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# Kitchen Design & Layout

Kitchen layout planning, work triangle optimization,  
open-concept conversions, and design principles for  
NB homes

23 Expert Answers from Kitchen IQ

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## What are the ideal dimensions and layout features for a walk-in pantry in a New Brunswick home?

A well-designed walk-in pantry in New Brunswick should be at least **5 feet wide by 6 feet deep (30 square feet minimum)** to allow comfortable movement and door swing clearance. The ideal size is 6x8 feet or larger, which provides enough space for floor-to-ceiling shelving on three walls while maintaining a 36-inch walkway down the center.

### Essential Layout Features

The most functional walk-in pantries feature **adjustable shelving systems** rather than fixed shelves, allowing you to accommodate everything from cereal boxes to small appliances. Install shelves 12-16 inches deep on the side walls and 18-20 inches deep on the back wall for larger items. Position the bottom shelf 18 inches off the floor to allow space for bulk items like dog food bags or cases of water.

Include a **countertop workspace** at 36-inch height along one wall — this creates a staging area for meal prep and houses small appliances like coffee makers or stand mixers. A 24-inch deep counter works well and can incorporate drawers underneath for utensils and kitchen linens.

### New Brunswick Climate Considerations

NB's humidity swings make **proper ventilation critical** in walk-in pantries. Install a small exhaust fan or ensure the pantry connects to your home's HVAC system to prevent moisture buildup that can spoil dry goods and create mold behind shelving. Avoid storing items directly against exterior walls in older NB homes, as temperature fluctuations can cause condensation.

Use **wire shelving or slatted wood shelving** rather than solid shelves to promote air circulation. This is especially important in Maritime humidity — stagnant air pockets can cause issues with flour, sugar, and other dry goods.

### Practical Storage Solutions

Install **pull-out drawers** in the lower sections for heavy items like canned goods — this prevents back strain and makes items more accessible. Include a mix of shelf heights: 8-10 inches for canned goods, 12-14 inches for cereal boxes, and 18+ inches for tall items like olive oil bottles.

Consider **door-mounted storage** on the interior of the pantry door for spices, condiments, and cleaning supplies. This maximizes storage without reducing floor space.

### Lighting and Electrical

Install **LED strip lighting** under each shelf level for complete visibility — pantries with only overhead lighting create shadows that make items hard to find. Include at least one electrical outlet for small appliances or charging stations for handheld vacuums.

### When to Hire a Professional

While homeowners can install basic shelving systems, creating a walk-in pantry from scratch typically requires **professional help for electrical work, ventilation, and structural modifications**. Moving walls or adding electrical circuits requires permits in New Brunswick. If you're converting a closet or small room, a contractor can ensure proper ventilation and lighting for your specific space.

Most NB contractors can build a complete walk-in pantry for \$3,000-\$8,000 depending on size, finishes, and electrical requirements — a worthwhile investment that adds significant value and functionality to your kitchen.

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Q2

## How much does a kitchen design-build firm in Saint John or Miramichi typically charge for a full design package including floor plan, 3D renderings, material selections, and contractor coordination?

**Design-build firms in Saint John typically charge \$2,500-\$6,000 for a comprehensive design package, while Miramichi firms generally charge \$1,500-\$4,000 due to lower overhead costs and market rates.** The wide range depends on kitchen size, complexity, and the firm's experience level.

### What's Included in a Full Design Package

A complete design-build package should include initial consultation and space assessment, detailed floor plan with dimensions and layout options, 3D renderings showing your kitchen from multiple angles, comprehensive material selections (cabinets, countertops, flooring, backsplash, fixtures), appliance specifications and sourcing, electrical and plumbing layout plans, and project timeline with contractor coordination. Many Saint John firms also include

permit application assistance, which adds significant value given the city's building department requirements.

The 3D renderings are particularly valuable for visualizing how your finished kitchen will look, especially important when dealing with older Saint John homes where space constraints require creative solutions. Most firms provide 2-3 design revisions included in the base price, with additional changes running \$150-\$300 per revision.

### **Regional Pricing Differences**

Saint John's larger market supports more specialized design-build firms with higher overhead costs, reflected in their pricing. Established firms near the Uptown or East Side typically charge premium rates (\$4,000-\$6,000) but offer extensive portfolios and established supplier relationships. Miramichi's smaller market means fewer design-build options, but those available often provide excellent value at \$1,500-\$4,000 for similar scope.

### **New Brunswick Market Considerations**

Many NB design-build firms credit 50-75% of design fees toward your renovation if you hire them for construction, making the effective design cost much lower. This is particularly common in Saint John's competitive market. However, verify upfront whether you'll own the design plans if you choose a different contractor – some firms retain ownership unless you complete the project with them.

### **Timing and Seasonal Factors**

Design work typically takes 3-6 weeks from initial meeting to final plans, with material selections often requiring the longest time due to NB's limited local showrooms. Many homeowners visit suppliers in Moncton or Halifax for premium selections. Winter months (November-March) often offer better design availability and sometimes 10-15% lower fees as firms seek to maintain cash flow during slower construction periods.

### **When Design-Build Makes Sense**

Design-build works particularly well for complex Saint John renovations involving older homes with structural challenges, galvanized plumbing, or 60-amp electrical panels requiring upgrades. The single point of contact streamlines permit applications and ensures design feasibility from a construction standpoint. For straightforward cabinet replacements, hiring a designer separately might be more cost-effective.

Need help finding a kitchen design-build firm? New Brunswick Kitchens can match you with experienced local professionals who understand the unique challenges of renovating in Maritime Canada's older housing stock.

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Q3

## What is the best kitchen layout for a small New Brunswick bungalow?

**The galley layout is the most efficient kitchen design for a small New Brunswick bungalow, making maximum use of limited floor space while keeping everything within easy reach.** For bungalows with slightly more room, an L-shaped layout with a small peninsula offers a good balance of workspace and openness.

New Brunswick has thousands of bungalows built from the 1950s through the 1980s, particularly across Moncton, Fredericton, Saint John, and the surrounding communities. These homes typically have kitchens ranging from 80 to 120 square feet with a closed-off layout separated from the living and dining areas by walls. The original designs often wasted space with awkward door placements and oversized gaps between counters.

A **galley kitchen** places cabinets and countertops along two parallel walls, creating a compact work corridor. The ideal galley width is 42 to 48 inches between counter faces—wide enough for one person to work comfortably and for cabinet doors and the dishwasher to open fully. In a galley, the sink typically goes on one wall with the range on the opposite wall, keeping the work triangle tight and efficient. This layout maximizes counter and storage space per square foot, which is exactly what a small bungalow kitchen needs. Semi-custom cabinets (\$10,000 to \$18,000) work well here because you can specify precise widths to fill every inch without the filler strips that stock cabinets often need.

If your bungalow's kitchen has one exterior wall and one interior wall, the **L-shaped layout** is worth considering, especially if you want to open the kitchen to the adjacent dining or living room. Removing the interior wall (confirm it is not load-bearing first—many bungalow interior walls are, and an engineer's assessment costs \$300 to \$800) lets you add a peninsula that creates counter seating and defines the kitchen space without enclosing it. This open-concept approach is extremely popular in NB bungalow renovations and can add significant resale value.

### Making Small Kitchens Feel Larger

Cabinet choices matter enormously in a small space. Go with **upper cabinets to the ceiling** to eliminate the dust-collecting dead space on top and gain an extra shelf of storage. Light-coloured painted cabinets (white, soft grey, or warm off-white) make the room feel larger. MDF-core with a painted finish is the best mid-range option for NB's climate—it handles the humidity swings between Maritime summers and dry heated winters better than thermofoil, which can delaminate within five to ten years.

For countertops, quartz (\$60 to \$120 per square foot installed) is the most practical choice. It is non-porous, handles NB's humidity without sealing, and a light-toned quartz brightens a small kitchen. Under-cabinet LED lighting is a small investment (\$300 to \$800 installed) that makes a dramatic difference in a compact kitchen, eliminating the shadows that make small spaces feel cramped.

