

Galley kitchen ideas: how to plan one to maximise space

Once seen as poky, these practical spaces are making a comeback as they are more efficient and better for entertaining guests than open-plan set-ups



From left: Naked Doors in Painted Shaker and slab fronts in Meadow Thistle, Naked Kitchens; Limehouse kitchen painted in Blakeney Blue by Neptune, Sims Hilditch; kitchen designed by Brooke Copp-Barton and made by End Grain
FRANKY RIDGEON, FAR STUDIO/MEGAN TAYLOR

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Galley kitchens used to be regarded as a disaster — tiny and poky, with barely enough room to open the doors, never mind swing the proverbial cat. But as our homes get smaller and space is ever more precious, the galley — which takes its name from the efficiently laid-out kitchens on narrow ships — is making a well-deserved comeback.

A traditional galley has units on both sides with a corridor down the middle, but such is the practicality of its design that the layout is often applied in larger rooms, where one of the walls is replaced with an island. This brings all the convenience of having everything within reach but is a more sociable set-up as friends and family can sit and chat while you cook.

I designed my own kitchen — nearly 10 years ago — exactly like this. The hob and oven are in the island, with the sink, fridge and a wall of open-shelf storage behind. I can unload the dishwasher without taking a single step, pivot from hob to sink to drain pasta, and grab plates, bowls and glasses from the shelves above.

At the same time an acquaintance had knocked down most of her internal walls to create a huge open-plan kitchen, living and dining space. When the work was complete she could only complain about how far she had to walk between fridge and cooker, and how suddenly someone watching television on the other side of the room meant that everyone was compelled to listen to the same show. It was the ultimate enormous designer kitchen that didn't work for anyone, whether they wanted to cook, eat or relax.

I have been a fan of tightly designed kitchens — preferably behind walls — ever since. You can tuck yourself away, listen to the music of your choice and meditatively prepare dinner without distraction while chaos reigns in the rooms around, and there's literally no space for boisterous children, enthusiastic pets or grumpy partners. It's an introvert's dream.

Whether you have a traditional galley kitchen or have adapted it with a row of cabinets along one wall, creating one that is really efficient requires a slightly nerdish attention to detail right from the start.

Just how many plates do you have and how many do you actually need? How many pans and serving dishes? Is the washing machine going in here, or can it move to the bathroom or another part of the house? Must you have a dishwasher? Will a slimline one be sufficient? Is the oven better at eye level so you can have extra cupboard space below?

The key to successful planning is to imagine yourself in the kitchen making your three daily meals and thinking about how many people might be there at any one time. Putting the kettle, toaster, mugs, coffee and bread in one place while the cereal and bowls are stored close to the fridge will help prevent traffic jams in the morning while someone else is at the other end looking for the dog food. Better still, replacing the kettle with a boiling water tap will free up precious room on the worktop.

Waste is the buzzword of the 21st century but it applies as much to space as to products. Do you need a large fridge or will a smaller under-counter one mean less wasted food? Do you tend to batch cook and freeze or do you just need a small space for cocktail ice?

Open shelves will make the space feel less enclosed but make sure your kitchenware is attractive enough to be on show. If you do want wall cabinets, consider sliding doors so you don't bash someone on the head when you open them. Then paint them the same colour as the walls so they recede.

Only once you have planned every cupboard and counter can you start to think about colour. In a small space you can afford to go bold. High-gloss paint and handleless doors will add a sense of sleek sophistication. In fact choose as many reflective surfaces as you can to bounce the light around — a foxed mirror makes a great splashback. Integrated appliances will add to the pared-back feel and make your kitchen seem lighter and brighter and, crucially, less cluttered.

A stainless-steel worktop will also help with this and, in addition, is the toughest, most practical solution; there's a reason restaurants choose this material over capricious marble and wood.

Underfloor heating will keep the temperature constant and means you don't lose space to radiators. And if the surface is small you can really go to town with the tiles — this might be the place to add colour and pattern as it won't make the room feel smaller. Replacing standard kickboards with mirrors will also make the floor look larger and give the impression that the cabinets are floating.

A galley kitchen may be small, but with a little planning it can be beautiful too.



