

# Ask the expert: 'Is a kitchen island really THAT beneficial?'



Kitchen island with bespoke weathered solid oak worktop by Andrew Ryan

Ghinlon Wang

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• [Email](#)

We are remodelling our home and extending the kitchen area to make it open plan. We cannot agree on whether to include a kitchen island. Would this addition be beneficial?

**A.** When one of my clients considers a kitchen island, the first question I ask is 'why?' Designing restaurants over the years has taught me one truism, which has stood the test of time and provides a useful guide when looking at kitchens in the home: be sure to have a clear idea as to the purpose of the envisaged island. This purpose must be rooted in its daily use.

## Start with Function

As with all good design, function and use are the starting point. Good design is as much about the ability to identify these qualities as it is the ability to wrap materials around them. If we can identify tangible everyday uses for a kitchen island, which add to the enjoyment and functionality of our kitchen, we can then consider its design to become the epicentre of the kitchen. If you are remodelling your home, your architect will advise you on the best kitchen layout and design.

## How big should an island be?

A functional kitchen island must be at least two metres wide by one metre deep. This will house three base cabinets on one side, leaving leg room for three stools on the reverse. With kitchen islands size matters. Bigger is better.

## What should we look out for?

The greatest gift an island brings to the kitchen comes in the form of additional counter space. There is never enough counter space for two reasons: Firstly, we are experimenting more in our kitchens, from organic meat roasts to Mary Berry bake-offs. These cuisines require additional workspace. And secondly, we have more cooking equipment - a KitchenAid, NutriBullet, and Nespresso machine now feature as standard in many homes. These appliances need space.

Hobs and sinks in a kitchen island are a big no-no in my book. While there is a bit of the Jamie Oliver in all of us, we generally lack the 10 person back-up crew to support our cooking efforts, and more importantly for cleaning up after the act. Hobs and sinks add exponentially to installation costs, introduce additional impediments to its use, and limit its capacity to support future design changes.

### How much will it cost?

A kitchen island can cost anything upwards of €2,000. It will depend on size, materials and equipment. I recommend using a trusted kitchen contractor for supply and installation. This comes at a cost, but so does the headache of DIY. The choice of materials and finishes is a personal one. Natural materials, like timber and stone, tend to transcend trends and time, aging gracefully.

The more accomplished kitchen islands I have come across, in restaurants and homes alike, worked beautifully because they were set in large spaces. But I wish to leave you with a different kind of thought: consider investing in a good dining table instead - as our mothers and grandmothers did. Always sound advice.

If you are considering changes to your home, work with a registered architect. Check on riai.ie, the registration body for architects in Ireland.

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