

## Pouring it on

### Expanded Profit Centers

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It is often advantageous for businesses to have liquid assets, but when discussing wet bars, the concept takes on an entirely new meaning.

Trish Burgess, CKD for St. Simons Island, GA-based Kitchen & Bath Concepts of St. Simons, explains: “I have found that our company makes the same, or greater, profit margins on wet bars as on kitchens. Often, the materials are very high grade and the time spent on drawing and planning is not nearly as much as in a large, highly detailed kitchen.”

“Any time you add more cabinetry and countertops to a home’s layout, a salesperson is also adding more to the total package – and naturally that translates to a greater design and sales commission,” reports Burgess. “I put the same markup on wet bars as on kitchens and thus, the return is the same as with kitchens.”

For designers to reap the rewards of a wet bar project, however, it is vital that they understand the needs of the space – and the client, says Eliot Mohr, president of Kitchen/Interior Showcase, a division of Mohr & Company in Spokane, WA.

“We try to assess our client’s lifestyle to determine what the design should be, and what accessories to include,” he offers.

Dawn Wattles, AKBD and design consultant for Indianapolis, IN-based Cabinetry Ideas, stresses: “The floor plan of the wet bar directly relates to the space and the function the homeowner is looking for.”

Jeani Lee, CKD, CBD for Ames, IA-based Kitchen, Bath & Home notes: “I think the profit center for kitchen and bath dealers comes from educating clients. Then it becomes their choice. But you’re providing a great service for clients by bringing up wet bars, because you’re adding a level of convenience to their lives that allows them to de-stress.”



*Photo: Courtesy of Steven P. Whitsitt Photography*

**According to Trish Burgess of Kitchen & Bath Concepts, people are investing more in wet bar areas, utilizing them as focal**

Julian McKinney, senior designer and general manager for Wilmington, NC-based Wilmington Kitchens, adds: “In new construction, our architects are including them, so we become a supplier for something the client already wanted. It also creates an extra serving area and storage area for dinner parties. Lastly, it is a specialty area, so it holds the beverage bottles and the mixers.”

Mohr adds that wet bars sometimes represent a status symbol of sorts. “Because of that, budgets can be more generous than one would expect,” he reports.

“People are definitely investing more money than ever before in their bars because they wish to show them off,” adds Burgess.

### Lay of the Land

Wet bars are typically designed in the form of an L- or U-shape, where the bartender will stand behind it and guests would sit around it, or as a galley-style where the bar is set into the wall, according to Stephen Klassen, general manager for Scottsdale, AZ-based Affinity Kitchen Design Group.

“The main benefit of a wet bar is that of easing, or entirely eliminating, the crowding that usually takes place in the kitchen when homeowners are entertaining,” says Burgess.

But it’s the versatility of wet bars that makes them so valuable, according to Wattles.

“More people are in the kitchen at once, so we are now creating zones that allow more activities to take place at once,” she comments. “The wet bar [follows this idea], as it is often a zone not just for drinks, but snacks as well.”

Burgess notes that wet bars can also function as a morning kitchen, depending upon location, or serve as a kitchenette for overnight guests.

According to Lee, designers look to figure out where the stress loads are, and then try to alleviate those issues.

To that end, it’s important to always include a dishwasher and refrigerator in the wet bar space, notes Jolynn Johnson, CMKBD, CAPS and president of Crystal Kitchen Center in Crystal, MN. “That way,

**points – and as morning bars, kitchenettes for guests or snack and beverage centers.**



**Above and the top: Stephen Klassen of Affinity Kitchen Design Group notes that the ideal wet bar layout is an L- or U-shape, making it easier for homeowners to entertain guests gathering around.**



*Photo: Courtesy of Crystal Kitchen Center*

**Getting the right balance between function, ergonomics and sheer ‘wow’**

it serves as an additional storage area, and you don't have to run between the main kitchen and the wet bar" to retrieve items.

"Usually the space is much smaller than a kitchen, so depending on what the homeowner wants in it, we have to figure out how we will fit that in with the cabinets and the countertops," she continues.

"Often the challenge is getting all of the appliance wishes met in a small space," concurs Wattles. "On the other hand, [when space allows], I have used the wet bar to help alleviate the appliance overload in the kitchen."

Lee notes that designers can consider stacking items. "You could include a refrigeration drawer and a wine center in the same stack" to make appropriate use of the space provided, she says.

Making the proper product choices – and making them fit – are key to successful wet bars.

Wattles adds that requests for wine storage and icemakers, for instance, present the perfect situation to create a wet bar and move extra appliances out of the main kitchen.

"This is a two-fold-bonus," she says. "The homeowners get an organized space where they can spread out, and we're able to expand our sales with the additional cabinets, etc."

McKinney agrees: "You can put an icemaker or an undercabinet refrigerator in because it gets it out of the kitchen. I am then able to have a better layout in the kitchen without having to give up space in the base cabinetry."

Johnson adds: "People tend to want little undercabinet refrigerators or full wine refrigerators or beverage centers, a microwave or a sink. Sometimes it becomes a whole layout with a dishwasher and a range – depending on the size and how much they want to spend."

### **Material Things**

According to Burgess, wet bars are an area where it pays to be materialistic. Rich detailing and distinctive touches are often the hallmarks of the wet bar design.

McKinney notes that he is seeing a lot of granite and engineered stone, as well as dark cherry cabinetry with rich glazes.

"You can also select alternatives to granite, such as stainless steel countertops, or copper, glass or concrete. Because it is not a high-traffic area, you can have a little more fun with the different countertops and shapes," says Johnson. "You can also add the foot rail for the client's feet to rest on, and perhaps wood molding going around the countertop edge. It gives you a feeling of being in a pub instead of sitting in a basement."

