and the backsplash. **2** With a faucet at both ends, the undermount stainless-steel trough sink on the island can be shared by

cooks and their helpers. **3** Similar in appearance to marble, milky onyx makes an ideal surface for the tiers of the pastry-making table, which has a black steel frame. **4** The bricklike flooring pattern was

laid using slices of reclaimed antique-elm barn beams. From a distance, the result suggests stone pavers, but a close look reveals the pronounced wood grain. **5** While the island's gathering side offers seating, the

working side is more storage-minded. What appear to be narrow drawers at each end are pullouts for trash and recyclables. **6** On the other side of the range wall, pantry cabinets and a built-in desk help support the work core.





An elongated island encased in olive concrete and paired with an onyx-top pastry table distinguishes the cooking and cleanup zones from the social areas and provides workstations for multiple cooks or helpers. As the occasion demands, the island serves as a lunch counter, buffet table, wet bar or—when the long, narrow trough sink is filled with ice—an oyster bar and beverage cooler.

Cooking appliances are clustered at one end of the kitchen—convenient for the chef, but away from guests. Two built-in refrigerator/freezer units serve different constituencies. The one nearest the range is reserved for the principal chef. The other one encourages assistants or guests to help themselves to salad makings or beverages, while keeping them out of the cleanup and cooking areas.

In addition to the island stools, guest seating includes an elegant eating area with dining room-caliber furnishings, including linen-upholstered chairs and even a sofa. To encourage easy mingling, space-gobbling base cabinets and countertops were kept out of high-traffic areas. Instead,

shallow floor-to-ceiling cabinets were installed in both the eating area and flanking a wide passageway to the adjacent family room. "The idea was to preserve as much floor space as possible by taking advantage of vertical space," says Dianna Holmes, an interior designer for the cabinet manufacturer. "The cabinets look like tall bookcases and their locations allow guests and helpers to get to wineglasses or china quickly and easily."

Whatever the party menu, materials provide a feast for the eyes. The visual entrées include a "brick" floor of antique elm, a range wall of iridescent glass mosaic tile and onyx, and a dining-table base incorporating crushed bamboo. "We deliberately chose materials based on their 'wow' value," Gluckstein says. "We wanted surfaces that were visually entertaining and that would keep guests interested and involved in their surroundings—some sleek, smooth, and cool; some dark, rich, and warm; and others textured, colorful, and festive."

Let the party begin. **K&D**

ABOVE LEFT: The path from the family room leads guests past the island and serving-capable table and on into the eating area, where a hutch stores linens and tableware. **ABOVE:** A rolling ladder allows access to items stored high in shallow cabinets flanking the doorway to the family room. **OPPOSITE:** Upholstered chairs, a sofa, and a glass-top table with a bamboo base form an elegant dining group.



Resources begin on page 128.

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