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crap

When I remodeled my own kitchen in 2018, I called upon every bit of design knowledge from my 20+ year career to make the best decisions for layout, lighting and finish selections in the new space. During the design phase, I user-tested all of my intended changes during nightly cooking to ensure that the new plan would be functional as well as stunning.

The kitchens I create for my clients undergo the same process of design and testing to find the best-looking functional space. Many clients come to me after a deep dive into HGTV to find a kitchen that they'd like to reproduce. "It's pretty," they'll say. "I can't tell you why I like it; it just feels good to look at. All the finishes go together and that's what I want."

This lack of language to be able to specifically describe the desired elements that make "great" space is a giant roadblock to successful design. In my first book *Remodeling Your House without Killing Your Spouse*, I introduced the concept of CRAP, a design language. CRAP is an acronym that stands for Contrast, Repetition, Alignment and Proximity. It provides a vocabulary to better communicate your feelings, diagnose a space when something isn't right, and treat the space to a glow-up so that it feels and functions as best it can.

It is the presence and balance of these four CRAP elements that allow a user to feel harmony, happiness, contentment and functionality within a room. Think of the concept as a more sciency version of feng shui and you'll get the hang of it.

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Let's take a look at each of the four CRAP elements using my remodeled farm kitchen to see how impactful they are in the overall design.

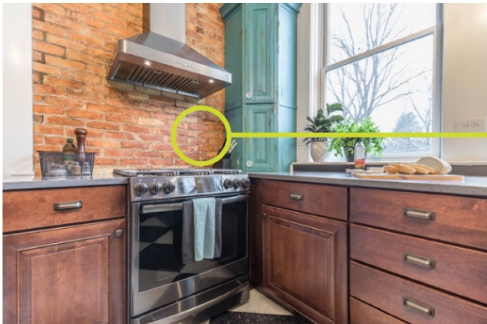
Contrast
Repetition
alignment
proximity



CRAP is developed from *The Non-Designer's Design Book* by digital goddess Robin Williams who wrote about two-dimensional graphic and web design.

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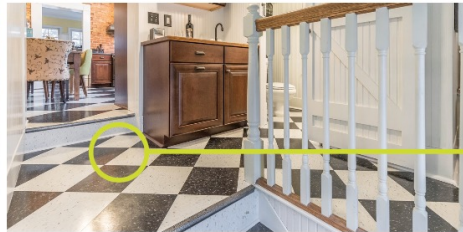
texture for days

The original 1870's exposed brick provides excellent contrast in texture when paired with modern black stainless appliances



ballsy color

High color contrast emanates from the ballsy black paint above the stark white window trim. The antiqued blue tall corner cabinet provides more color contrast from the wood stained base cabinets.



size matters

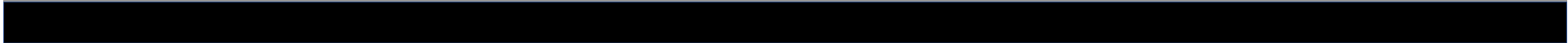
The black and white vinyl composition flooring tiles are a contrasting scale in the connecting rooms: 2'x2' squares in the large open kitchen and 1' square tiles in the smaller butler's pantry beautifully highlight the size difference.

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contrast

Contrast highlights the differences between finishes in the kitchen to show visual interest. Too little contrast is a snoozefest, and too much contrast is visually jarring. There are three ways to achieve contrast in a room: color, texture and size. Let's take a look at how each element impacts the overall look and functionality of a kitchen.

**COLOR
TEXTURE
SIZE**



70/30 rule in action

The “Starbucks” seating area of the Compound kitchen is a good example of balanced thematic elements. The grouping of 4 chairs would be overkill if all were the same style and color, and head-scratching if all were completely different seating. The combination of two colors and two chair styles is a happy medium that asserts a theme without screaming or whispering “hey, look at me!”



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repetition

Repetition asserts a theme through multiples. “Theme” can be interpreted in many ways: a style, a genre, or a look—it doesn’t matter what you call it; your eye will search for the common elements within the kitchen and try to make sense of the story you’re trying to tell. Warning: themes are for parties, not for rooms! Make sure to follow the 70/30 rule when it comes to themed décor and strive to keep the theme-y bits to a happy 50% range.

The 70/30 rule applies to all of the thematic elements in a room: décor, artwork, colors, furnishings and architecture. If more than 70% of those elements are linked in a specific theme, it’s like being beaten over the head with the idea. Conversely, if fewer than 30% of the thematic elements are linked, you give a big “HUH?!?!?” to the space because it doesn’t tell a cohesive or compelling story. Keeping the thematic elements to 50% provides proper balance.

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zero Indiana-ing effect

The spacing and height of the vintage grocery sale signs, antique beam with memorabilia and the derpy dog stained glass allows the eye to rest on an object before flowing to the next treasure.

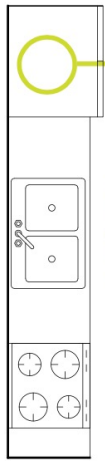
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alignment

Alignment shows hierarchy through placement. Much like animal pack law, some things are just more important than others. Your eyes are constantly seeking the alpha element in a room and will be hella-disappointed if the hierarchy of décor isn't easily identifiable. The goal with alignment is to allow your eye to stop and rest in appreciation of an element before moving on to the next visual cue.

There are two forms of alignment to avoid: the *Indiana effect* and the *Royal Caribbean effect*. *Indiana-ing* involves forcing the eye to travel in a straight line while viewing artwork or architectural elements all presented at the same height. The effect is the same as driving through the flat Midwest state: your eye zips past mundane and uninspiring scenery. Yes, I'm allowed to say that. I lived in Indiana for five years.

