

# dining spaces

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## eating drinking talking sharing

The space where a family eats is often the heart of the home where many activities other than consuming food take place, such as socialising and communicating, doing office work or homework, art and crafts, playing cards or board games. Many homes today have more than one dining area - one within the kitchen for breakfast and snacks, and another integrated into a living room.

Seating should be comfortable to encourage this diverse range of gatherings and activities and the atmosphere relaxed so that people can linger over a meal. Nobody will want to sit longer than necessary on an uncomfortable chair or in bright and intrusive lighting conditions. Understanding what makes an eating space work is important to the success of that room and to the home as a whole.

The kitchen and eating spaces should be linked so that food can be easily transported to the dining table and dishes and eating utensils transported back to the dishwasher. It is also important to think about the people using the space, such as the size and ages of the family, whether you regularly have a lot of guests for meals, the way you eat and the food you eat. Some families dish their meal onto plates in the kitchen and then take them to the table, while others place platters of food on the table and diners serve their own food, which requires a larger sized table.

The time of the day the space is used, how often it is used and for how long it is used determines many other aspects of dining space design. Is it on view, subject to a lot of wear and tear, easy to maintain? Or is it only used when entertaining guests, isolated from living spaces and generally only used in evenings?



**in-kitchen dining**

As the design of kitchens has evolved so has the in-kitchen dining facility with either an extended kitchen bench which becomes a table at one end, or an island or bar with bar stools where the cook and family or guests can interact during food preparation.

In fact the cooking process is sometimes part of the entertainment factor today, and guests watch their meal being prepared while sipping on a glass of wine or juice. Another common feature of kitchen design today is to incorporate a bar area where drinks are mixed and served

The return of the breakfast nook has also been noted - a booth with fitted table and seats similar to those seen in cafes. These are ideal for young families as they often have vinyl seats and laminated table tops, which are durable and easy to maintain.



This snack area is created with a pullout table top, which looks like another drawer in the cabinetry when closed.

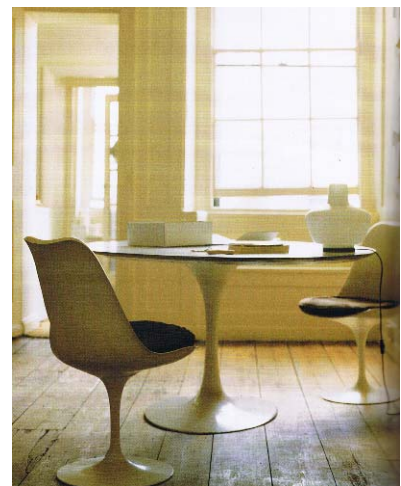
Both of these kitchens have been designed to incorporate eating spaces in close proximity to where the food preparation takes place so that family members can interact during the food preparation and cooking.



### dining + living + working

The eating area within the home will alter as the family needs change. If you have very young children you may choose to use the eating room as a playroom as well, then as they grow older it may double up as a study/computing space. Or adults with a home office may use the dining area as a board room or meeting room.

The layout of a dining space usually takes its starting point from the dimensions and shape of the floor so that the selected furniture is an appropriate scale to the space. The table is the focal point and often an extendable table works well as it can be opened up when required for entertaining but it does not take up too much space for day to day living.



The three table shapes are square, rectangular or round/oval and the height and position of the legs/pedestal should be able to accommodate the chairs. The table can be centred in the space or placed alongside a wall and pulled out when extra seating is needed.



This high-tech table setting could be used in a dining space or a boardroom - the laminate and plastic surfaces are easy to maintain.

These dining spaces below are both light and airy. The one on the left is incorporated into a window seat and has a funky pendant light fitting to add a little drama over the table. The setting on the right is in neutral shades with pale timber furniture, which provides a background to the food that will be served at the table. Both of these dining areas have uninterrupted views outdoors.



### formal informal separate isolated

A formal dining room can be rich in colour or more sombre and artificially lit if used for evening meals. In contrast, an informal room designated entirely to dining, may be bright, airy and full of sunshine. It usually depends on the style of the rest of the house, and even though the room may be isolated, the style of furnishings is most often carried through in elements such as antiques or modern furniture, artworks, etc.

Colours that are conducive to communicating and eating in a formal setting in particular are rich reds and burgundy, such as **Resene Pohutukawa**, or ochre yellow and golds, such as **Resene Gold Dust**. On the other hand colour should not overshadow the food presentation, so equally as popular are pale neutrals and off-white colours, such as **Resene Tea**, which may be applied to painted walls, drapes and upholstery or table top settings.

In contrast, a formal but austere dining room may be selected by enthusiasts for Japanese style interiors and food. Pale timber floors and furniture, shoji screens and parchment coloured walls complete the look.

This dining space is anchored by a floor rug, and has practical wall to ceiling storage cabinets on the rear wall. Industrial lights overhead also accentuate the position of the dining furniture.