For flooring, LVP (\$2,000 to \$4,000) is the clear winner in a small bungalow kitchen—waterproof, warm underfoot during NB winters, and available in light wood tones that visually expand the space. Running the same floor from the kitchen into the adjacent room makes both spaces feel larger.

Budget a mid-range renovation at \$25,000 to \$40,000 for a small bungalow kitchen, or \$50,000 to \$65,000 if structural wall removal is involved. Getting three or more quotes from local contractors is essential, as NB pricing varies significantly.

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## How do I design an open-concept kitchen in a split-entry NB home?

**Converting a split-entry home to open-concept kitchen living requires careful structural assessment first, because the wall between the kitchen and living area in most NB split-entries is load-bearing.** Removing or modifying that wall is absolutely possible, but it requires an engineered beam, a building permit, and a qualified contractor—budget \$5,000 to \$15,000 for the structural work alone.

Split-entry homes are one of the most common house styles in New Brunswick, built heavily from the late 1970s through the 1990s across Moncton, Fredericton, Saint John, and virtually every suburb and rural community in the province. The typical layout has the kitchen on the upper level, separated from the living and dining areas by one or two walls. These kitchens are usually 100 to 140 square feet with a U-shaped or galley layout and a small pass-through or no visual connection to the living space at all.

The first step is hiring a **structural engineer** (\$300 to \$800 for a residential assessment) to determine which walls are load-bearing. In most NB split-entries, the wall between the kitchen and living room carries loads from the roof structure above, which means you cannot simply knock it out. The engineer will specify the size and type of beam (typically an LVL or steel beam) needed to carry the load, along with the post locations required to support it. This engineered drawing is mandatory for your building permit application. In Moncton, Fredericton, and Saint John, the permit process takes one to three weeks and costs \$100 to \$300. Rural areas under Regional Service Commissions may take two to five weeks.

### Making the Layout Work

Once the wall is open, you gain the opportunity to redesign the kitchen layout entirely. The most popular approach in NB split-entry conversions is an **L-shaped kitchen with a centre island or peninsula** facing the living area. The island serves as both a workspace and a visual boundary between the kitchen and living room. A standard island needs a minimum of 36 inches of clearance on all walkable sides, so your combined kitchen-living space should be at least 12 feet deep from the exterior wall to make an island practical.

For the island itself, plan for plumbing if you want a prep sink (\$1,500 to \$3,000 for the rough-in) and electrical outlets (required by NB Building Code on islands with countertop seating). The island countertop is a natural spot for a quartz waterfall edge (\$60 to \$120 per square foot installed), which creates a clean, modern look that contrasts beautifully with the open space.

One NB-specific concern in split-entry renovations is the **electrical panel**. Many split-entries built in the 1980s have 100-amp panels that may be at capacity, and some older ones still have 60-amp service. Opening up the kitchen is the right time to upgrade if needed (\$1,500 to \$4,000). You will also want to address ventilation—an open-concept

kitchen requires a proper range hood venting to the outside, not a recirculating microwave fan. NB's Maritime humidity in summer makes exterior venting essential for managing moisture.

Budget \$50,000 to \$75,000 for a full split-entry open-concept kitchen renovation including structural work, new cabinets, countertops, flooring, electrical, and plumbing. Get quotes from at least three contractors experienced with structural renovations—not every kitchen renovator is comfortable with beam installations and load-bearing wall removals.

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Q5

## What is the work triangle in kitchen design and why does it matter?

**The kitchen work triangle is the invisible path between your three most-used stations—the sink, the range (or cooktop), and the refrigerator—and getting it right makes the difference between a kitchen that flows naturally and one that feels frustrating to cook in.** Each leg of the triangle should measure between 4 and 9 feet, and the total perimeter should fall between 13 and 26 feet.

The concept has been a foundational principle of kitchen design since the 1940s, and while modern kitchen use has evolved (we now have islands, double ovens, and multiple prep zones), the triangle remains the single most important layout consideration for NB homeowners planning a renovation. If your triangle is too tight—all three stations crammed into one corner—you will bump into anyone else in the kitchen. If it is too spread out—the fridge on one side of a large room and the sink on the other—you will walk thousands of unnecessary steps while preparing a single meal.

In practical terms for New Brunswick kitchens, the triangle plays out differently depending on your layout. In a **galley kitchen** (common in NB bungalows and older homes), the triangle is naturally compact, with the sink and range typically on opposite walls and the fridge at one end. This is actually one of the most efficient triangle configurations, which is why professional kitchens almost always use a galley layout. In an **L-shaped kitchen**, the

triangle forms along the two walls with the fridge usually positioned at the end of one leg. The risk with L-shapes is placing the fridge too far from the sink—try to keep that leg under 9 feet. In a **U-shaped kitchen**, each station goes on a different wall, creating an even triangle that works well in kitchens with 8 to 12 feet of width between walls.

## Applying the Triangle to Your Renovation

When planning your NB kitchen renovation, sketch the triangle before committing to cabinet and appliance placement. The most common mistake is designing around aesthetics first and function second. A gorgeous kitchen island looks great in photos but can break the work triangle if it forces you to walk around it every time you move between the stove and the sink.

Another NB-specific consideration: **plumbing and electrical locations affect your triangle options**. Moving the sink means extending supply and drain lines (\$1,500 to \$4,000), and relocating the range involves moving a 240-volt circuit or gas line. In older NB homes with galvanized plumbing or 60-amp panels, these moves can add significant cost. A skilled kitchen designer will optimize the triangle while minimizing infrastructure changes, saving you thousands.

The work triangle also intersects with traffic flow. If your kitchen is a pass-through between the living room and dining room—extremely common in New Brunswick split-entries and bungalows—foot traffic should not cut through the triangle. People walking through while you are cooking is a safety hazard and an efficiency killer. If your current layout has this problem, a renovation that repositions the entry points or adds a peninsula to redirect traffic is money well spent.

When interviewing kitchen renovation contractors in NB, ask them to explain their approach to the work triangle. A knowledgeable contractor will discuss it naturally as part of the design process. If they jump straight to cabinet styles and countertop colours without addressing layout flow, keep looking.

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Q6

## Should I add a kitchen island to my Fredericton home renovation?

**A kitchen island is worth adding to your Fredericton renovation if your kitchen has at least 12 by 12 feet of open floor space after cabinets are installed, which allows for a functional island with proper 36 to 42 inch clearance on all sides.** If your kitchen is smaller than that, a peninsula or a mobile butcher block cart is a better use of the space.

Fredericton's housing stock includes a wide mix of styles—century homes in the downtown core, bungalows and split-entries in the Skyline Acres and Southwood Park areas, and newer builds in subdivisions like Wilsey Road and Hanwell. The feasibility of an island depends entirely on your kitchen's footprint and layout. Many 1970s and 1980s Fredericton bungalows have kitchens in the 100 to 130 square foot range, which is too tight for a permanent island after perimeter cabinets are in place. Split-entries and two-storeys from the 1990s onward often have larger kitchens—140 to 200 square feet—where an island fits comfortably.

A well-designed island typically measures 4 feet long by 2 feet deep at minimum, though 5 to 7 feet long by 3 feet deep is more practical for both prep work and seating. The clearance around the island is non-negotiable: 36 inches minimum on all walkable sides, and 42 to 48 inches on the side facing the range or dishwasher so doors and drawers can open without blocking the path. Measure your kitchen carefully with perimeter cabinets accounted for before committing.

### What an Island Adds

The biggest benefit of a kitchen island is **additional counter space and storage**, both of which are in short supply in most existing Fredericton kitchens. A 5-foot island adds roughly 10 to 15 square feet of prep surface and typically includes two to four base cabinets or deep drawers underneath. Adding a countertop overhang on one side creates seating for two to three stools, which is invaluable for families and entertaining.