Royal Caribbean-ing involves the opposite strategy: placing artwork and elements here and there and hither and yon so that your eye bobs up and down around the space like a seasick cruise line passenger. Tossing your cookies is never a thing in design, so keep your eyes happy by allowing them to stop and rest before moving on to the next cool thing.



single wall kitchen

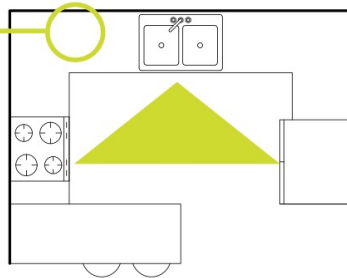
The Single Wall kitchen has a super squishy triangle shape. You won't get your 10,000 daily steps in this configuration, but you might feel like you're in a cue for an amusement park ride with all the back-and-forth.

While the overall layout is pretty simplistic, the single wall kitchen can be super efficient if the counter space between the appliances is ample for safely landing your food and cookware.

G shaped kitchen

The G-Shaped kitchen has a traditionally even triangle shape. The hook of the "G" is created by a peninsula which serves as the barrier to too much interior traffic. The peninsula seating outside the main triangle allows for social visitation, light prepwork assistance and casual dining without bumping butts with the cook.

This G-Shape is essentially a 'roided up U-shaped kitchen that can be super efficient for introverted or dictatorial cooks who need you to stay out of their damn way.



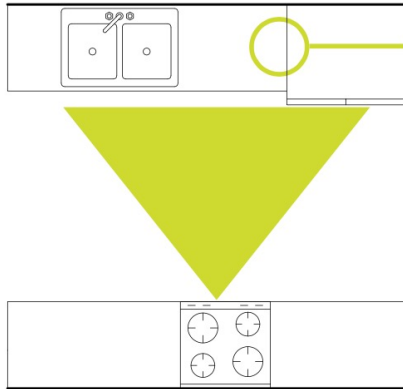
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proximity

WORK TRIANGLES

In the world of two-dimensional design, proximity is defined as showing similarity among sets of items though location. In the real world, it's really all about function. Stuff's gotta work, or no amount of pretty will cover the dysfunction. You can knock yourself out creating the perfect contrast, beautiful repetition and the most amazing alignment you've ever seen. Warning: if your kitchen doesn't function, you have failed like McDonald's pizza.

The concept of proximity in kitchen design is often expressed through the work triangle—that cool three-point relationship between the stove, refrigerator and sink. No matter what shape your kitchen layout is, the size and shape of the triangle determines the proximal efficiency. Let's look at kitchen layout styles to better understand proximity.



galley wall kitchen

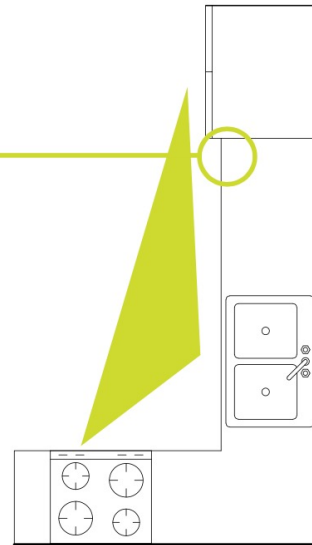
The Galley Wall kitchen has a deeper triangle shape that is famous for butt-bumping if more than one cook is in the kitchen. This layout is common in apartments and ranch homes and has the potential to break noses and inflict goose eggs on unwitting residents who walk into the open fridge while turning the blind corner.

Given how short the triangle sides are, the efficiency of the galley kitchen with a single user is pretty high.

L shaped kitchen

The L-Shaped kitchen has a long, narrow triangle shape that's conducive to multiple cooks. The openness of the triangle allows for two users to be positioned so that one can pass around the backside without bumping butts or dropping dishes.

Overall, the L-shaped kitchen is most efficient if the longest leg of the triangle does not exceed 9'.

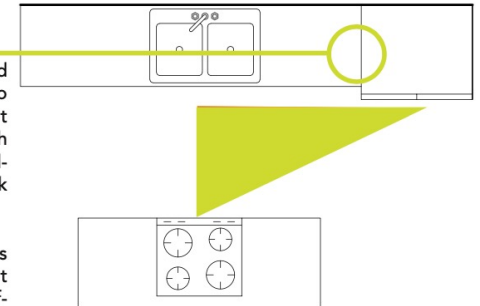


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island feature kitchen

The Island Feature kitchen has a wedged triangle shape that allows the cook to perform culinary ballet with elegant turns, twirls and strides to get to each appliance. This layout is useful for multiple prep spots, so more than one cook can access the space.

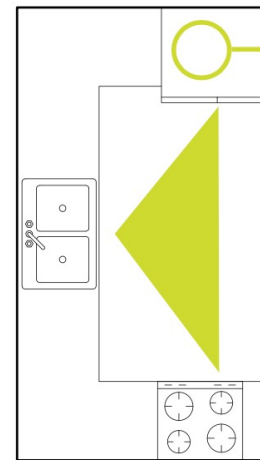
Unlike the Galley style, the island offers escape routes on either side to prevent butt-bumping the cook. Overall, the efficiency of the Island Feature kitchen is high.



U shaped kitchen

The U-Shaped kitchen has a wide, even triangle shape that functions like an oval racetrack. Each lap takes the cook efficiently around the appliances with plenty of prep space between.

As long as a second cook stays tight to a corner, the efficiency for multiple users is practical. As Darrell Waltrip would say, "Boogity, boogity, boogity – let's go racing, boys!"



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