

EIGHT STEPS to a WINNING KITCHEN

TEXT MARY LEVITSKI

PHOTOGRAPHY JASON MORTLOCK

This Toronto kitchen has all the right stuff: It's bright, spacious and über-functional. Designer Karen Sealy of Sealy Design spills her eight-step recipe for a perfect kitchen.

NO.

1

CONSIDER CURRENT AND FUTURE FUNCTION

Are you a one-cook or two-cook family? Do your kids help with the cooking? The intended function of your kitchen will dictate everything from the counter height to the work zones (maybe you'll realize you need more than one sink). The true starting point, though, is often the appliances. "There are so many sizes and types of appliances these days that you need to pick elements like your fridge and cooktop first and design your kitchen from there," says Karen. This space was built with casual entertaining in mind, so Karen incorporated a wine fridge, informal seating and plenty of counter space for serving meals buffet-style.

THE
PALETTE



NO.2

CREATE AN EFFICIENT WORK TRIANGLE

Your work triangle – the space between the stove, fridge and sink – should be big enough to allow you to move around freely, without being overly spacious. This will minimize the amount of travel needed between key areas and ensure that traffic stays off the cook's turf, especially when kids are running amuck and guests are mingling during a large gathering. "By making the work triangle only large enough to accommodate the cook, you're encouraging friends and family to stay outside of it," says Karen.

NO.3

MAXIMIZE STORAGE

For Karen, there's no such thing as too much storage. This kitchen is no exception, from cabinetry that climbs all the way to the ceiling to drawers built into the banquette. But in a large space like this, all that storage can feel heavy and overpowering. To break up the look, Karen chose contrasting hues for the cabinetry and island, as well as mirror-panelled doors for the uppermost cabinets. "Mirror fronts offer the same visual interest as glass without forcing you to fill the shelves with pretty display items," says Karen.

NO.4

BUILD TO LAST

Milk spat out in a bout of laughter at breakfast; a sauce-laden spoon accidentally nudged out of a pot by a passerby – no kitchen is exempt from such mishaps. That's why Karen designs kitchens that are durable.

She chose quartz for the countertops because it's stain-proof, doesn't require resealing and comes in larger slabs, which means fewer seams. She also went for chip-camouflaging porcelain on the floor and water-resistant Sunbrella fabric on the banquette and some of the toss cushions.

NO.5

LIGHT EVERY ZONE

"Kitchens are the hardest-working rooms in the house," says Karen. "We use them morning, noon and night, so the lighting has to serve a wide variety of purposes." Here, recessed lights illuminate the space overall, under-cabinet fixtures and shapely over-the-island pendants serve as task lighting and the drum pendant above the table sets the mood. A bank of windows lets in another key lighting source: sunshine.

NO.6

CONSIDER SIGHTLINES

The countertop that sees the most prep in this open-concept kitchen is tucked deep within it, far out of sight of the home's front entrance, so the homeowners can put their best foot forward when guests come over.

Karen also married the kitchen to the adjacent living room with her colour and finish choices and to the outdoors by hanging the mercury glass pendants in a random pattern that mimics raindrops.

NO.7

COUNTERBALANCE ACOUSTICS

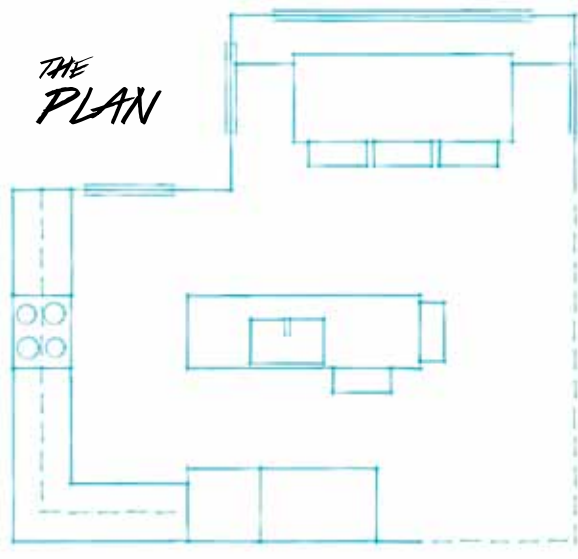
With all their hard surfaces, kitchens are by nature echoey - which doesn't give off the coziest vibe. To boot, when there are 20 or 30 people over for wine, "you can imagine how loud it can get!" says Karen. To soften the acoustics, she incorporated plushness where she could: cushioned seating, an array of toss cushions on the banquette and a soft-under-foot sisal runner in front of the sink.



Karen dishes on design inspiration and decorating tips at STYLEATHOME.COM/SEALY.

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THE PLAN



NO.



ADD PERSONALITY

Bright colours and flashy finishes are best used in moderation, much like bold spices, and belong on easy-to-switch-out elements. More permanent and pricey features, such as the main finishes, countertops, cabinetry and flooring, should be chosen in more neutral, timeless tones. “Any colour is very demanding,” says Karen, so you’ll likely get sick of, say, bright blue countertops within a few years. If you’re really craving colour, Karen recommends adding a subtle accent tile to your backsplash. Here, just the right dose of fun in bright and funky toss cushions, crystal upper-cabinet knobs and sparkly pendant lights is balanced by safe choices like Shaker-style cabinetry, beige flooring and white countertops.