



By Jeffrey Kerr



# Let's Get Cooking

*The kitchen has become the social centre of the home – often replacing the living room and family room as the spot family and friends congregate.*

**N**ot surprising, people want functional, usable and flexible kitchen designs that work for everyone in the family. And an accessible kitchen is no different. It has to incorporate the unique needs of the family while preserving the warm atmosphere designed to welcome guests.

A flexible kitchen design must ensure the sink, worktop, equipment, appliances and storage can all be easily accessed and are easy to use from both a standing and seated position. Traditionally, kitchen designers focused on a compact work triangle including the sink, stove and refrigerator. But today, with more attention to everyone's needs, the triangle has to be expanded to include all work areas as well as a separate cooktop and wall oven, dishwasher and disposal of compost, recycling, and garbage.

Good design is the foundation of an efficient and accessible kitchen that maximizes independence and convenience.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has identified important considerations in accessible kitchen design:

- Kitchen layout must provide the right balance between countertop area, manoeuvring space and storage space.
- Kitchen size for someone who uses a walker or wheelchair should allow maneuvering space of 750 x 1,200 mm (30x47 in.) in front of controls, work areas and appliances. This work area can be part of the overall required minimum maneuvering space of 1,500 x 1,500 mm (59x59 in.) in the work triangle. Power wheelchair and scooter users will need a larger turning radius.
- Minimal effort design takes into account the location and relationship of all major elements within the kitchen and can include more lighting, a place to sit while working, a lower work station, and accessible storage.
- Adaptability addresses the needs of people using wheelchairs as well as those who don't. Finding an effective height for countertop, sink, cooktop, worktop and upper cabinets can be challenging. There are both high tech and low-tech design options.
- Ease of cleaning versus trends such as stainless steel has to be taken into account. Appliances, floors and countertop surfaces must be low maintenance.

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**Jeffrey Kerr** BROKER

Barrier Free Real Estate Specialist  
Senior Real Estate Specialist (SRES)  
Master Accredited Senior Agent (Master ASA)

**416.424.2222**

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The major design elements of a universal kitchen are countertops; cupboards, drawers and pantries; sinks and cleanup areas; food preparation areas; switches and controls; interior finishing; lighting; and audibility of such things as timers and smoke alarms.

I spoke with both Randy Sora, Accessibility Design / Management Consultant at EZaccess Inc. and David Wallace, Adapt-able Design Group. Both design kitchen layouts in-house to meet the client's specific needs. He said, "I generally develop the design myself in consultation with the client and Occupational Therapist. Once we get to the general configuration and placement of appliances, storage, work areas etc., I then hand it over to the

kitchen appliances please let me know and I'd be happy to connect you with the experts I interviewed for this article.

Jeffrey Kerr, Broker, Barrier Free Real Estate Specialist,  
RE/MAX Unique Inc., Brokerage  
T. 416.424.2222

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kitchen designer to fine tune. They provide their input into customizing, identify hurdles that we may face or suggest additional ideas. It's definitely a collaborative process."

The Daniels Corporation, a GTA builder, provides layout options for an Alternate Kitchen within their Accessibility Designed Program, included in all Daniels' high-rise buildings moving forward. The alternate kitchen can be designed to meet the needs of people who use mobility devices and includes such features as minimum clearance of 1,100 mm between the island and kitchen; under sink clearance; and accessible counter heights, lowered to 34 inches. Appliance options include side opening oven, double door fridge, cooktop with knee clearance and a dishwasher drawer.

I talked with Deborah Damiano, the Sales Manager at Paddy's Market "The Appliance Specialist" to ask for her thoughts on accessible kitchen appliances. She said, "We work with each customer to identify their unique needs. For instance, refrigerators that are counter depth can be easier to access. The fridge on top and freezer on the bottom can also be helpful as well as swing doors or even fridge drawers that pull out. Wall ovens with swing doors are also easier to use than an oven with a drop-down door. Technology has also improved cooktops; the Induction Cooktop is extremely safe, automatically shutting off if the pot has been removed. The burners also cool down as soon as the pot is taken off the burner. The options are increasing, giving customers much more choice than in the past."

Huge advances have been made in both design and technology, helping to ensure everyone can enjoy the kitchen equally and safely. However, such changes should not be made in isolation. Professional advice, flexible solutions and long-range planning can make all the difference in the world.

The extra effort will be worth it, and as always, attention to accessibility can help in the long term with resale value.

If you'd like more information on barrier free kitchens or accessible



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