

Kitchen Design — Five Layouts and The Work Triangle



Kitchen Design — Understanding Common Layouts

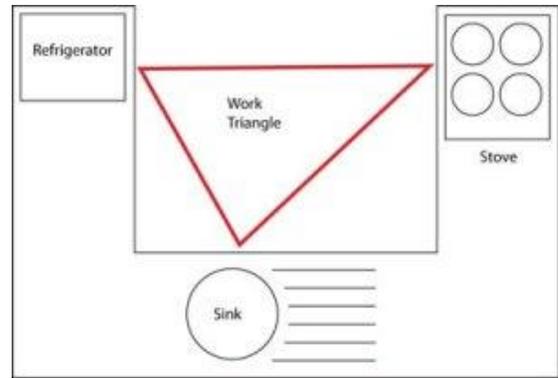
Your dream kitchen is coming to life in your imagination. As you begin creating that vision, you'll be working with a design specialist who is invested in making sure your project is a success — not just at completion but for years to come.

To make the most of your relationship with your designer, it helps to understand in advance the language and concepts you'll be collaborating on. Today, we'll be talking about the work triangle, and how it applies to the five top kitchen layouts.

The **work triangle** is the shape of travel between **sink**, **refrigerator**, and **range**. This is the path of movement while a kitchen is in use.

A Kitchen's Work Triangle

The National Kitchen and Bath Association has codified efficient design principles into practical guidelines. When it comes to the work triangle, these guidelines suggest:



Kitchen Triangle

1. If there is only one sink, it should be between the refrigerator and range. Or, locate it across from either the food prep area or the range.
2. Do not locate a peninsula or island such that it interrupts or obstructs the triangle by more than a foot.
3. Through traffic should not interrupt the triangle, but rather take a different route. This guideline can be difficult or impossible in some small kitchens.
4. The total distance of these three lines should not exceed 26 feet.
5. None of these lines should be less than four feet or more than nine feet long.

The full set of NKBA guidelines is available for purchase [here](#). Browse some of these concepts at no cost [here](#).

Basic Kitchen Layouts

99% of the kitchens in the USA fall into one of five layouts:

Single wall — All components – cabinets, appliances, and counter tops – are along one wall.

Galley — All components are on two opposing walls.

L-shape — All components are on two walls connected at a right angle.

U-shape — All components are on three walls connected at right angles.

G-shape — A U-shape with a fourth wall or peninsula that almost completes a square or rectangle.

Each shape has its plus and minuses, and some are simply better and more efficient than others.

If the space is large enough, you can add an island to any of these layouts. Islands do not have to be rectangular or square — they can be any shape that gets the job done and pleases you.

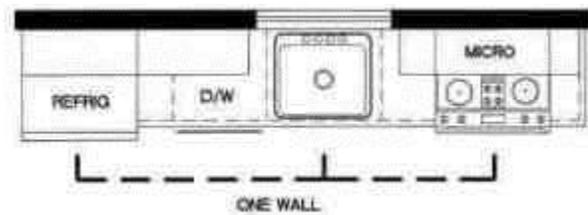
An island is a workspace you can walk all the way around. A peninsula does not have a wall behind it, so it can easily be mistaken for an island. But a peninsula is physically connected to the rest of the cabinetry, while an island is not.

Understanding the five basic kitchen layouts – and which one you have in your house – will help you make the most of your new design. You and your designer will take many things into consideration, such as space and budget.

You may decide together to work within the existing space. Or you may expand the space by knocking down non-load-bearing walls, or by replacing load-bearing walls with exposed or hidden headers. Another way to gain space is to include a bump-out or even an addition. If you do add space, this may allow you to change to a new layout or add an island or peninsula to the existing layout.

However, adding space or changing a layout isn't always necessary. Sometimes just replacing countertops and cabinetry can completely rejuvenate your kitchen.

Single Wall Kitchen Design



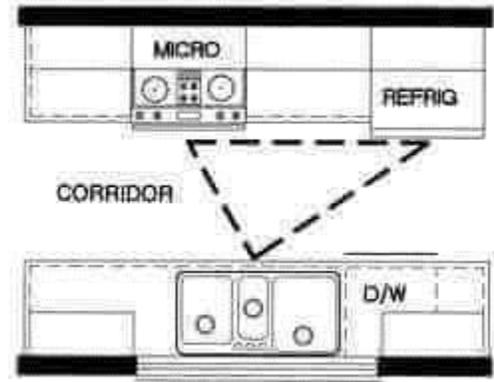
Single Wall Kitchen

It's typical to see single wall layouts in small DC condominiums, but they appear in other dwellings as well. Instead of a work triangle, work areas form a line, reducing efficiency. More rarely, single wall layouts can occur in larger kitchens, meaning a lot of travel between work areas. You might need skates!