### alternative eating spaces

Although close proximity to kitchen is important, very often there are other spaces within the home that a small table and one or two chairs can be placed for enjoyable eating.



The lobby, landing or the corner of another room that is bathed in sunshine or has a view may be an ideal space for a drop-side table and couple of chairs for breakfast or lunch. Even a small table and chair in a bedroom can be suitable for early breakfast or late supper. Folding chairs that can be easily stacked away when not in use are a perfect solution when space is restricted.

And more and more families today eat in front of the television. In this instance a sturdy tray on the knee or a small table on wheels that can be pulled up in front of the sofa are required. Or for children, a plastic tablecloth over the carpet or under the highchair is a must. Sadly this way of eating reduces the amount of communication between members of the family and the enjoyment of tasting and digesting a nourishing meal.

### eating outdoors

Many of us enjoy eating in the garden or an outdoor room. It helps if the eating area is not too far from the kitchen but with modern outdoor cooking appliances available this is not always a problem. We often like to follow the sun and may have an outdoor table on the terrace to catch the morning sun for breakfast, and another spot where we dine or entertain in the evenings.

It is easy to protect the eating area from the elements with walls, screens or trees to provide protection from the wind, and overhead glazing or louvers, or simply an awning or umbrella to protect us and our food from the rain or sun.

And for additional warmth there are outdoor heaters and fireplaces, as well as the warming feel of glowing candles. So whether you are following the water view or wanting a quiet and soothing dining experience in the garden, well planned outdoor dining areas will always be enjoyed.

The simplicity of this voile cloth does not compete with the garden setting for an outdoor meal.





This awning structure provides instant protection from the wind and rain and creates an extremely inviting eating space out in the garden. The indoor room on the right also has an old wooden table and garden chairs but the addition of striped cushions makes the space feel cosy and relaxed.



### dining tables

Big tables bring people together, and there is always room for an extra person or two to share the meal.

Approaches to modern design tend to simplify the lines of dining tables for easy maintenance and comfort in use. A simple table can always be embellished with table linen and decorations when required. For a young family a laminate finish or old timber top table is the easiest to look after, and probably the most forgiving if glassware is dropped on it.

Glass tabletops are high maintenance as fingermarks show up, and high gloss dark stained timber or black lacquer finishes show up dust and fingermarks more than paler timbers or a natural stone, such as travertine or even polished concrete.

The diameter of a round table generally ranges from 1m for 4 seats to 1.5m for six to eight diners. A square or rectangle table needs to allow approximately 600mm per diner. 1m x 1.8m would seat eight adults, and a table 1m x 1.5 would accommodate six diners. The usual table height is 750mm.



This simple oblong table is themed in green and white to match the check cloth on the chairs, while the small square table tucks nicely into a corner for two diners.

### dining chairs

The dining chair is designed for one specific function yet it is one of the most used and moved around pieces in the home. In small areas, stackable or fold-away chairs are the answer.

The standard height for the seat is 450mm and a knee clearance between the seat and table top is needed. Always allow clearance behind the chair so it can be pulled out - about 1m allows a person to pass behind a seated diner.

Chairs need to be easy to keep clean, and if they are upholstered ensure the fabric can be washed. There are so many options of materials for chair frames and seats - timber, tubular steel, plastic and synthetic materials, leather, cane - most are made from a combination of materials.

If the chairs need to be moved often, ensure they are lightweight and easy to handle. And the most important factor is that the chair supports your back and is comfortable to sit on. This cantilevered design of the Breuer chair has stood the test of time and is easy to move in and out from under the table.



Three other classic chairs - the Tulip plastic pedestal chair, the Jacobsen plywood chair, and the Thonet bentwood chair. They all work with a wide variety of tables, are light and easy to move around and have proven to be very durable as well.



## storage + serving

Storage for glassware, crockery and table linen in cabinets is more modular than the old sideboards and china cabinets we once saw in dining rooms. The current versions are made out of laminate, timber, metal or glass to co-ordinate with other furniture in the living/dining spaces.

Shelving and cabinets may also accommodate stereo systems, artworks, books, ornamental accessories, games, crafts, office equipment and computers in multi-functional eating spaces.

A trolley can be highly functional - it is invaluable for wheeling dishes and platters of food to the table and taking the used dishes back to the kitchen for the washing. It may also be used as a drink trolley if the table is small and cannot accommodate water jugs or wine bottles.



Glassware and crockery is stored on the shelves behind this table and chairs. The translucent glass sliding doors help to keep the stored items dust-free and protected from knocks by passing family members.



**Have wheels - can move!**

The trolley on the left is a great way to transport crockery to and from the table. The dining table on the right can be easily wheeled up into a corner to allow more space in the room, and wheeled out and have chairs placed around in when entertaining guests. It can also be wheeled in front of the fire in winter or up to the window to dine and enjoy a view in summer.

