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A COOKS' TOUR OF KITCHENS

There's a design lesson or two to be learnt from the foodie fraternity, writes **Catherine Nikas-Boulos**

Depending on who you speak to, the kitchen is either the much-loved heart of the home, or the money pit that sucked the life out of their savings.

As one of the rooms that real estate gurus will tell you sell the home, the kitchen can be a place of quiet reflection while making supper, or a cacophony of joyful chaos as the family congregates to break bread together.

Pages of glossy magazine spreads have been dedicated to kitchen trends, but we've asked some everyday experts to share the secrets to efficient food preparation in their favourite room in the house.

THE CHEF

Brad Sloane may work in a professional kitchen, but he does his most impressive work in a make-do kitchen in Clovelly.

The head chef at North Sydney's Greenwood Hotel says his kitchen at home might not be his ideal, but it's a compromise he's willing to make to live by the beach with partner Nikki and son Jack, 3.

"We rent and it's very dated, but it all works," he says.

Brad says he does most of the cooking at home on his days off, preferring one-pot wonders.

With limited bench space, pumpkin soup, roast chicken and beef stew are family favourites during the week.

"It's how I like to cook," Brad says.

"We don't have a dishwasher, so I don't want to make a lot of mess because I'll have to wash it all up."

Brad also takes the opportunity to cook vegetarian dishes at home, and encourages young Jack to keep an open mind with food.

"In winter especially, I like to cook vegetarian meals with lots of root veg, pearl barley and beans. Jack also loves fish, but he's

not keen on meat unless it's a braise.

"Kids can be difficult with food, but we have always encouraged him to try different things. We say, 'you don't have to eat it all, just try it', or 'you have to eat at least three things on your plate before you finish dinner', and usually he's really good about it."

Q What is your favourite part of the kitchen?

A "Well, the stove top is what I use the most, and I use the oven quite a bit as well. If I do a braise, I've got a good roasting pan with lid

where I can get things started on the stove and then throw them into the oven."

Q How do you make the most of this kitchen?

A "We're not blessed with space, so the table doubles as prep bench and everything else. Jack likes to get in there as well, standing on a chair to help me chop up the veggies for dinner with his kiddie knife."

Q What's your ideal kitchen?

A "I really like that free flowing from-kitchen-to-living-room layout. That space brings everything together. When the rooms are separated, it separates the family a little bit. It's great when we're all spending time together at home."

THE FOOD BLOGGER

Living in an apartment in the heart of Sydney hasn't stopped Sally O'Neil from being the epitome of good living.

With a plethora of restaurants and cafes on her doorstep, she could be forgiven for bypassing her kitchen altogether and stepping out for dinner every night.

But that's not the way of this food blogger who serves up healthy, inspirational food ideas on her site, The Fit Foodie (the-fit-foodie.com).

Her kitchen might be small by apartment standards, but Sally says it is "contemporary and functional", and she often finds herself spending about four hours a day by the stove.

"The kitchen was in the apartment when we moved in, and although it's compact, I've learnt to love it," she says.

"We make the space work for us."

Creating healthy dishes is her passion, and every recipe that features on her blog is made here, along with daily breakfasts, lunches, dinners and snacks for herself and partner, Graham Hanson.

The kitchen certainly gets a good workout, with Sally often whipping up a large batch of oats with egg whites, sultanas, cinnamon, vanilla and grated carrot for breakfast.

On days where she is doing a food shoot for a client, she'll prep it in the morning so that she can catch the beautiful light that floods the apartment at midday.

"If I get a chance, I'll prep lunch for my partner for the next day too," she says.

"I'm typically in the kitchen for a minimum



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of four hours a day, it's the heart of my home."
Q How have you adapted your kitchen to suit your cooking style?

A "I have so many healthy pantry ingredients, so I needed extra space to store them all. →

→ "I've moved the fridge from its concealed cupboard and filled the space with a large shelving unit to house all my spices and superfoods."

Q What are some of the kitchen gadgets or appliances you couldn't do without?

A "I couldn't live without my blender. I use it to make silky smooth soups, protein shakes and sauces, as well as home-made nut milks and nut butter. I use it at least twice a day."

Q What don't you like about your kitchen?

A "Lack of workbench space. We live in a one-bedroom city apartment, so for the sake of the fantastic location we've had to compromise on space. I'd love to have all my kitchen gadgets out on display for easy access but I have to put most of them away to reserve usable workbench space. I've also bought a large chopping board that sits over the double sink to create extra surface space."

Q If you could have your dream kitchen, how would you design it?

A "I'd love to add a kitchen island. It would be all white and full of awesome gadgets such as an integrated filtration tap system and steam oven. I'd love another dishwasher because I'm always creating so much mess and using a million different plates for food shoots. I'd also add a whole storage section for my food styling props, napery and photography backgrounds. At the moment they're spread all over the apartment, and it can take me forever to find what I'm looking for."

THE FOOD EDITOR

Grant Jones, food editor at The Daily Telegraph recently renovated the kitchen in his inner-west property.

As a foodie and the family's primary cook, Grant had strong views on the kind of kitchen he wanted. With his heart set on an open-plan kitchen, big change was planned for the Federation home.

"I needed a space where I could talk to my guests and family without being locked away in a separate part of the house," Grant says.

"It had to be open and interactive, plus I wanted a space where I could demonstrate how to make things and somewhere to put my hundreds of cookbooks," he says.

"Cooking demonstrations have been

restricted to rice paper rolls and pancakes with my six-year-old son Louis so far."

Pre-renovation, the 1906 cottage featured a tack-on kitchen from the 1930s with more bits added on in the 1970s.

When Grant and his partner Joan moved

in a decade ago, there was just an electric two-burner cooktop, no oven and an old electric Zippo water heater.

A dividing wall separated the kitchen from the dining area.

"I knocked out the wall and built a temporary kitchen using Formply sheets and pine and then we added a top-of-the-line 900mm Smeg oven bought for us by my partner's mother as a moving-in present."

The temporary kitchen lasted seven years, but, after Louis was born, they submitted full renovation plans to council.

"Five years later we renovated and we basically doubled the size of the house — and we kept the oven."

There were several redesigns on the path to getting the kitchen just right.

Grant worked closely with architect Robin McInnes to make best use of available space and then signed on with Sydney Kitchens to realise the renovation.

Q Who designed your kitchen?

A "Pat Clarke from Sydney Kitchens was the designer and was very patient given we went

through five redesigns. She has since retired, although I am not sure if it was because of working with me or not."

Q Why did you go through so many design changes before you finished?

A "I wanted everything to hand so that I could have an oil and vinegars drawer close by, a skinny cupboard for all my chopping boards, space to walk past if the oven door was open and a dishwasher in the island bench. But I didn't want a sink on the island bench. Also, I wanted loads of storage space and a decent exhaust unit because the kitchen is below the void and stairs which lead to our master bedroom."

Q Is everything as you wanted it now, or would you make any changes if you had your time again?

A "The extractor fan is top-class, professional Quasair model and does a great job. Although we did lose a bit of cupboard space with the extraction tubing. I'm not sure where else we could have put it."

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FOCUS

Chef Brad Sloane encourages his son Jack to be adventurous with food.
Picture: Justin Sanson



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Food blogger Sally O'Neil would love more kitchen bench space.



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Food editor Grant Jones re-designed his kitchen five times.