Mohr adds that he is seeing granite and engineered stone as well, with tile and solid surface still popular.

He notes that the cabinetry in wet bars is typically higher end, due mainly to clients being willing to pay more for a specific look.

"Most of our clients are asking for their wet bars to have a furniture look, or for them to follow a particular theme that they have seen in magazines or on design shows," he emphasizes.

**power is key to creating a great wet bar, according to Jolynn Johnson, CAPS, of Crystal Kitchen Center, whose project is featured above.**

McKinney notes that he recently completed a wet bar project off of a media room that featured a two-tone finish, “where the cabinets had a brownish look and everything else was trimmed in black.”

“People are willing to go a little bit more eclectic, and are willing to punch it up a bit more than just using the traditional kitchen cabinet that has glass fronts and mullions,” he says.

When dealing with appliances, Burgess notes that she generally uses cabinet panels to achieve a rich, cohesive look for the space.

“Generally, we apply matching cabinet panels to the refrigeration equipment so that the cabinet style, wood and finish are the first things noticed by casual observation, rather than the equipment,” she remarks.

“One of the keys [to making the design distinctive] is to consider alternatives to the standard backsplash, such as mirrored, or to include wainscoting or a dramatic motif in the background of the backsplash area,” McKinney adds.

“You can also consider specialty glass or stained glass,” he continues. “We can create a vineyard look for a client, or, with custom carved mouldings, we can make it look like a wine center.”

### **More in Store**

Wet bars also give designers the ability to integrate custom looks, such as floating shelves, turned posts and columns and carved moldings, observes Klassen.

“There are certain elements that the designer can pick up on because wet bars usually require a little bit more finesse,” remarks McKinney. “You should always ask the clients if they want a glass shelf – because that is an upgrade. For the designer, those are extra dollars coming in.”

He adds: “Since a wet bar is a small space, you won’t break the budget [doing things like this], but it does give you an opportunity to punch things up a little bit.”

Storage in wet bars also present many upselling possibilities for designers.

“The wet bar is typically going to be close to the kitchen and great room areas, so it is great for secondary storage, and can also be a display situation for wine glasses, etc.,” McKinney offers.

In addition to glass shelves, his firm is also creating storage where the bottom of the cabinet is made out of glass so that light can filter through. This provides an elegant display look, according to McKinney.

He continues: “A lot of storage areas have open shelving, and therefore are a little more expensive because of the construction.”

Johnson concurs: “In wet bars, you often see open shelving or racks for wine bottles, or glass doors that allow for the display of glasses and stemware.”

Mohr notes that storage of bottles and other supplies can also be incorporated by using kitchen-type corner units, such as lazy susans or dead corner turn-outs.

“It’s just like you plan in your real kitchen,” explains Johnson. “Decide what you are putting away and what you are going to do. The idea is to think about what the area is being used for and what you need to store.”

Klassen concludes: “Obviously, the selling point is convenience. Many kitchens are spacious, but they often seem to have fewer upper cabinets, so storage space is at a premium. It is very helpful to know that there will be a designated place for glassware, serving trays, drinks and snacks.”

### **Techno Tricks**

Technology also gives designers an option for boosting their profits, Wattles says.

“Televisions are more popular here than in the kitchen, since this is the hang-out location,” she says.

“Families are entertaining more,” adds Klassen, “and are asking for big-screen televisions and sound systems [in these rooms].”

“We have to determine what type of lighting we want to incorporate into the area, such as whether to add LED lighting, or if the space needs a flip-down TV because of where it’s located in the home,” explains McKinney.

For Mohr, unusual additions – such as computers that include drink menus – can impress consumers, as well as fiber optic lighting, which can be integrated into bar tops.

### **Project Profile**

Many designers note that creating wet bars has provided them with the opportunity to design some of their most unique work.

“One [project I designed] that stands out is a basement that was designed to feel like an English pub,” a very popular look for today’s wet bars, states Johnson. “You walk downstairs and the walls are faux painted to look like cobblestone. It feels like you’re on a street in England. It’s completely different from the upstairs kitchen, though we did it all at the same time.”

She continues: “Another room we did was a wine bar that was set up as a normal wet bar and done in dark colors. It had a dishwasher, sink, microwave, metal ceiling and cork floor to go along with the wine theme. It was only 6’x9’ but had plenty of counter space and cabinet storage, and also offered ample room for two people to sit.”

“I did one that was a small area, and the clients wanted some glass shelves that they wanted lit, along with a sink,” McKinney describes. “They also had an undercabinet refrigerator in there. Since it was on a different floor from the kitchen, it functioned as a secondary kitchen area that provided drink storage.”

Mohr adds that his firm also completed a contemporary wine bar room that incorporated a large Sub-Zero dual zone wine refrigerator with wood trim around the glass door, a Sub-Zero two-drawer undercounter refrigerator with matching wood drawer fronts and a Sub-Zero icemaker with matching front.

“It also incorporated curved, tempered glass shelves cantilevered between slabs of granite on the backsplash to accommodate glassware, and the end cabinetry had either curved doors or soft-curved side panels. The moldings were also curved to create a sleek, softened look,” he reports.

In the end, Wattles notes that, for kitchen and bath designers, enjoying maximum profits from wet bar applications is based on a very simple formula. “The plan is made to go with the homeowners’ thoughts, ideas, wishes and aesthetic preferences, and from there it is just a matter of budgeting to get it done,” she concludes.

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