## decorative accessories

Dining is an important part of living and should be made as sensuous as possible. Big bowls or baskets of fruit and vegetables on the table add colour and energy - shiny aubergines and tomatoes, pumpkins, red onions, artichokes and capsicum make a colourful display.

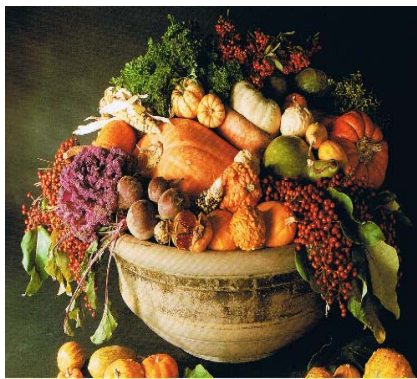
Growing herbs in small pots, wild flowers, garden foliage and berries look interesting as a table centrepiece and of course flowers have always been used to decorate the table. Find interesting containers - old tins, mismatched crockery, baking tins, old bottles, wooden boxes, a teapot or a watering can - they all add history and interest to dining.

Candles grace any dining table, whether formal and elegant or rustic and casual, indoors or outdoors. Candlelight creates the mood for an intimate and convivial meal. Remember not to use highly scented candles as they tend to overpower the taste and smell of the food.

The fragrance imparted from this citrus fruit is fresh and adds to the dining experience - remember to tweak as many of the senses as possible which will tantalise and reinforce the taste-buds.



A combination of colourful vegetables, fruit, nuts, foliage and herbs looks great in this old pottery bowl as a centre piece on a country-style kitchen table. Growing a mixture of herbs and cress in old weathered terracotta pots is another way to add energy to the dining table, and each diner can have a small pot as part of their place setting as well.



### celebrations + culture

Sharing food is an important part of all cultures and nearly every major family or social event involves food - wedding breakfast, birthday party, funeral wake - they all involve friends and family eating together.

Our sense of taste is supplemented by smell, colour, texture and temperature. Food is about preparation, cooking and presentation. Eat local and seasonal food, buy perishables daily and savour the smell of freshly cooked food.

Pungent spices and herbs, colourful fruit and vegetables, wholesome nuts and seeds - having these on display adds to the entire eating experience.

As cultures and cooking styles fuse together, so does the way we prepare and serve food - it is all part of the rituals and history passed down from generation to generation.





## **nutrition + enjoyment**

So much of the food we purchase at supermarkets is packaged in a way that we cannot touch or smell it before we buy. We enjoy food more when we know something about its origin and journey to the table - fish caught locally, fruit picked from the tree in the garden or vegetables harvested by a family member, wine from a particular vineyard.

Cooking spoils many nutrients while raw fruit and vegetables give vitality and maximum nutritional value. A balanced diet provides nutrients that are good for mind and body - giving a sense of wellbeing, confidence and clarity.

We reward ourselves with food, and many console themselves with food. We cook for those we love and love those who cook for us.



## **colour + comfort**

The rainbow colours of a balanced diet - if you have a good mixture of food colours you will be having a balanced intake of nutrients. Food manufacturers know how much colour appeals to us, and use bright synthetic hues to make processed food attractive to us, so we learn to distinguish between natural and synthetic colour for the sake of our health and wellbeing.

Colours, furniture and lighting used in fast food restaurants are designed to increase the appetite, make you eat fast and people do not want to linger after the meal because the seats are uncomfortable and lighting severe.

The ambience in which you eat affects your receptiveness to the food - the colour of the walls and quality of the light, the comfort of your seats and the colour of crockery and table linen - all combine to increase your appreciation of the food.



## lighting for eating

The atmosphere created by lighting in a dining room is important - ideally it should be flattering to both the faces of the diners and the food before them. It also needs to be conducive to conversation and comfort.

Equally as important is the need to be flexible to accommodate all functions other than eating that may take place in the dining area, such as operating a laptop computer or task lighting for arts and crafts that are done on the table.

A pendant light over the table, with a rise and fall mechanism and dimmer switch is one option if the table is to be retained in one position. Downlights on a dimmer switch offer more freedom if the table is moved or extended within the space. A narrow shaft of light falling on the centre of the table tends to bring the diners seated around the table together and the intimacy of this effect can be enhanced by the use of candles.

Wall lights or widely spread downlights provide the overall lighting needed for moving about and serving meals in the eating space. A central over-the-table light with high watt bulb should have the bottom half of the bulb silvered to avoid glare.

This dining room has neutral colour walls, timber furniture with chairs upholstered in blue fabric. The blue shade is also picked up in the rug underneath the setting. The table top needs something living - food, flowers, plants - to make it more inviting to sit at. A row of old tins painted in various colours with potted flowers make a nice centre decoration.



New Wave Caffe - this tableware was designed by Villeroy & Boch and received a German Business Innovation Award in 2005. The enjoyment of a good cup of coffee is enhanced by the comfort of drinking from this asymmetrical design.



## compiled by

- Colourwaves - Jill Carroll

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