From a renovation cost perspective, a basic island with stock cabinets and a laminate top runs \$2,000 to \$5,000 installed. A mid-range island with semi-custom cabinets, quartz countertop, and pendant lighting costs \$5,000 to \$12,000. If you want plumbing in the island (a prep sink is popular), add \$1,500 to \$4,000 for the rough-in, and electrical outlets on the island are required by NB Building Code if you include countertop seating. Both plumbing and electrical additions require permits through the City of Fredericton's building inspection department—expect \$75 to \$200 in permit fees and one to three weeks for processing.

One consideration specific to Fredericton's older homes: if adding an island means removing a wall to open up the kitchen to the dining room, you need a structural engineer to assess whether that wall is load-bearing. This is common in bungalow and split-entry conversions and adds \$5,000 to \$15,000 for the beam installation and structural work.

For the island countertop material, quartz (\$60 to \$120 per square foot installed) is the most practical choice—it handles the humidity swings of NB's Maritime climate without sealing, resists stains, and is heat-tolerant enough for everyday kitchen use. Butcher block (\$40 to \$70 per square foot) is a warm, attractive option for an island without a sink, but it requires oiling every three to six months and is vulnerable to moisture damage.

If your Fredericton kitchen cannot accommodate a permanent island, consider a **mobile butcher block cart** (\$300 to \$800) that rolls out when you need prep space and tucks away when you do not. It gives you many of the benefits without the construction cost or permanent floor space commitment.

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## What are the best kitchen layouts for entertaining in NB homes?

**The L-shaped layout with a large island is the best kitchen configuration for entertaining in most New Brunswick homes**, combining open sightlines with ample prep and serving space. An L-shape keeps the primary work triangle tucked along two walls while the island becomes a natural gathering point where guests can sit, snack, and socialize without crowding the cook.

Many NB homes built in the 1970s through 1990s have enclosed kitchens separated from dining and living areas by load-bearing walls. Converting to an open-concept layout dramatically improves the entertaining experience, but removing or modifying a load-bearing wall requires engineered drawings and a building permit through your municipality or Regional Service Commission. Budget \$3,000 to \$8,000 for the structural work alone, including a properly sized beam and temporary supports during construction.

For homes where structural changes are not feasible, a **U-shaped layout with a pass-through** offers a great middle ground. You keep the kitchen defined as its own space but open a section of wall to create a serving counter or bar-height pass-through that connects to the dining or living area. This is a lower-cost option at \$2,000 to \$5,000, and often does not require a permit if the wall section removed is non-structural.

### Island Design for Entertaining

The island is the centrepiece of an entertaining kitchen. For comfortable seating, plan at least a 12-inch overhang on the seating side, and allow 36 to 42 inches of clearance between the island and surrounding counters or walls so traffic flows smoothly even with guests milling about. A standard NB kitchen of 10 by 12 feet can accommodate a 4-by-2.5-foot island with seating for two. If your kitchen is 12 by 14 feet or larger, you can go up to a 6-foot island with seating for three or four.

Include a **prep sink on the island** if your budget allows. This keeps the main sink area free for cleanup while giving you a secondary water source for food prep. Adding plumbing to an island costs \$1,500 to \$3,500 in New Brunswick and requires a plumbing permit.

### Practical Tips for NB Homeowners

Good lighting makes or breaks entertaining spaces. Plan for layered lighting: recessed pot lights for general illumination, pendant fixtures over the island for ambiance, and under-cabinet LEDs for task lighting along the counters. If you are adding new electrical circuits for lighting and island outlets, this requires an electrical permit and inspection. Older NB homes with 60-amp panels will likely need a panel upgrade (\$1,500 to \$4,000) to handle the additional load of a modern entertaining kitchen.

Range hood venting is another important consideration. When cooking for guests, your kitchen produces significantly more heat and moisture. In New Brunswick's humid summers, a range hood that vents to the outside is essential rather than a recirculating model. Budget \$400 to \$1,500 for a properly ducted range hood installation.

Plan your renovation timeline carefully. Contractors in New Brunswick are busiest from May through October. If you want your new entertaining kitchen ready for summer gatherings, start the design process in January and book your contractor by March. Alternatively, scheduling your renovation for the November-to-March window often yields 10 to 15 percent savings and faster availability.

Need help finding a kitchen renovator who specializes in entertaining-friendly layouts? New Brunswick Kitchens can match you with local contractors for free estimates on your project.

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Q8

## How do I plan a galley kitchen renovation for maximum efficiency?

**A well-planned galley kitchen is one of the most efficient layouts available, keeping everything within one or two steps of the cook.** The key to a successful galley renovation is maintaining the classic work triangle between your sink, stove, and refrigerator while maximizing counter space and storage along both walls.

The ideal galley kitchen has **4 to 5 feet of clearance between the two parallel counter runs**. Less than 3.5 feet and two people cannot pass comfortably or open appliance doors safely. More than 6 feet and you lose the efficiency advantage because you are walking too far between stations. In many older New Brunswick homes built in the 1960s through 1980s, existing galley kitchens have roughly 3.5 to 4.5 feet of aisle width, which is actually close to optimal.

### Making the Most of Your Galley Layout

Place your **sink and stove on the same wall** with 24 to 36 inches of counter space between them. This is your primary work zone where you will prep, cook, and plate. The refrigerator goes on the opposite wall, ideally near the

entrance so groceries can be unloaded without walking through the cooking zone. This arrangement keeps the work triangle tight, with total distances between the three points adding up to no more than 20 to 26 feet.

Counter space is always at a premium in galley kitchens. Extend your counters all the way to the walls on both sides rather than leaving gaps. Consider a **butcher block pull-out counter** that slides out from under the main counter when you need extra prep space and tucks away when not in use. In NB kitchens, butcher block holds up well for occasional use but avoid it as your primary near-sink counter because the Maritime humidity in summer promotes warping and mould growth.

For cabinetry, **upper cabinets that extend to the ceiling** add 25 to 30 percent more storage compared to standard 30-inch uppers with a gap above. In New Brunswick, semi-custom cabinets in the \$10,000 to \$18,000 range offer ceiling-height options with 4 to 8 weeks lead time. Stock cabinets from big box stores rarely come in ceiling-height sizes, so you would need filler panels or a soffit to close the gap.

Lighting is critical in a galley because the cook's body often blocks overhead light. Install **under-cabinet LED task lighting** along both runs, which is a simple DIY project with plug-in strips, plus recessed ceiling lights spaced 3 to 4 feet apart down the centre of the aisle.

Ventilation matters even more in a narrow galley. Cooking odours and moisture concentrate quickly in the enclosed space. A properly ducted range hood venting to the exterior is a must in New Brunswick, where summer humidity already pushes indoor moisture levels high. Recirculating hoods simply do not cut it in a galley layout.

A typical galley kitchen renovation in New Brunswick runs **\$20,000 to \$40,000** depending on whether you are keeping the existing footprint and plumbing or making changes. Keeping the sink and appliances in their current positions saves \$2,000 to \$5,000 by avoiding plumbing and electrical rough-in work. If the layout is sound and the cabinet boxes are in good condition, **cabinet refacing at \$5,000 to \$12,000** combined with new countertops and backsplash delivers a dramatic transformation at a fraction of full renovation costs.

Get matched with a kitchen renovator experienced in galley layouts through New Brunswick Kitchens for free estimates.

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## What size kitchen island fits a standard NB kitchen?

**Most standard New Brunswick kitchens of 10 by 12 feet can accommodate an island of approximately 4 feet long by 2 to 2.5 feet deep**, leaving adequate walkway clearance on all sides. The minimum clearance around any kitchen island should be 36 inches, with 42 to 48 inches preferred on sides where people will be walking past someone working at the counter.

New Brunswick's housing stock includes a wide range of kitchen sizes. Homes built in the 1960s through 1980s, which are very common in Moncton, Fredericton, and Saint John, typically have kitchens in the 80 to 120 square foot range. Newer homes built after 2000 tend to have larger open-concept kitchens of 150 to 250 square feet. The island size that works for your kitchen depends entirely on the floor dimensions and the existing layout of cabinets, appliances, and doorways.