If the opposing wall has a dining room on the other side, that's good news. You can take advantage of the best way to improve the space – knocking out that wall and creating an open entertaining space by adding an island. This is a great way to reclaim a room that is rarely used otherwise. Instead, it becomes an appealing and value-adding feature.

A single wall layout doesn't always have to be small. [Click here to see an example](#) of a large single wall kitchen design with an island on Capitol Hill in DC.

Galley Kitchen Design



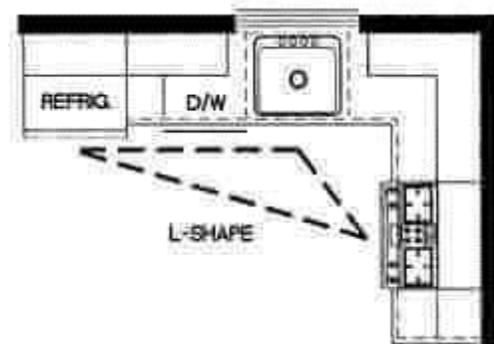
Galley Kitchen

A galley kitchen involves two parallel walls with kitchen passage between, usually with an exterior door at one end. These are common in DC neighborhoods such as Columbia Heights, Petworth and Capitol Hill. They can feel tight and cramped — as with the single wall kitchen, knocking out one wall opens up the space dramatically.

Shifting the back door can allow you to convert this layout to any of several different layouts, gaining space and efficiency. But even if you don't, just changing from galley to single wall with an island can improve the feel of the space, making it more open and friendly.

Click to see [a galley kitchen project in DC](#).

L-Shaped Kitchen Design

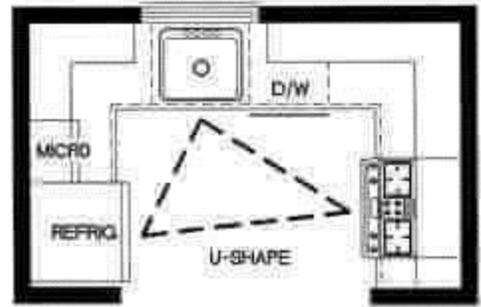


L-Shaped Kitchen

L-shaped kitchens can be large or small. This layout can be highly efficient and works well within an open floor plan, with an island, or along with a dedicated kitchen table.

See [this long L-shaped kitchen](#) in white, with a long island – Bethesda, MD.

U-Shaped Kitchen Design



U-Shaped Kitchen

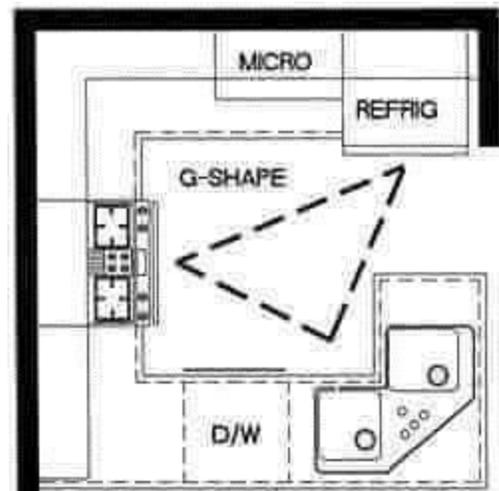
A U-shaped kitchen is highly efficient for a solo cook, but can cause collisions when two or more are working. A larger kitchen with an island and multiple work stations can help, if team cooking is important.

Older houses with this layout tend to have a dead space between cabinets in any given corner. Reclaim this space with a super-susan or a blind corner pull-out.

Smaller U-shaped kitchens can be short on counter space, resulting in counter clutter. A solution is to relocate the microwave – high or low – to cabinet height above 54" or under the counter below 36".

See [this U-shaped kitchen](#) in Silver Spring, MD.

G-Shaped Kitchen Design



G-Shaped Kitchen

Add a fourth wall or peninsula to a U-shaped kitchen and the result is a G-shape. The extra barrier compounds the traffic challenge, even in a large kitchen.

You can enjoy a sizeable improvement in openness and space by knocking out as many sections of wall as possible. Adding a pass-through opening helps relieve exit and entry traffic.

See an example of [an opened-up G in this kitchen](#) in Kensington, MD.

Understanding how your kitchen layout sets up the work triangle can help you make better decisions about your design as you remodel. Do you like to cook alone? Do you prefer to cook with a friend or two? Do you entertain while cooking? Do you prefer a close, efficient workspace or room to spread out?

Whatever your layout, applying these concepts to your environment, your needs, and your desires will help you and your design professional plan the kitchen of your dreams.