



# Grand Manners

By Kymberly Taylor

Have you noticed that, when throwing a dinner party, there is always one well-meaning guest who invades your space, blissfully unaware? That there is always a man standing in front of the refrigerator? Kitchen designer Joni Zimmerman knows this after years of practice combining two great loves: the science of design and the psychology of people.

Zimmerman, owner of Design Solutions in Annapolis, notes that some guests are indeed conscious about this unspoken rule. And, some are not. "One guest may be better at minding space than another, but men, forget it . . . they like to stand in front of the refrigerator and they are clueless about it, that's why I joke about getting the crowd control ropes . . . I just want to rope the place off."

"The bottom line is, when hosting, personal space is internal but also depends on the setting. When cooking, you are in a task-oriented place in your mind . . . you need to maneuver, do things, and have more space around you." She explains that guests, though, are in a social frame of mind and need less space.

For example, this French country estate-style kitchen has a classic symmetrical balance with a formal plan, as does the rest of this waterfront home, whose interior was designed by Arlene Critzos, owner of Interior Concepts. The homeowners entertain often, inviting 150 over for dinner. So, Zimmerman embedded into the kitchen "work task" zones and "social interaction" zones. The hostess can still preside over her guests and work safely at her "stage," while guests converse at another island.

Balance is essential, she says. "When something is well balanced and something is well proportioned, they feel 100 percent great within a space. The moment something is off, they are uncomfortable," she reflects, pointing out that the islands are balanced within a larger configuration of negative and positive space.

For example, there is a central arch in the back of the kitchen, and behind this, a solid green hutch. One can look through the negative space



of the arch and feel surprised yet grounded by its presence. Heights vary in cabinetry, refrigerator, and furnishings, which create layers of interest.

Zimmerman's approach is unlike most designers. She begins by asking her client to stand in the part of the kitchen they use the most. From here, the plan evolves. In this case, her client stood in the middle of the kitchen, which is where Zimmerman planned the work zone. Note that the work space is indeed in the center, and that appliances, refrigerator, and range are four feet away, poised for action. "You take two or three steps and you are where you need to be," she says. This spatial arrangement keeps everyone in their proper place. And, it inspires confidence in the hostess, who telegraphs this to her guests, who then have a better time.

Want to throw a really great dinner party? Examine your kitchen, its exits and entrances, and change what you can, she suggests. "We can make aesthetic choices to balance out the abnormalities of a space, we can structurally make changes and place furnishings strategically. It's like an intuitive language for me." With all of these elements, it is no wonder that her designs brim over with positive energies, drawing all to their powerful center.

Resources:  
Design Solutions  
Joni Zimmerman, [dslkitchens.com](http://dslkitchens.com)

Interior Concepts  
Arlene Critzos, [www.interiorconceptsinc.com](http://www.interiorconceptsinc.com)

