Choosing the Right Kitchen Layout for Your Room Shape

Getting the layout right is one of the most important decisions in a kitchen project. The shape and size of your room will largely determine what is possible, and understanding the strengths of each layout can help you make the most of your space. Whether you are planning a full renovation or just thinking through options, matching the layout to the room shape is a practical first step.

The Galley Kitchen: Best for Narrow Spaces

A galley kitchen consists of two parallel runs of cabinets with a walkway between them. This layout is a strong choice for long, narrow rooms or for spaces where you want to keep the cooking zone compact. Because everything is within a few steps, the work triangle - the path between the hob, sink and fridge - tends to be efficient. The main thing to get right is the width of the walkway. If it is too tight, movement feels cramped; too wide and you lose the efficiency. A clearance space of around 1.2 metres usually works well, though the exact figure depends on the depth of your cabinets and the size of the appliances. One drawback is that a galley kitchen can feel like a corridor if the room is very long. Breaking the run with a shallow shelf or a different counter finish can help the space feel less tunnel-like.

L Shaped Kitchens: Open and Flexible

An L shaped kitchen uses two adjoining walls to form a corner, leaving the rest of the room open. This layout suits square or roughly rectangular rooms and works especially well when the kitchen is part of a larger living area. The open side can accommodate a dining table or a kitchen island, which adds both work surface and informal seating. The corner itself can be a challenge if not planned carefully - deep base cabinets in the corner can become dead storage unless you fit a carousel or pull-out system. When done well, the L shape gives you a natural work triangle with plenty of counter space. It also allows for good circulation routes because there is no dead-end; people can walk around the perimeter without crossing the main cooking zone.



U Shaped Kitchens: Maximum Storage and Worktop

A U shaped kitchen wraps around three walls, offering the greatest amount of cabinet and counter space for the footprint. This layout works best in rooms that are wide enough to accommodate a third run of cabinets without making the central space feel tight. The work triangle is contained within the U, so the cook can move between the sink, hob and fridge with very few steps. It also provides plenty of room for custom kitchen storage - deep drawers, tall larder units and pull-out racks can all be worked in without sacrificing the worktop area. The main trade-off is that a U shaped kitchen can feel enclosed if the room is small. You need to leave enough clearance space between the two side runs so that opening appliance doors and bending to reach lower cabinets is comfortable. If the room is too narrow for a full U, consider dropping one side to an L shape instead.

Kitchen Islands: Adding a Central Work Zone

An island can transform any of the layouts above by adding a central work surface, extra storage and a place to sit. However, an island only works if the room is large enough to allow a clear circulation route around it. A common mistake is to fit an island that is too big for the space, which then obstructs movement and makes the kitchen feel cluttered. The island should sit at least one metre away from the cabinets on every side, and more if you plan to have seating on one side. The shape of the island matters too - a long narrow island works in a galley kitchen, while a square or rectangular island suits an L or U shaped layout. If you are adding an island to an existing room, think about the work triangle again: the island should not break the natural flow between the hob, sink and fridge. Instead, it can become a fourth zone for preparation or for housing the sink or hob itself, depending on your plumbing and ventilation setup.

Work Triangle and Clearance Space

The work triangle concept has been around for decades and remains a useful guide. The idea is that the three main work points - the hob, the sink and the fridge - should form a triangle that is neither too compact nor too spread out. In practice, a well-planned triangle keeps the total distance between these points within a comfortable range, while also ensuring that no leg of the triangle cuts through a high-traffic area. Clearance space is just as important. You need enough room to open appliance doors fully, to stand at a counter without blocking the walkway, and to allow two people to pass each other. Cabinet depth also affects clearance: standard base cabinets are about 60 centimetres deep, so a walkway between two runs needs to account for that on both sides. If you are planning custom kitchen storage, these dimensions become even more important because you want every drawer and pull-out to be fully accessible.



Matching Layout to Room Shape

Square rooms often work well with a U shape or an L shape with an island. Rectangular rooms can take a galley layout if the room is narrow, or an L shape if the room is wider than it is long. For rooms that are open on one side - for example, a kitchen that flows into a dining area - an L shape or a galley with an island tends to be the most practical. The key is to measure your room accurately and to think about where the doors and windows are placed. A window above the sink is a classic choice, but it also limits where you can put wall cabinets. Similarly, a door in the middle of a wall can break up a run of cabinets, so you may need to adjust the layout to keep the work triangle intact.

Practical Considerations

Think about how you use the kitchen day to day. If you cook frequently, you will want the hob and oven to be close to each other and have plenty of counter space on either side. If you tend to bake, you might prioritise a large expanse of worktop for rolling out dough. The layout should support your habits, not fight them. Also consider the circulation route through the kitchen. If the kitchen is a thoroughfare between a hallway and a garden door, you need to keep

the walkway clear. An island might block that flow, so a galley or L shape might be better. If the kitchen is a dedicated room with no through traffic, you have more freedom to close off the space with a U shape or a large island.

Custom kitchen storage can be built into any of these layouts, but the layout itself determines how much storage you can realistically have. A U shaped kitchen gives you the most linear cabinet run, while a galley kitchen can still pack a lot of storage into a narrow footprint if you use tall cabinets at one end. An L shape with an island offers a balance of storage and openness. The important thing is to plan the storage alongside the layout rather than as an afterthought. That way, you can incorporate pull-out shelves, deep drawers and corner solutions that make the most of every centimetre.



Bringing It All Together

There is no single best layout, only the one that fits your room shape and your way of living. Start by measuring the room and noting the position of doors, windows and any structural features. Then think about the work triangle and clearance space. Once you have a shortlist of layouts that could work, imagine moving through the space - preparing a meal, opening the

fridge, loading the dishwasher. If the flow feels natural, you are on the right track. If something feels awkward, try a different layout or adjust the position of the island or the cabinet runs. A bespoke kitchen layout is about tailoring the design to the room, not forcing a standard shape into a space that does not suit it. With careful planning, you can create a kitchen that is both functional and comfortable to use every day.