Here is a practical guide based on common NB kitchen sizes. A kitchen that is **10 by 10 feet or smaller** generally cannot accommodate a fixed island with proper clearances. Consider a rolling kitchen cart instead, which can be moved out of the way when not in use. A kitchen of **10 by 12 feet** can fit a 4-by-2-foot island, giving you a useful prep surface but likely not enough overhang for seating. At **12 by 12 feet**, you can go up to a 5-by-2.5-foot island with a 12-inch overhang on one side for two stools. A **12 by 14 foot or larger** kitchen opens up options for a 6-to-8-foot island with seating for three or four people, a prep sink, or integrated storage.

### Planning Your Island

Before committing to an island, **tape out the footprint on your floor** with painter's tape. Include the overhang for seating if planned. Live with it for a few days, walking around it, opening appliance doors, and pulling out drawers to make sure nothing collides and the traffic flow feels natural.

Adding plumbing to an island for a prep sink costs \$1,500 to \$3,500 in New Brunswick and requires a plumbing permit. Electrical outlets on an island require a dedicated circuit and must meet NB Building Code requirements for GFCI protection. If your home has a 60-amp panel, common in older NB homes, you may need a panel upgrade (\$1,500 to \$4,000) before adding island circuits.

A basic island with stock cabinetry and a laminate top costs \$1,500 to \$3,500 installed. A semi-custom island with quartz countertop, seating overhang, and integrated storage runs \$4,000 to \$8,000. A custom island with waterfall edges, a prep sink, and premium materials can reach \$10,000 to \$15,000 or more.

Because island installation involves levelling the base precisely on what are often uneven floors in older NB homes, this is a job best left to a professional installer. Get matched with a local kitchen renovator through New Brunswick Kitchens for free estimates on your island project.

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## How do I convert a closed kitchen to open concept in a 1970s NB home?

Converting a closed kitchen to open concept in a 1970s New Brunswick home is very achievable, but you must first determine whether the walls you want to remove are load-bearing. In most 1970s NB homes, at least one kitchen wall runs perpendicular to the floor joists and carries structural load from above. Removing it without proper engineering is dangerous and a code violation.

The first step is hiring a **structural engineer** to assess which walls are load-bearing. In New Brunswick, a residential structural assessment typically costs \$500 to \$1,200. The engineer will specify the size and type of beam (typically an LVL or steel beam) needed to replace the wall, the post locations, and whether the foundation can handle the point loads from the new posts. This assessment is required before your municipality or Regional Service Commission will issue a building permit, which is mandatory for any structural modification.

### What to Expect During the Work

Once engineering is complete and the permit is in hand, your contractor will install temporary shoring walls to carry the load above while the existing wall is removed and the new beam is installed. This process typically takes 2 to 4 days for the structural phase. The total cost for removing a load-bearing wall and installing a beam in a typical NB home runs **\$3,000 to \$8,000**, depending on the span and whether steel or engineered lumber is used.

1970s NB homes often have several hidden issues that surface during an open-concept conversion. **Galvanized plumbing** is very common in this era and should be replaced during renovation because it corrodes internally and reduces water pressure. Budget \$2,000 to \$5,000 for re-plumbing the kitchen area. **Electrical panels** from this era are frequently 60-amp, which cannot support a modern kitchen with today's appliances. A panel upgrade to 100-amp or 200-amp costs \$1,500 to \$4,000 and is practically a requirement when opening up the kitchen.

You may also encounter **asbestos in floor tiles** (9-by-9-inch tiles were commonly used through the 1970s) and potentially knob-and-tube wiring in older sections of the home. Asbestos tile removal requires a licensed abatement contractor in New Brunswick and adds \$1,500 to \$4,000 to the project. Never attempt to remove suspected asbestos materials yourself.

### Planning the New Open Layout

With the wall removed, you gain an opportunity to rethink the entire kitchen layout. The most popular approach in NB open-concept conversions is an **L-shaped layout along the two remaining walls with a new island** where the wall used to be. The island defines the kitchen space, provides seating that faces the living or dining area, and keeps the cook connected to the household.

Flooring continuity matters in an open-concept space. **Luxury vinyl plank at \$2,000 to \$4,000** is the most practical choice for NB homes because it runs seamlessly from kitchen to living area, handles the humidity swings between Maritime summers and dry heated winters, and is fully waterproof near the sink and dishwasher. Matching the existing living room floor is another option, but hardwood near the kitchen sink and dishwasher is risky due to water exposure.

A full closed-to-open kitchen conversion in a 1970s NB home typically runs **\$50,000 to \$80,000** when you include structural work, new cabinets, countertops, flooring, electrical upgrades, and plumbing updates. Book your contractor by March or April for a summer start, or consider the November-to-March window for potential savings of 10 to 15 percent.

Find local kitchen renovation contractors experienced with open-concept conversions through the New Brunswick Construction Network at [newbrunswickconstructionnetwork.com](http://newbrunswickconstructionnetwork.com).

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**Q11**

## What is the minimum clearance needed around a kitchen island?

**The minimum clearance around a kitchen island is 36 inches (approximately 91 cm) on all sides, with 42 to 48 inches recommended for working sides where appliances or cabinets face the island.** These clearances ensure that cabinet doors and dishwashers can open fully, two people can pass each other safely, and the kitchen meets NB Building Code accessibility requirements.

The 36-inch minimum applies to walkway-only sides of the island, such as a passage between the island and a wall with no cabinetry. On the working side, where your stove, sink, or base cabinets face the island, you need at least **42 inches of clearance**. This allows someone to stand at the counter while another person opens a cabinet or dishwasher door behind them. If your kitchen serves as a thoroughfare between rooms, which is common in many older NB homes with pass-through layouts, **48 inches** on the high-traffic side prevents bottlenecks.

For island seating, the clearance behind the stools is often the most overlooked dimension. You need a minimum of **36 inches from the edge of the counter overhang to any wall or obstruction** to allow someone to comfortably sit down, stand up, and push in a stool. With counter-height seating (36 inches high), stools are shallower and need slightly less room. With bar-height seating (42 inches), taller stools have a larger footprint and may need 40 to 44 inches of clearance behind them.

Before committing to an island, **measure your kitchen and tape out the island footprint plus clearances on the floor**. Include the overhang for seating. Walk around it, open all adjacent cabinet doors and the dishwasher, and pull out drawers. If anything collides or the walkways feel tight, the island is too large for the space.

In many New Brunswick homes built in the 1960s through 1990s, kitchens are in the 80 to 120 square foot range. A kitchen that is 10 by 10 feet or smaller typically cannot accommodate a fixed island with proper 36-inch clearances on all sides. In these cases, a **rolling cart** that can be repositioned or a **peninsula attached to one wall** is a better solution. A peninsula only requires clearance on three sides rather than four, making it workable in tighter spaces.

If your island includes a sink or cooktop, additional clearances apply. A cooktop on an island should have a minimum of **24 inches of counter space** on each side for safety, plus a range hood or downdraft ventilation system. In NB's humid climate, any island cooktop absolutely needs exterior-vented ventilation to manage moisture and odours.

Planning an island addition in your NB kitchen? New Brunswick Kitchens can match you with local contractors who will measure your space and design an island that fits properly. Get a free estimate on your project.

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**Q12**

## How do I maximize storage in a small NB kitchen?

**The most impactful way to maximize storage in a small NB kitchen is to extend your upper cabinets to the ceiling and add interior organizers to every base cabinet.** Standard 30-inch upper cabinets leave 12 to 18

inches of dead space above them that collects dust and wastes valuable real estate. Ceiling-height uppers add 25 to 30 percent more storage without taking up any additional floor space.

Many New Brunswick homes, particularly those built in the 1960s through 1990s, have kitchens in the 80 to 100 square foot range. These compact kitchens require creative storage solutions to function well for a modern household. The good news is that a well-organized small kitchen can store just as much as a poorly organized large one.

