



Kosher Kitchens:

# A Planning Design



Mark Schulman of EMES Cabinets designed this kosher kitchen with 42-inch cabinets, a large island and dual appliances to accommodate separation of meat and dairy.

Designing kosher kitchens can be very different from typical kitchens. But dealers can help clients **make kosher living convenient** with a few design solutions.

by David Whitemyer // photos by Michael Weschler

and  
ing Guide



This kitchen includes 42-inch cabinets, 40 linear feet of countertop and a large island.

The unique challenges and considerations of designing a kosher kitchen can stretch the conventional thinking of even the most experienced designer and knowledgeable homeowner. Keeping kosher has more to do with how a kitchen is used and maintained than about the layout and materials. Still, there are numerous strategies a designer can implement to make life easier for a kosher household while still creating a warm and inviting space.

#### **A Place for Everything**

Mark Schulman, owner of EMES Cabinets LLC in Passaic, N.J., recently completed a kosher kitchen with 42-inch cabinets, at least 40 linear feet of countertop and a large island. "A kosher kitchen is basically two kitchens in one," he says. With the required separation of meat and dairy, two sinks, dishwashers, microwaves, ovens, dish sets and cookware sets may be needed.

That could mean as much as 26 linear feet of base cabinets and 24 linear feet of wall cabinets – twice what the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA) recommends for a typical kitchen.

Many kosher kitchens feature completely separate sets of cabinets for meat and dairy place settings, sometimes using a color scheme to help visually divide the items. In homes that do not have the square footage to double or triple kitchen storage space, dealers can incorporate creative concepts for increasing storage, such as stackable utensil trays. Every cubic inch must count, Schulman says.

## QUICK TAKE

- If the homeowner can afford it, and if square footage allows, two sinks, stoves, dishwashers and microwaves are ideal.
- Every cubic inch should count. For separate sets of dishes and cookware, and for Passover items, extra storage is vital.
- Hard, nonporous countertop materials (i.e., stainless steel, granite) are kosherable, whereas absorptive materials generally are not.
- Significant countertop space will help with the separation of meat and dairy, as well as with the preparation of traditional, multi-course meals.
- Ultimately, the guidelines and decisions for “keeping kosher” should be made by the community rabbi.

In addition to dual sets of dishes for everyday use, a different set of cookware and accoutrements are needed for Passover. Just a few generations ago, those once-a-year items would be packed away in attics or basements. But today, they often are stored in pantry-type units or on the top shelf of ceiling-height cabinets.

## Twice as Nice

Fitting in double appliances—two dishwashers, two sinks, two ovens, two microwaves, etc.—can be challenging, but it also opens the door to a plethora of inventive design solutions.

First, to keep the kitchen from looking like an appliance store, it's important to consider symmetry, Schulman says. It helps to physically divide the kitchen while providing visual balance—placing sinks and other appliances on opposite sides of the kitchen, and utilizing cabinet and window placement for symmetry.

Rather than have two full-size dishwashers, drawer units can save space and are good for



**Above and Right:** Many kosher kitchens feature separate cabinets for dishes for meat and dishes for dairy.

**Below:** The kosher kitchen features an appliance garage to house small appliances.





### KOSHER KITCHEN GLOSSARY

When working with a client and his or her rabbi to plan a kosher kitchen, designers likely will come across many common Jewish terms—some Hebrew, some Yiddish—having to do with dietary laws and food preparation. This list is by no means comprehensive, and in many cases, these words have multiple spellings and definitions.

**FLEISHIGS:** Yiddish “of meat,” used when describing meat products or meat-preparation equipment. Synonymous with Hebrew “Basari,” meaning “meaty.”

**HALACHA (OR HALAKHA):** The Jewish law.

**KASHERING (OR HECHSHER KEILIM):** Also, “to kasher,” the act of making something kosher, often involving strict cleaning requirements.

**KOSHER:** Adhering to the Jewish laws governing diet and food preparation.

**MILCHIG:** Yiddish “of milk,” used when describing dairy products or equipment that comes in contact with dairy. Synonymous with Hebrew, “Chalavi.”

**PARVE:** Yiddish “neutral,” used for foods containing neither meat nor dairy, such as fruits, vegetables, eggs and fish.

**SHABBAT (OR SHABBOS):** Commonly, the Sabbath, the seventh day of the Jewish week, beginning at sunset Friday and ending Saturday night. The Sabbath observance includes certain restrictions on cooking and food preparation.

**YOM TOV:** Meaning “good day,” used to denote a Jewish holiday or festival, many having special foods and some Sabbath-like restriction.

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smaller, more frequent loads. Similarly, under-counter refrigerator drawers can provide additional storage.

It’s also important to think about the triangle, comprising the sink, range and refrigerator, says Schulman, noting that two triangles may be ideal if the client has double appliances.

### Materials Matter

Rabbi Dovid Bendory says while double sets of appliances are not required, it is more crucial to consider how the appliances are used and cleaned, and the material of which they are

made. Bendory, executive director of Pidyon, a Torah-based educational organization, teaches “The Kosher Kitchen” for the Shema Yisrael Torah Network. Many stoves and refrigerators, for example, now are available with a “Sabbath mode,” which maintains a constant “on” position, within the guidelines of Jewish law. (Activities like pressing an electronic button are prohibited on the Sabbath.)

The dishwasher is the most complicated appliance in the kitchen because of food contamination, the temperature of the water and the inside materials,

**Far Left:** Many kosher kitchens include double dishwashers, sinks, ovens, microwaves, etc.

**Left:** Granite is considered the easiest choice for countertops.

**Below:** Mark Schulman of EMES Cabinets LLC

Bendory says. “A stainless steel interior is essential,” he says, because it can be “kashered,” meaning cleaned properly and made kosher. Plastic interiors cannot be kashered.

The general rule of thumb regarding materials is non-absorptive surfaces that can be kashered. Stainless steel for sinks and granite for countertops are the most widely accepted materials as kasherable, Bendory says.

Surfaces not used for meal preparation or storage, such as cabinet faces, flooring and backsplashes, allow for more options and do not need to be kasherable. Wood, cork and bamboo—all porous—are warm, beautiful and perfectly acceptable for flooring. Colors, woods and grains for cabinetry are not limited.

### **Not Black and White**

Bendory notes there are no specific, universal design requirements for kosher kitchens. Jewish law, in some cases, allows for certain leniencies if a household cannot accommodate strict compliance, and many of the finer



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details of kosher law are open to interpretation and debate. "If there are any questions," he says, "decisions about 'keeping kosher' need to be made by the community rabbi."

Ultimately, a kosher kitchen is a kitchen, with the same attention to detail, comfort and function. Beyond the separation of meat and dairy, and the need for significant storage, a kosher kitchen is a place for families to share meals and stories. As with any kitchen design, designers must gather information about the users of the kosher space—family, dining habits, cooking interests, and religious and holiday traditions. WP



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