



KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL

How exposed is your refrigerator? Is your stove on display or hidden away? Pilar Viladas looks at the perennial kitchen conundrum.

To open the kitchen or not to open? Is it better to put your culinary talents (and your dirty pots, alas) on display for all to see, or is it better to direct your guests to a separate dining room where — ta-da! — dinner appears on the table as if by magic? That is the question, although not for me. I have a galley kitchen — which is by definition open to almost no one — and when my guests come to dinner, they cluster in the foyer and talk to me while I cook. That is, they talk to my back, and I toss replies over my shoulder. If even one person sidles in to “help,” gridlock ensues, and I have to clear the area. But it’s better than having my guests huddle in the living room while I miss out on the conversational fun.

And that is precisely why open kitchens have become so popular in recent years. Now that cooking has become a spectator sport, both the players and the fans want

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to share the spotlight; the host wants to talk to the guests, and vice versa. No one wants to feel like a galley slave. Indeed, even those who can afford galley slaves don’t want them anymore. The foodie revolution has turned even the most perfectly coiffed Manhattanites into Italian *mammas*. Come on-a my kitchen.

Which is why it shouldn’t be surprising to hear that someone as glamorously social as Blaine Trump finds that, at least on weekends, the kitchen is the center of her domestic universe.

“In the country,” she says, “when people come for dinner, no one comes through the front door — they always come in through the kitchen.” Trump admits that in the city, where dinners are more formal, she prefers a separate dining room; sometimes an open

Above left: in an open kitchen designed by Page Goolrick, the table is the center of attention. Above right: a 1960’s galley kitchen — not for a crowd.

kitchen offers “too much information.” But if a proper dining room seems too old-fashioned, Trump suggests “a dining-room-study, with bookshelves and a banquette.”

The decorator Mario Buatta says approvingly, “A lot of kitchens today are live-in kitchens,” yet Buatta also prefers a proper dining room in the city. “Who wants to look at a messy kitchen from the dinner table?”

Michael Love, an interior designer who, by her own estimate, has designed “a couple hundred kitchens” in her career, firmly opposes open kitchens. “Cooking is messy, if you’re a good cook,” she says. But if you must have an open kitchen, Love

move to New York from California “like open kitchens,” she says. “If they live downtown, open. If they live in an A-plus building with a really tough board, not only do they have closed kitchens, but they have really good exhaust systems.”

In large, traditional apartments, Stein adds, more and more people are taking staff rooms and folding the space into expanded family kitchens — while still keeping their formal dining rooms. Stein calls Christie Brinkley “courageous” for opening up the kitchen in her former apartment in a tony Upper East Side building but says that in that particular market, it poses definite resale risks. “An open kitchen can kill a sale,” she explains. The very rich, it seems, would rather keep their options open than their kitchens.

Which is why the condominium apartments in the Time Warner Center, where prices start in the millions, will have several different kitchen types — all of them elaborately appointed but none of them completely open. David Wine, the vice chairman of the Related Companies, the project’s developer, points out that while buyers want flexibility, “Our customers are very, very big on entertaining, and want to accommodate help when they entertain.” But, Wine adds, a

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adds, “don’t make it look like a living room.” Carved cabinets and upholstered furniture are magnets for grease and odors, she warns. Love adds that in many Manhattan apartments, building codes forbid through-the-wall exhaust ducts, and while range hoods are good at venting cooking heat, they don’t do as well at venting smells.

Linda Stein, a real-estate agent to the stars, sees the open-closed debate in sociological, almost taxonomic, terms. People who