**Pull-out drawers and organizers** inside base cabinets transform deep, hard-to-reach spaces into fully accessible storage. A blind corner pull-out system recovers up to 70 percent of the storage lost in corner cabinets. Pull-out spice racks beside the stove, tray dividers in narrow cabinets, and under-sink organizers that work around plumbing all make a measurable difference. Retrofitting existing cabinets with pull-out shelves costs \$100 to \$300 per cabinet, while new semi-custom cabinets with these features built in run \$10,000 to \$18,000 for a small kitchen.

## Vertical and Underused Spaces

The **inside of cabinet doors** is often overlooked storage space. Mount small racks for spice jars, measuring cups, or pot lids on the inside of base and upper cabinet doors. A **pegboard or magnetic knife strip** on a backsplash wall keeps tools accessible without using counter or drawer space. Open shelving in a small section replaces a bulky upper cabinet with easy-access display storage for frequently used items like mugs, oils, and everyday dishes.

Consider a **tall pantry cabinet** if you can fit one at the end of a run. A single 24-by-84-inch pantry cabinet with pull-out shelves holds as much as 6 to 8 linear feet of standard upper cabinets and keeps dry goods, small appliances, and baking supplies organized and accessible. In a small NB kitchen, this single addition often solves the biggest storage complaint.

The **toe kick area** under base cabinets offers another hidden storage opportunity. Toe kick drawers are shallow pull-out drawers installed in the recessed space at the bottom of cabinets, perfect for baking sheets, cutting boards, and flat items. They add storage without changing the kitchen footprint.

For NB homes with older kitchens, **cabinet refacing combined with new interior organizers** (\$5,000 to \$12,000) is often the most cost-effective approach. You keep the existing cabinet boxes if they are structurally sound, install new doors and drawer fronts, and upgrade the interiors with modern pull-out systems. This avoids the disruption and cost of a full cabinet replacement while dramatically improving both storage capacity and the look of the kitchen.

One important caution for NB kitchens: in our Maritime climate with humid summers and dry heated winters, **solid wood shelving and organizers hold up better than particleboard or MDF in areas near the sink or exterior**

**walls** where moisture and temperature variation are greatest.

Need help redesigning your small kitchen for better storage? New Brunswick Kitchens can match you with local kitchen renovators who specialize in maximizing compact spaces.

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## What are the pros and cons of a peninsula vs island layout?

A **peninsula** is the better choice for most New Brunswick kitchens under 120 square feet, while an island works best in larger open-concept spaces of 150 square feet or more. Both add counter space, storage, and a social gathering point, but they have fundamentally different space requirements and functional characteristics.

A **peninsula** extends from an existing counter run or wall, creating an L-shaped or U-shaped layout with a bar or work surface on the open side. Because it connects to the existing cabinetry, it only needs walkway clearance on three sides rather than four. This makes it ideal for the compact kitchens found in many NB homes built from the 1960s through the 1990s, where a full island would leave inadequate clearances.

An **island** stands free in the centre of the kitchen, unconnected to any wall or counter. It provides 360-degree access, creates a natural gathering point, and can serve as a room divider in open-concept layouts. However, it requires a minimum of 36 inches of clearance on all four sides, with 42 to 48 inches preferred on working sides. This means your kitchen needs to be at least 12 by 12 feet to accommodate even a modest island.

### Cost and Installation Differences

Peninsulas are generally **\$2,000 to \$5,000 less expensive** than comparable islands because they share cabinetry, countertop material, and often plumbing and electrical connections with the existing run. There is no need for standalone base cabinet framing or separate countertop templating. In many cases, a peninsula can be added without any plumbing or electrical work, avoiding the need for permits.

Islands typically cost **\$3,000 to \$15,000** depending on size, materials, and features. Adding plumbing for a prep sink runs \$1,500 to \$3,500 in New Brunswick and requires a plumbing permit. Electrical outlets on an island require running wiring through the floor, which adds cost and complexity, especially in homes with basements or crawl spaces common across New Brunswick.

The **traffic flow** difference is significant. A peninsula creates a defined entry point to the kitchen, which some homeowners prefer because it keeps the kitchen feeling like its own zone even in an open layout. An island allows people to circulate freely around it, which is better for entertaining but can make the kitchen feel less contained and harder to keep guests out of the work zone.

For **seating**, both can accommodate stools with a 12-inch overhang. However, island seating faces outward toward the living area, which is more social and comfortable for guests. Peninsula seating can feel like you are facing a wall or into the kitchen rather than toward the gathering space.

One practical advantage of a peninsula in NB's older homes is that it **avoids running utilities through the floor**. Many 1970s and 1980s NB homes have concrete slab floors or finished basements where cutting trenches for island plumbing and electrical is expensive and disruptive. A peninsula taps into the existing wall utilities, saving both money and construction time.

The bottom line: measure your kitchen carefully, tape out both options on the floor, and live with the markings for a few days before deciding. If your kitchen is under 120 square feet, a peninsula will likely serve you better. If you have a spacious open-concept kitchen, an island provides the flexibility and visual impact that makes it worth the extra investment.

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Q14

## How do I design a kitchen for aging in place in New Brunswick?

**Designing a kitchen for aging in place means planning for comfort, safety, and accessibility now so the space works well for decades to come.** The core principles are reducing the need to reach, bend, or climb; ensuring safe footing and adequate lighting; and choosing durable, low-maintenance materials that handle NB's climate without constant upkeep.

**Counter height variation** is one of the most impactful aging-in-place features. Include at least one section of counter at 30 to 32 inches instead of the standard 36 inches. This lower section allows someone to work while seated in a chair or wheelchair and is also comfortable for tasks like rolling dough or mixing. A 4-to-6-foot lower section on a wall run or island end serves this purpose without disrupting the overall kitchen flow.

**Pull-out drawers in base cabinets** eliminate the need to kneel or bend deep into dark cabinet interiors. Deep drawers for pots, pull-out shelves for pantry items, and lazy Susans or pull-out corner systems keep everything at arm's reach. Upper cabinets should have pull-down shelf systems or be limited to the first shelf's height for daily items. Budget \$100 to \$300 per cabinet for pull-out retrofits, or specify these features when ordering semi-custom

or custom cabinets.

## Safety and Accessibility Features

**Flooring** is critical for fall prevention. Luxury vinyl plank is the best all-around choice for aging-in-place kitchens in New Brunswick. It provides a slip-resistant surface even when wet, cushions falls better than ceramic tile, stays warmer underfoot than tile during NB's cold winters, and handles the humidity swings between seasons without warping or buckling. Budget \$2,000 to \$4,000 for LVP kitchen flooring. Avoid high-gloss tiles and polished stone, which become dangerously slippery when wet.

**Lighting** needs increase significantly with age. Plan for layered lighting at roughly double the brightness you would typically install. Under-cabinet LED strips illuminate work surfaces without shadows, recessed ceiling lights provide even general illumination, and night lights or motion-sensor toe kick lighting help with nighttime kitchen visits. Rocker-style light switches are easier to operate than toggle switches, and placing them at 42 inches rather than the standard 48 inches improves reach.

**Lever-style faucets** and D-shaped cabinet pulls replace knobs that require grip strength and fine motor control. A touchless or single-lever kitchen faucet with a pull-down sprayer makes dishwashing easier and costs \$200 to \$600 installed. A wall-mounted pot filler above the stove eliminates carrying heavy pots of water across the kitchen.

For appliances, consider a **wall oven at counter height** rather than a range that requires bending to access. An induction cooktop is safer than gas because there is no open flame, and it shuts off automatically when a pot is removed. A raised dishwasher, elevated 6 to 12 inches above floor level on a custom cabinet base, reduces bending when loading and unloading.

**Wider walkways** of 44 to 48 inches between counters accommodate walkers and wheelchairs. This may require adjusting the layout, particularly in the compact kitchens found in older NB homes. If structural changes are needed to widen doorways or reconfigure walls, a building permit is required through your local municipality or Regional Service Commission.

An aging-in-place kitchen renovation in New Brunswick typically runs **\$35,000 to \$65,000** depending on the scope of modifications needed. Many of these features add only 10 to 15 percent to the cost of a standard renovation when planned from the start, far less than retrofitting them later.

