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Planning ahead is key to ample kitchen storage

By Allison E. Beatty, Special to the Tribune

Concerned about having enough storage in your new kitchen?

The solution is to plan out your storage needs before the house is built. That way you can make sure the builder or kitchen designer adds a variety of gadgets and accessories to make the kitchen more efficient.

Storage is a perennial hot button for many home buyers. Regardless of the size of the kitchen or number of cabinets, it is difficult to have enough for all the "stuff" that fills a kitchen.

"There is no such thing as enough storage," said Lee Okamoto, design counselor for Magellan Development Group, a co-developer of **Lakeshore East** near Wacker and Columbus Drives. "You just have to get creative with it."

When buying a new home, there are several ways to incorporate more storage into the kitchen. Most cabinet lines have a variety of options for dividing horizontal and vertical space and organizing everything from silverware to small appliances.

Home buyers should start by thinking about how they plan to use the kitchen. If they are gourmet cooks, they may want extra shelving for spices and large drawers for pots and pans. If they entertain frequently, they may want extra decorative storage for glassware and dishes.

One way to think about storage is to divide the kitchen into zones and maximize the vertical and horizontal space in each area. The range or oven area is the cooking zone, for example. One important storage feature for that zone is the pullout drawer.

"Pullouts are the most tremendous invention because they make storage more accessible," said Sarah Reep, director of design for KraftMaid Cabinetry.

Instead of opening a cabinet door and fishing around for the pasta pan, the chef can pull out the drawer and grab the pan from the back of the drawer.

These types of drawers often are added in cabinets on the side of a range or near a wall oven, as they make it more convenient for accessing items while cooking. Large pullout drawers also are ideal for storing small appliances, serving platters and mixing bowls. This is particularly true in a corner cabinet where storage is not as efficient.

Another solution is to add deep cabinet drawers next to a stove. These drawers can be used to store cooking utensils, cheese graters and other oversize items.

The sink area is another storage zone and one where storage features can help make cleaning and meal preparation more efficient. Among the storage options are cabinet dividers for cleaning supplies and a small drawer on the front of the base cabinet. The drawer flips down and is used for storing sponges.

When designing a kitchen, buyers also should think about the way they shop. Those who buy in large quantities will want more cabinet and pantry space than those who visit the local market every three days.

"Some are going to Cosco once a week or once a month and that helps determine how much storage they need," said Alan Zielinski, owner of Better Kitchens in Niles.

Conversely, people who shop often and cook with fresh vegetables might want a larger refrigerator instead of a walk-in pantry.

While storage woes can plague any kitchen, they often are a bigger issue in small kitchens. "It's hard in condominiums because no matter how much storage we give them there's not enough storage," Okamoto said.

In some cases, the desire for storage is prompting buyers to forego more decorative spaces. "In one floor plan we have a dining room and an eat-in kitchen and people are eliminating the eat-in kitchen area and adding a desk with drawers and built-in cabinetry," Okamoto said.

The key to solving storage issues in a small kitchen is to make the most use of every inch of space. This can mean extending the wall cabinets from 36 inches to 42 inches high.

The taller cabinets add extra storage space for infrequently used items. When glass doors are added, they also add a decorative element.

The high cabinets also can be accessed by a step stool that is hidden in the toe kick at the base of the cabinets. "You pull it out and it makes it easier to get into those 42-inch-high cabinets," Zielinski said.

It also pays to create hidden storage niches. "We like to take that three to four inches alongside the range and put columns and a hidden spice rack in there," Zielinski said.

This type of design adds the columns as a decorative element and makes use of space that might otherwise be left open.

When selecting a floor plan, there also are other ways to maximize storage in the kitchen. If the kitchen layout includes a desk along one side of the room, for example, consider replacing the desk with a full-base cabinet. Or, if desk space is important, make sure the desk is flanked by drawers on at least one side and a wall cabinet above it.

Another option is to replace an extra closet near the garage with a built-in pantry. By adding shelves in all that vertical space, you can add spaces for storing canned goods, pasta and other items.

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