

HOME & DIGITAL



Dick and Betty Conway, of Long Beach, N.Y., have a V-shaped island with arm's-reach appliances for entertaining grandchildren.

Welcome to Kitchen Fantasy Island

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lation, was \$15,000.

"It's like my captain's chair," says Ms. Friedland, a manager at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. "I can keep everyone close by, but still get stuff done." Five-year-old Julien is typically on a stool at the island, working with his Lego towers safely out of reach of 2-year-old Wyatt, who is typically drawing with crayons at a table nearby. A box of chew toys for Che, the miniature poodle, sits in a corner at the base of the island.

A slim drawer in front of the sink is a place for a half-dozen sponges to air-dry on a rack, out of sight. A faucet (Franke "Little Butler," \$300) filters and dispenses water at tea-kettle temperature for quick cups of hot cocoa or tea. A drawer near the floor hides a step stool that 5-year-old Julien can pull out and climb to get to counter level, helping Mom.

The Friedlands had a compelling reason for going all out on their island. Without it, storage would have been scarce: Windows and a big arched doorway dominate an entire wall of the kitchen. "There wasn't a place there to create a bank of cabinets," says Philadelphia-based designer Mona Ross Berman, who designed the kitchen and the island.

The coolest thing about the island, though, is its evening transformation, Ms. Friedland says. On many weekends, it becomes "our little hip-

ster bar," she says, a place to entertain, display appetizers and chat with friends. For a recent "latkes and vodkas" party for 50 guests, the island held a smörgasbord of traditional Hanukkah fare—potato pancakes, brisket, pastrami, kugel—along with various flavored vodkas.

Shared work spaces were common in 19th century farm and commercial kitchens. But freestanding islands weren't common in residential design until the post-War construction boom, says Sandy Isenstadt, University of Delaware professor of architectural history. As the divide between kitchen and dining room disappeared, he says, "you were losing a wall. Cabinets migrated to the island," as did some appliances.

Big islands bring challenges. Some are so vast that the center is a countertop "dead zone," a hard-to-reach place for spills to puddle. "I typically suggest an island 5-feet wide by 8-feet long," says Lane Brooks, creative director for Christopher Peacock Home, a Greenwich, Conn., design firm. "You don't want it to look like an aircraft carrier," he adds. "You don't want to have to walk around the island to wipe it down."

Dick and Betty Conway recently remodeled the kitchen in their condo overlooking the ocean in Long Beach, N.Y. They needed a bigger kitchen to accommodate their growing number of grandchildren. At present, they

have nine, ages 10 months to 9 years, and some of them are almost always visiting. "They'd take food, go into the living room and all over the sofas," says Mr. Conway, a retired sales executive. "We didn't have a real surface for play dough and drawing."

Mr. Conway decided on a V-shaped island with seating for six, making it easy for one or more adults to reach over and serve young guests. Among the under-the-counter features: a glass-front refrigerator (Marvel "Beverage Center" \$1,500) and a pull-drawer microwave oven (Sharp "Insight Pro," \$750). A 52-inch Samsung flatscreen TV mounted to the wall swings out for viewing "The Backyardigans" and "Wonder Pets" from the island. The beige-granite counter is a hard surface for craft projects, and a cupboard holds paints and crayons.

The island emboldened the Conways to put light-green carpeting down in other parts of their home, something they had been resigned to living without while their grandchildren were young. The island's total cost: \$20,000, with design by Mr. Conway and Showcase Kitchens.

Princeton, N.J., architect T. Jeffery Clarke recently put in a kitchen island with a built-in steamer (15-inch Wolf steamer, \$2,000), a pullout butcher-block cutting board and self-closing drawers that shut with a light push. Mr. Clarke chose a two-level design that clearly separates the 42-inch-high dining surface from the 36-inch-high food-prep surface.

Every year, Mr. Clarke and his wife, Barbara, host a Valentine's dinner party, starting off with an appetizer spread and a Champagne toast. Next year, they say, they will put out the spread on their island. "It becomes the gravitational center of the group anyway," Mr. Clarke says.

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Architect T. Jeffery Clarke's island features a flip-down butcher block cutting board.

What's Selling Where | Ice Cream

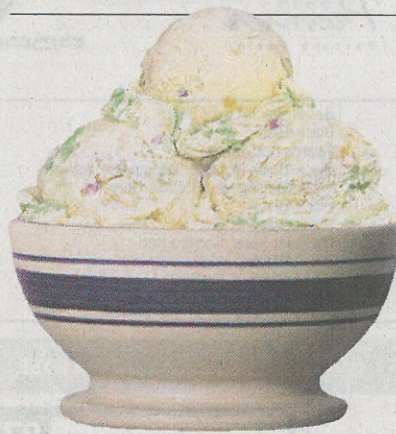
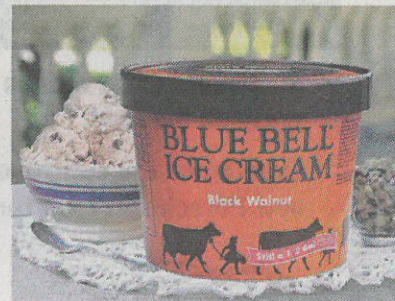
Blue Bell Creameries, the 106-year-old ice-cream maker based in Brenham, Texas, can attest to customers' passion about ice-cream flavors. The third-largest U.S. ice-cream seller, with about 60 varieties, after Unilever PLC's Breyers and Nestle SA's Dreyer's, Blue Bell often rotates in new flavors like Caramel Turtle Cheesecake and Key Lime Pie for three to six months while deciding on carrying them year-round. When some are discontinued, "we hear about it," says Ricky Dickson, Blue Bell's vice president of sales and marketing. Homemade Vanilla and Cookies 'n Cream are most Americans' favorites, he says, but "there's a passion connected to ice cream that's often regional, where certain flavors take you right back to a memory of when you ate it for the first time."

—Shelly Banjo

MEMPHIS, TENN.

Black Walnut

This ice cream is infused with black walnuts native to states east of the Mississippi River. For many in the South and Midwest, the taste evokes memories of collecting the nuts and tasting them in pies and cakes. "There's a culture here of finding black walnuts in everything from breads to ice cream," Mr. Dickson says.



NEW ORLEANS

Mardi Gras King Cake

The creamery combined cinnamon cake with a Mardi-Gras colored swirl of cream cheese and candy sprinkles in shades of purple, green and gold to commemorate the festival. Following Hurricane Katrina, a New Orleans exodus from Louisiana spread the flavor's popularity to parts of Texas and beyond.



MIAMI

Rum Raisin

Introduced in 2011, this ice cream, loaded with plump, rum-flavored raisins, rarely sells anywhere else in the country. But in Miami, shoppers' tastes are influenced by warm weather and Latin American culture, which has created a town hankering for fruit, rum and raisins.



EL PASO, TEXAS

Pistachio Almond

For the large Hispanic population here, dessert is often defined by fruit and nuts rather than chocolate and cream. This pistachio ice cream, introduced in 1977 and accented with pieces of crunchy, chopped roasted almonds, is most popular in Texas and New Mexico.



DENVER

Rocky Mountain Road

A "jacked up version of your regular rocky road," this dark chocolate ice cream has dark chocolate-coated peanuts, milk chocolate-coated pecans, white chocolate-coated almonds, roasted walnuts and a marshmallow sauce swirl. The flavor was introduced for Blue Bell's 2011 entry to the Colorado market—and soon added to its catalog of 17 permanent flavors.

Blue Bell Creameries (5)