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Q15

## How do I plan for kitchen waste and recycling storage in my NB renovation?

**Plan for a minimum three-bin pull-out waste system in your kitchen renovation to accommodate New Brunswick's municipal waste sorting requirements for garbage, recyclables, and compost.** Waste and recycling storage is one of the most overlooked elements of kitchen design, and retrofitting it after the renovation is far more costly and awkward than building it in from the start.

Most New Brunswick municipalities, including Moncton, Fredericton, and Saint John, operate **curbside sorting programs** that require separating household waste into at least garbage, single-stream recycling, and organic waste or compost. Your kitchen needs dedicated space for each stream, ideally concealed inside cabinetry for both hygiene and aesthetics. The most popular solution is a **pull-out waste organizer** installed in a base cabinet, which slides out on full-extension drawer slides for easy access and hides everything behind a cabinet door when closed.

For the pull-out system, allocate a **minimum 18-inch-wide base cabinet** near the sink or at the end of a countertop run, which fits two bins side by side. A 24-inch cabinet is even better and can accommodate three bins for garbage, recycling, and compost. Quality pull-out waste systems from manufacturers like Rev-A-Shelf cost \$150 to \$400 for the hardware, plus the cost of the cabinet itself. Top-mount systems that attach to the cabinet door so the bins pull out when the door opens are the most convenient because you can open them with one hand or a knee bump while your hands are full. Bottom-mount systems are less expensive but require you to open the door and then pull the drawer separately.

### Placement and Sizing Strategy

Position your waste cabinet within one or two steps of your primary prep area and sink. The natural workflow in a kitchen moves from prep to cooking to cleanup, and having your waste and recycling bins along that path makes sorting effortless. If your kitchen island includes a prep sink, consider a small single-bin pull-out on the island for food scraps during meal prep, with the main waste station near the primary sink.

For household size, plan bin capacity based on your family's volume. A family of four in NB typically generates enough waste to fill a standard 35-litre garbage bin and a 35-litre recycling bin every three to five days between collection periods. If your municipality collects bi-weekly, you may need larger bins or a secondary recycling station in a pantry, mudroom, or garage. Compost bins should have lids that seal well because NB's warm, humid summers accelerate decomposition and odour. Look for bins with charcoal-filter lids or plan to empty the kitchen compost bin into your outdoor green bin daily during summer months.

Do not forget about **non-standard recyclables** that NB residents need to manage separately, such as beverage containers eligible for deposit refund at Encorp Atlantic depots. A small bag or bin in the pantry for returnables keeps them separate from curbside recycling. If you have space, a pull-out recycling centre in a tall pantry cabinet with multiple bins gives you room to pre-sort paper, plastics, and glass.

During the design phase, confirm with your cabinet supplier that pull-out waste hardware is compatible with the specific cabinet line you are selecting. Some stock cabinets from big-box stores have internal dimensions that do not accommodate standard waste systems. Semi-custom and custom cabinets (\$10,000 to \$25,000 for a full kitchen) can be built to exact specifications for your waste management needs. Find a kitchen renovator who prioritizes functional design through New Brunswick Kitchens.

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## What is the best layout for a kitchen with two cooks?

**A double-island or large U-shaped layout with two distinct work zones is the best kitchen design for two cooks in New Brunswick homes.** The key is creating separate prep, cooking, and cleanup stations so two people can work simultaneously without colliding at the sink or stove.

The most effective two-cook layout divides the kitchen into two complete work triangles — each with its own sink, counter space, and access to cooking or prep appliances. In larger NB kitchens (200+ square feet), a **double-island layout** achieves this beautifully: one island handles prep with a secondary sink and cutting space, while the main counter run holds the range, primary sink, and dishwasher. For mid-sized kitchens more typical of New Brunswick's housing stock (especially 1970s–1990s homes in Moncton, Fredericton, and Saint John), a **U-shaped or G-shaped layout** with a large island offers the best balance of space and functionality.

The critical measurements for a two-cook kitchen are **42 to 48 inches of clearance** between facing counters or between the island and perimeter cabinets. The standard 36-inch clearance that works for one person becomes a bottleneck the moment two people are moving with hot pots and loaded cutting boards. If your NB kitchen's footprint cannot accommodate at least 42 inches of walkway on all sides, a two-cook layout may require removing a wall or reconfiguring the adjacent dining area — both of which require a building permit if load-bearing walls are involved.

### Planning the Two Zones

Each cook's zone should have a **minimum of 36 inches of uninterrupted counter space** for comfortable prep work. Zone one typically centres around the range or cooktop with the primary sink and dishwasher, while zone two focuses on a secondary prep sink, a dedicated cutting area, and perhaps a second small appliance station. Adding a second sink runs \$1,500–\$3,500 including plumbing rough-in, but it transforms usability for two-cook households.

Electrical planning is especially important in older NB homes. Two active cooking zones mean more countertop appliances running simultaneously — stand mixers, food processors, kettles. Many pre-1990s New Brunswick homes have 60-amp panels that simply cannot support this demand. Budget \$1,500–\$4,000 for a panel upgrade to 100-amp or 200-amp service, and ensure you have the NB Building Code minimum of two 20-amp small appliance circuits, though a two-cook kitchen really benefits from three or four.

For the overall renovation budget, a two-cook kitchen layout in New Brunswick typically falls in the **\$35,000–\$65,000 range** for a mid-range to high-end finish, depending on whether structural changes are needed. Custom cabinetry (\$18,000–\$25,000+) often makes more sense here than stock because you need non-standard configurations — deeper drawers, varied counter heights, and specific cabinet widths to maximize both zones.

Semi-custom cabinets (\$10,000–\$18,000) can work well if the layout fits standard sizing.

Book your contractor by March or April for a summer start in New Brunswick, when most renovators are busiest from May through October. A two-cook kitchen involves coordination between cabinetry, plumbing, and electrical trades, so expect a 6–10 week project timeline once work begins. Getting three or more quotes is essential — NB pricing varies 30–40% between contractors for identical scope, and a project this involved benefits from finding a renovator who has designed multi-zone kitchens before.

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**Q17**

## How do I incorporate a coffee station into my NB kitchen design?

**A dedicated coffee station works best as a small countertop zone — 24 to 36 inches wide — tucked into a corner, a cabinet alcove, or along a secondary counter run away from the main cooking and prep areas.**

This keeps your morning coffee routine from competing with breakfast prep and dish cleanup.

The ideal coffee station needs just a few essentials: **enough counter depth** (at least 16 inches for most espresso machines, 12 inches for a drip brewer), **a dedicated electrical outlet** on its own circuit or at minimum a 20-amp small appliance circuit, and **upper or lower storage** for mugs, beans, filters, and syrups within arm's reach. In many New Brunswick homes built in the 1970s through 1990s, the kitchen may only have a few countertop outlets — adding a dedicated outlet for your coffee station costs \$150–\$350 and requires an electrical permit and inspection through your local municipality.

### Design Options by Budget

The simplest approach is a **countertop coffee nook** (\$200–\$500 for accessories and organization): designate a corner of your existing counter, add a small shelf or mug rack above, and keep your machine, grinder, and supplies grouped together. This works well for NB homeowners doing a cosmetic kitchen refresh in the \$12,000–\$20,000 range who want better function without structural changes.

A **built-in coffee bar** (\$1,500–\$4,000 as part of a renovation) takes things further. During a cabinet renovation, your installer can create a recessed alcove with a countertop at standard 36-inch height or a raised 42-inch bar height, upper shelving, and a pull-out drawer for coffee supplies. Some NB homeowners opt for a cabinet with retractable doors that close to hide the entire station when not in use — this keeps the kitchen looking clean and protects equipment from cooking grease and moisture.

For a **premium built-in coffee station** (\$3,000–\$8,000+), consider a plumbed-in espresso machine with a direct water line. This eliminates the need to fill a reservoir daily but requires running a water supply line, which adds plumbing costs of \$500–\$1,500. A small bar sink (\$300–\$600 installed) beside the coffee station is another popular upgrade that lets you rinse mugs and dump espresso pucks without crossing to the main sink.

