

Not Just for Breakfast Anymore

MODERN BREAKFAST NOOKS AND BARS PROVIDE ROUND-THE-CLOCK ENJOYMENT

BY KATHERINE SHARPE



A light-filled, comfortable breakfast nook adjacent to the kitchen (this page and next, top), as built by Applegate-Tran, allows for multipurpose use.

THINK "BREAKFAST NOOK," and the pleasure of settling in with a mug of coffee and the morning paper isn't far from mind. But breakfast bars and breakfast nooks aren't just serviceable in the morning hours. Aside from the obvious uses, homeowners are drawn to breakfast nooks and bars for the variety of ways in which these areas mesh with the rhythms of modern life.

"Most people these days want seating in the kitchen," says Miguel Thurston of New Century Kitchen & Bath in San Leandro, adding that many homeowners like having "a place to have a conversation while they cook." Kelly Morisseau, of Main Street Kitchens in Walnut Creek, concurs, adding that today's breakfast areas are "falling in with the great-room concept — kids are doing homework, guests pop over for coffee." A well-planned bar or nook can be a seat of almost non-stop activity in the home.

What goes into planning a breakfast space? "Understanding the client's lifestyle," says Diane Chandler of 3D Remodeling, in Livermore, is a crucial step in beginning a project. She starts by asking who will use the area. In families with children, for example, the breakfast nook often becomes prime real-estate for homework. Empty nesters, says Meredith English of Gayler Construction in Danville, can find a breakfast nook a "happy medium" between eating "in an isolated dining room" and taking their meals in front of the TV.

A household's needs influence whether a nook or a bar design is chosen. Thurston points out that for older or disabled individuals, bars can be easier because there is less sliding in and out. A breakfast nook, on the other hand, provides "a larger serving area for meals," and a more sociable layout for talking to one's fellow diners, while a bar favors quick snacks and kibitzing with the cook, Morisseau says.

Material Choices

In terms of materials, most homeowners choose to match the banquette seating of a breakfast nook to their existing kitchen cabinetry, and the countertop of a breakfast bar to the countertop material they've used for an island and the rest of the kitchen. But "it's up to the daringness of the client" whether to match or contrast with the rest of the kitchen, Thurston says.

For those who like to mix it up, the choices are endless. Thurston says many homeowners now opt for glass, specifically the kind that has been back-painted to bring a color through, which can be prepared by a custom glass company or a glazier. The standard materials — granite, concrete, stainless steel, Corian, Avonite, Quartz products, Richlite and good old Formica — are still popular, English says, for their "solid surface and easy-to-clean" qualities. The only material that's fallen out of favor is tile. Though "some people still want a vintage look," health and cleaning concerns have deterred the use of tile, Thurston says.



Sidling up to the bar, built by Gayler Construction, is a pleasure when it looks this good.



An Alamo open-plan kitchen built by Gayler Construction makes use of its ample space with both a breakfast bar — perfect for small talk with guests — and a round nook surrounded by windows.

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She suggests using diner seating and tables purchased from a restaurant-supply store to sport that retro look.

Good lighting is crucial, too, designers agree. Morisseau prefers "lighting that is dimmable and separately switched from the main kitchen lighting, if possible." Dimmable pendants provide both task and mood lighting.

Space, says Morisseau, is the greatest challenge to kitchen design. These days, "people want to have three places to eat: dining room, nook and bar seating." A well-planned breakfast nook or breakfast bar can make the most of available space, providing a use for almost every hour of the day, from breakfast time to snacks, homework, the pre-dinner hour, late-night bill paying, midnight snacks and onwards towards morning. ■

RESOURCES:

- New Century Kitchen & Bath
 San Leandro
 510.347.1818
- Gayler Construction
 Danville
 925.820.0185
- Main Street Kitchens
 Walnut Creek
 925.944.0153
- 3D Remodeling
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