Repeat after me: you do not have to match your wall units to your base cupboards. Tonal colours will make this look more like a room in which you cook than a workaday kitchen. [Naked Kitchens](#)' design using Naked Doors in Painted Shaker and slab fronts in Meadow Thistle. Doors only from about £3,000. Photograph: Franky Ridgeon, Far Studio



Just because it's a kitchen doesn't mean you can't have fun — the patterned floor and bright orange fridge make this a standout spot for mundane jobs. Limehouse kitchen painted in Blakeney Blue by [Neptune](#), starting from £12,000. Design by [Sims Hilditch](#)



Keeping the hue of the cabinets classic allows you to add dramatic splashes of colour with lighting and accessories. The countertop is made from reclaimed Iroko wood school laboratory desks, sourced from Retrouvius, and the paint colour is Little Greene's Aquamarine Deep for the units and Hicks Blue for the front door. Sink by Villeroy & Boch, tap from Lefroy Brooks and pendants from Artifact Lighting. Designed by [Brooke Copp-Barton](#) and made by [End Grain](#). Shot by Megan Taylor



Above left: Using the same colour across units, shelves and wall cladding makes the space feel less cluttered and allows the marble worktop to stand out. Add personality by putting your prettiest items on the shelves. [Burbidge Kitchen Makers](#)' Malton in Seal Grey, from £15,000

Centre: A galley kitchen in Trancoso, Brazil, made from local Tatajuba wood, which is yellow when newly cut and matures to a glossy golden brown or russet. Eucalyptus sticks have been applied over the structure to ventilate the units and hide some elements of the kitchen. Studio: [Nenmar](#). Photograph: Marcelo Aniello

Right: A bespoke creation ensures you utilise every centimetre of space. [Three Four Five Furniture](#) in Glasgow makes fully customisable kitchens in birch plywood and [Kit Caboose](#) specialises in awkward shapes — this was built narrower than the standard 60cm so it wouldn't stick out past the doorway. Starting from £10,000.



If space is tight you can mix and match to see what works best. This island is an old haberdasher's unit with a reclaimed laboratory worktop and the side units are by [DeVol](#), painted in printer's black with a quartzite worktop and original quarry floor tiles. Design by Hannah Ellis of [@half_a_hall studio](#).



Above left: A sloping ceiling doesn't mean you can't have a stunning kitchen — use open shelves and add pattern and softness with a fashionable sink skirt and window blind. Units are painted in Farrow & Ball's Sulking Room Pink and walls in New White. Sink by Shaws and taps from Bespoke Taps, reclaimed terracotta floor tiles from Maitland & Poate. Designed by Brooke Copp-Barton and made by [Ed Keyser](#). Shot by Matt Gamble

Centre: One upside to a small kitchen is that you don't need much of anything, so you can splurge on a fabulous worktop or sink to add the wow factor. Classic English kitchen by [DeVol](#), from £25,000, in bespoke green with worktop in Arabescato marble.

Right: This [Ikea](#) Metod kitchen can be designed and built to suit any space, with a range of cabinet frames, drawers and hardware available in different sizes.



Painting the walls the same colour as the cabinets will make the latter recede and disappear, and the room will feel larger as a result. Henley kitchen in sage green by [Neptune](#), starting from £14,000



This 10ft wide kitchen has low units on one side and floor-to-ceiling ones on the other to house a boiler/utility cupboard, fridge-freezer, double oven and wine cooler. The 16ft marble worktop draws the eye across the whole space to make it feel bigger. Designed by [Angel O'Donnell](#). Carcass from [Ikea](#), doors from Superfront, handles from Buster & Punch.



Above left: The mix of cupboards and shelves, doors and wooden drawers gives this tiny kitchen a sense of individuality. [Burbidge Kitchen Makers](#)' Malton in Thyme, from £15,000

Centre: You will never go wrong with a white kitchen, and you can easily paint the walls to ring the changes and refresh the room. This is a classic five-piece Shaker design, modernised with a square-edged frame. [Howdens](#)' Witney kitchen, POA

Right: Keeping most of the units in natural wood is a timeless look, and you can always paint one cupboard if you get bored. [Naked Kitchens](#)' Frameless kitchen, combining Painted Shaker and oak veneer J-groove design in Marsh Green, from about £12,000. Photograph: @roar_architects