New Brunswick's dry winter air (indoor humidity dropping to 15–25% with forced-air heating) is worth considering if you choose solid wood shelving or butcher block as your coffee station countertop — both need periodic oiling, and the dry air can cause checking and cracking. A quartz or laminate surface is more practical for a dedicated coffee area where spills and water rings are daily occurrences. Laminate runs \$20–\$45 per square foot installed, and for a small 24-by-24-inch station surface, you may be able to use a remnant piece from your main countertop fabrication.

Placement matters for daily flow. Position the coffee station **away from the main cooking triangle** — near the kitchen entrance, in a butler's pantry pass-through, or along a wall opposite the range — so the first person up in the morning is not standing in front of the stove or blocking the dishwasher. If you are planning a full kitchen renovation in the \$25,000–\$45,000 range, talk to your contractor about incorporating the coffee zone into the initial design rather than adding it as an afterthought.

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**Q18**

## How do I design a butler's pantry for my NB kitchen renovation?

A butler's pantry is a service corridor or secondary prep area between the kitchen and dining room, typically 4 to 8 feet long and 4 to 6 feet wide, that adds both storage and functional workspace to your NB

**kitchen renovation.** It is one of the most requested upgrades in higher-end New Brunswick renovations, and with careful planning, it can work even in older NB homes with tighter floor plans.

The ideal butler's pantry includes upper and lower cabinets along one or both walls, a countertop for staging food and drinks, and often a small secondary sink. This layout keeps clutter — small appliances, serving dishes, bar supplies — out of the main kitchen while giving you extra prep space during holiday entertaining and family gatherings. For NB homeowners who love to host, this is a practical luxury that pays dividends every Thanksgiving and Christmas.

## Layout and Space Requirements

You need a minimum passage width of 42 inches (3.5 feet) for a single-wall butler's pantry, or 48-60 inches for a galley-style layout with cabinets on both sides. Many older NB homes built in the 1960s-1980s have a hallway or unused passage between the kitchen and dining room that can be converted with minimal structural changes. If you are working with a tighter footprint, a single-wall layout with 12-inch-deep upper cabinets and 24-inch-deep base cabinets maximizes storage while keeping the walkway clear.

For countertops, butcher block (\$40-\$70 per square foot) is a popular butler's pantry choice because the warm wood adds contrast to the main kitchen's quartz or granite. Since the butler's pantry sink sees lighter use, butcher block holds up well here — just keep up with oiling every 3-6 months, especially during NB's humid summer months. If you want zero maintenance, a laminate countertop (\$20-\$45 per square foot) is perfectly practical for a secondary space.

## Plumbing, Electrical, and Permits

Adding a **secondary sink** means extending supply and drain lines, which adds \$1,500-\$4,000 to your budget and requires a plumbing permit in NB. Position the butler's pantry sink as close to the main kitchen plumbing stack as possible to minimize costs. You will also want at least two dedicated electrical outlets — one for small appliances like a coffee maker or wine fridge, and one for general use. Any new electrical circuits require a permit and inspection through your local municipality or Regional Service Commission.

A **wine fridge or beverage cooler** is a common butler's pantry feature. Undercounter models require a dedicated 15-amp circuit and adequate ventilation clearance (check the manufacturer's specifications). Budget \$500-\$2,000 for the unit plus \$200-\$500 for the electrical hookup.

## Budget and Practical Tips

A well-equipped butler's pantry adds \$8,000-\$20,000 to your kitchen renovation depending on finishes, plumbing, and electrical work. Stock cabinets from big box stores can keep costs on the lower end since butler's pantry

cabinets do not need to match the main kitchen exactly — a complementary colour or style works beautifully. If your main kitchen has white shaker cabinets, consider a contrasting navy or sage green for the pantry.

Ventilation is critical in NB's humid climate. A butler's pantry without an exterior window should have good air circulation to prevent moisture buildup behind cabinets and under the sink. Consider a small exhaust fan if the space is enclosed. If you are considering a butler's pantry as part of a larger kitchen renovation, get matched with a kitchen renovator through New Brunswick Kitchens for a free estimate on designing the layout that works best for your home.

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## How do I design an accessible kitchen for wheelchair users in NB?

An accessible kitchen for wheelchair users requires lowered countertops, roll-under clearance at the sink and work areas, wider pathways, and appliance placement within reach range — with a typical NB budget of \$40,000 to \$75,000 or more depending on how much structural modification is needed. Designing for wheelchair accessibility goes well beyond simply widening doorways; it requires rethinking the entire kitchen layout for independence and safety.

**Counter height** is the most fundamental change. Standard kitchen counters are 36 inches high, which is too tall for most wheelchair users. Accessible work surfaces should be 28 to 34 inches high, with at least one section providing **roll-under clearance** — a minimum of 27 inches from floor to underside and 30 inches wide, allowing the wheelchair to pull fully underneath. The most effective approach is a multi-height kitchen: standard 36-inch counters for standing family members and lowered 30 to 32-inch sections for the wheelchair user, with removable or fold-down counter extensions where needed.

**Sink placement** should be at a lowered section with full roll-under access. Choose a shallow-basin sink (no deeper than 6.5 inches) to allow knee clearance underneath, and install the drain and supply pipes as far back against the wall as possible. Insulate exposed pipes under accessible sinks to prevent burns from hot water lines contacting the wheelchair user's legs. A single-lever or touchless faucet eliminates the grip-and-twist motion that can be difficult for users with limited hand strength.

**Pathway width** throughout the kitchen should be a minimum of 42 inches for comfortable wheelchair navigation, with 60 inches at any point where a full turn is needed. In many older NB homes — especially bungalows and split-levels from the 1960s through 1980s — kitchen doorways are only 28 to 30 inches wide and will need to be widened to at least 36 inches, ideally with pocket doors or open archways rather than swinging doors that obstruct the pathway.

### Cabinets and Storage

**Lower cabinets** should use pull-out shelves, lazy Susans, and drawer-style base cabinets rather than deep shelves that require reaching. Upper cabinets are largely inaccessible from a wheelchair unless they are wall-mounted pull-down systems (available from specialty manufacturers at \$200 to \$500 per unit) that lower to countertop height. An alternative is open shelving at accessible heights or a pantry with pull-out racks.

**Appliance selection and placement** matters enormously. A wall oven installed at a lowered height (with the bottom of the oven door at 30 to 32 inches) is far more accessible and safer than a traditional range where you must reach over open burners. A side-opening oven door is ideal. Cooktops should have front-mounted controls to

eliminate reaching over hot surfaces. A French-door refrigerator provides better wheelchair access than a top-freezer model, and a drawer-style dishwasher eliminates bending.

## NB-Specific Considerations

If your renovation involves widening doorways or modifying load-bearing walls to create the open layout that accessible kitchens typically require, you will need a building permit and potentially engineered drawings. In Fredericton, Moncton, and Saint John, permit processing takes one to three weeks. Electrical work for lowered outlets (15 to 20 inches above the floor instead of standard 42 to 48 inches for countertop outlets) requires an electrical permit.

Check whether you qualify for the **Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) residential rehabilitation assistance** or provincial accessibility grants that may offset some costs. Your contractor can help navigate available funding options.

This is a project that benefits greatly from professional kitchen design expertise. Find a kitchen renovation contractor experienced with accessible design through New Brunswick Kitchens — we can match you for free.

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Q20

## How do I design a U-shaped kitchen layout for a small NB home?

**A U-shaped layout is one of the most efficient designs for small NB kitchens, typically working best in spaces that are at least 8 feet wide and 10 feet long.** The three-wall configuration maximizes counter space and storage while keeping everything within arm's reach — a real advantage when you're working in the compact kitchens found in many 1960s-1980s New Brunswick homes.

The key to making a U-shape work in a smaller kitchen is maintaining adequate clearance between the opposing runs of cabinetry. You need a minimum of 42 inches (about 3.5 feet) of walkway space between facing counters,

though 48 inches is more comfortable and allows two people to work without bumping elbows. If your kitchen is too narrow for this, you'll end up with a cramped space where cabinet doors and drawers collide — a common mistake in older Moncton and Saint John homes where rooms tend to run a bit smaller than modern construction.

