

Home Touch

Make kitchen lounge a family space

BY MARY G. PEPITONE
At Home

While the kitchen remains the heart of the home, an adjoining lounge extends its heartbeat of food and fun. Often filled with overstuffed furniture, a kitchen lounge can have a bar or fireplace so families can chill out and “loungue around” in a comfortable atmosphere.

It's also called the living room in an open kitchen design. Patricia Davis Brown, of her namesake firm in Vero Beach, Fla., says most families live in this part of the house.

“People just naturally gather around food,” she says. “But everyone lingers in a comfortable living room or lounge that's not cut off from the kitchen.”

But that wasn't always the case. Brown says in the 1980s, design started to shift to open kitchen layouts, a stark contrast from the walled-off kitchens and formal dining rooms of early- to mid-century homes.

Gone are the days when people cooking in the kitchen were cut off from everyone else, Brown says. Her firm has overseen many remodeling projects in which the first order of business is to tear down those walls.

“The way we live and entertain today is much more informal,” she says. “The kitchen area has become the place where kids do homework and families entertain, play games and hang out watching television.”

Whether you're renovating an existing house or building a new home, treat the lounge as an extension of the kitchen area and make it a more intimate place for people to congregate. Brown says that means the look of the lounge should complement the kitchen's design and style.

Start with the flooring of the lounge and work your way up the walls. “When you step into the living area of the kitchen, it shouldn't feel like you're stepping into a different house,” she says. “The flooring should be a natural continuation of what's in the kitchen.”

The flooring in the lounge should be soft and warm, yet durable and easy to clean. Wood, tile or stone floors found in the kitchen can be continued into the lounge, but a large area rug or carpeting makes the lounge even more inviting than a cold, stark floor.

When choosing paint colors for the lounge, look to the kitchen for continuity. If the kitchen and the lounge share a continuous ceiling, it's wise to keep paint colors the same, too. However, Brown says if there's a ceiling beam between the kitchen and the lounge, there's more room for creativity.



Patricia Davis Brown Designs photos



“This living space is meant to be more fun, so you can pull an accent color from the kitchen and make it the predominant color of the lounge,” she says. “The idea is to make the lounge more accessible, and that can mean making it a more playful, colorful space, depending on the homeowners' aesthetic.”

Since many families end up living in the lounge area, make sure the paint or

wallpaper choice is one that is durable and can be easily cleaned.

Many take lounging to heart and have a hearth in this room. The fireplace in a lounge can be either wood-burning or gas, with a simple contemporary firebox or an elaborate stone hearth surround.

And today, it's never been easier to get fired up about incorporating a fireplace into a lounge design. A zero-clearance

ABOVE: Patricia Davis Brown Designs completely remodeled this town home by removing the walls to open up the kitchen, so guests could relax before and after a meal.

LEFT: Modern, yet functional, describes this kitchen, which has a good flow into the comfortable living space.

fireplace — made of metal with a masonry lining — is a self-contained unit, which allows homeowners to have a gas-burning fireplace that can be directly vented through an outside wall.

A natural focal point of the room, the fireplace doesn't have to compete with the electronic attention-grabbers. “With today's flat-screen televisions, you can hang the TV above the fireplace and not have to reorient the room to enjoy the fire or a family movie,” Brown says.

The finishing touches of a lounge are its furnishings, which should be comfortable, yet fit a homeowner's decorating sensibility. “Don't place Arts and Crafts-style furniture into a home with a contemporary Asian-themed decor,” Brown says. “You want design elements that all play well together.”

Make sure furniture is durable and easily cleaned, especially if food from the kitchen migrates to the lounge. Brown says accent colors in the form of throw pillows can be swapped out.