## **Making the Work Triangle Efficient**

Place your sink at the base of the U (typically under a window, which is ideal for NB's daylight), your refrigerator at the end of one arm, and your range or cooktop at the end of the other. This creates a natural work triangle where no leg is more than 6-7 feet, keeping meal prep fluid. In NB's older housing stock, the sink is often already on an exterior wall with existing plumbing — keeping it there saves \$1,500-\$4,000 in plumbing relocation costs.

For cabinets, consider running uppers to the ceiling on all three walls. In a small kitchen, that vertical storage is invaluable. Semi-custom cabinets (\$10,000-\$18,000) allow you to order exact sizes that fit your U-shape without filler strips eating into usable space. Stock cabinets from big box stores come in 3-inch increments and often leave awkward gaps in U-shaped layouts. Given NB's dry winter air from forced-air heating, choose MDF-core painted cabinet doors over thermofoil — thermofoil tends to delaminate within 5-10 years in our climate.

## **Avoiding Common Pitfalls**

Corner cabinets are the trickiest part of a U-shaped layout. You'll have two inside corners, and without proper planning, that's a lot of dead space. Lazy Susans, blind corner pull-outs, or magic corner systems can reclaim 60-80% of that otherwise wasted area. Budget \$300-\$600 per corner for good hardware.

Lighting is critical in a U-shape because upper cabinets on three walls create shadows on every counter surface. Plan for under-cabinet LED lighting on all three runs — a cost-effective upgrade at \$200-\$500 that makes a dramatic difference. Also ensure your electrical plan includes at least two 20-amp small appliance circuits for countertop outlets, as required by NB building code, plus dedicated circuits for major appliances.

If your small U-shaped kitchen has an exterior wall, pay attention to insulation and vapour barriers behind the cabinets. NB's temperature swings cause condensation on poorly insulated exterior walls, and moisture trapped behind cabinets leads to mold. A kitchen renovator experienced with NB homes will know to check and address this before installing cabinetry.

For a small NB kitchen, a full mid-range U-shaped renovation with new cabinets, quartz countertops, LVP flooring, and updated lighting typically runs \$30,000-\$45,000. Book your contractor by March or April if you want a summer start, since May through October is peak season. Winter renovations can save 10-15% if your schedule is flexible. Get at least three quotes — pricing in NB varies 30-40% between contractors for identical work.

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Q21

## What are the best kitchen window placement options for natural light in NB?

**The best kitchen window placement in New Brunswick maximizes natural light from the south and west exposures while accounting for our Maritime climate's lower sun angles during the long winter months.**

Since NB kitchens can feel dark and closed-in from November through March, smart window choices make a significant difference in how the space looks and feels year-round.

South-facing windows deliver the most consistent natural light throughout the day and are the gold standard for NB kitchens. A window over the sink on a south-facing wall is the classic placement for good reason — you spend significant time at the sink, and natural light there reduces the need for artificial overhead lighting during daytime hours. If your kitchen's sink wall faces north, you'll want to compensate with larger windows or additional window openings on an adjacent wall.

For homes in Moncton, Fredericton, and Saint John where lot sizes can be tight, consider the orientation of neighbouring homes. East-facing windows give bright morning light for breakfast routines but go dim by early afternoon. West-facing windows provide warm afternoon and evening light, though they can cause glare and heat gain during NB's summer months — a consideration for kitchens where you're cooking dinner facing the setting sun.

### Window Types That Work Best

**Casement windows** are the top choice for over-the-sink placement because they crank open outward, making them easy to operate when you're reaching across a countertop. They also seal tightly when closed, which matters in NB's cold winters for preventing drafts and condensation near your work surfaces. Double-hung windows work but the lower sash can be hard to reach behind a deep countertop.

**Garden windows** (box bay windows that project outward) are popular in NB kitchens for growing herbs year-round. They add 12-18 inches of depth and create a mini greenhouse effect, but they must be well-insulated — they're

essentially a bump-out exposed to NB's winter temperatures on three sides. Budget \$1,500-\$3,500 installed for a garden window, compared to \$500-\$1,200 for a standard casement replacement.

If you're doing a larger renovation that involves structural changes, adding a window or enlarging an existing one can transform a dark NB kitchen. This does require a building permit and potentially an engineer's assessment, especially if you're widening an opening in a load-bearing wall. Expect to add \$2,000-\$5,000 for a new window opening including framing, flashing, and finishing.

**Energy efficiency** cannot be an afterthought in NB. Choose triple-pane windows with a minimum Energy Star rating for Zone 2 (NB's climate zone). Low-E coatings reduce heat loss in winter while limiting UV damage to your cabinets and countertops. NB's Maritime humidity means proper window flashing and vapour barriers are essential — moisture getting behind the wall sheathing around a kitchen window leads to rot and mold that you won't see until the damage is extensive.

For kitchens where adding or enlarging windows isn't feasible, consider a tubular skylight (sun tunnel) to bring roof-level daylight into the space for \$500-\$1,500 installed. Light-coloured countertops, glossy backsplash tiles, and under-cabinet LED lighting also help bounce and supplement natural light. NB kitchen contractors experienced with our older housing stock can assess your specific home's orientation and structure to recommend the best options for your situation.

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## How do I plan a kitchen renovation for a bi-level home in New Brunswick?

**Bi-level (split-entry) kitchens in New Brunswick present unique renovation challenges because of their typically compact floor plans, half-level stairwells, and the structural limitations of the split-level design.**

These homes were extremely popular in NB during the 1970s and 1980s, so many are now 40-50 years old with original kitchens that desperately need updating.

The first thing to understand about bi-level kitchen renovations is the layout constraint. In most NB bi-levels, the kitchen sits on the upper level adjacent to the stairwell opening, which eats into usable floor space. The room is often galley-style or a compact L-shape, typically 10-12 feet by 10-14 feet. You're usually working with at least one wall that borders the stairwell — and that wall cannot be moved without major structural work. Plan your renovation within the existing footprint whenever possible, as structural changes in a bi-level can easily add \$15,000-\$30,000 to the project.

### Addressing Common Bi-Level Issues

**Electrical upgrades** are almost always necessary in 1970s-1980s NB bi-levels. Many have 100-amp panels that were adequate for the era but struggle with modern kitchen loads. You'll likely need additional circuits — at minimum two dedicated 20-amp small appliance circuits for countertop outlets (required by NB building code), plus dedicated circuits for the dishwasher, range, refrigerator, and microwave. An electrical panel assessment should be your first step before any design work. Expect \$500-\$4,000 for electrical upgrades depending on scope, and remember that all electrical changes require a permit and inspection through your local municipality.

Many NB bi-levels have **galvanized plumbing** that should be replaced during a kitchen renovation. These pipes corrode internally over decades, reducing water pressure and potentially leaching contaminants. If you're opening walls for any reason, it's cost-effective to replace visible galvanized sections with copper or PEX while the walls are accessible. Budget \$1,500-\$4,000 if plumbing needs to be relocated or replaced.

The **stairwell railing or half-wall** between the kitchen and the staircase is a design opportunity. Some homeowners replace a solid half-wall with an open railing or a countertop-height peninsula that doubles as a breakfast bar. This opens sightlines and makes the kitchen feel larger without structural changes. Just verify with your contractor whether the half-wall is load-bearing before making plans — in many bi-levels, it is.

### Material and Design Choices

For cabinets in a compact bi-level kitchen, maximize vertical storage by running uppers to the ceiling. Light-coloured painted cabinets (whites, light greys) visually expand the space. MDF-core painted doors are the best mid-

range choice for NB's climate — they handle our winter dry air and summer humidity better than thermofoil, which tends to delaminate within 5-10 years. Semi-custom cabinets (\$10,000-\$18,000) let you order sizes that fit your specific dimensions without wasted filler space.

For flooring, LVP (luxury vinyl plank) at \$2,000-\$4,000 is the most practical choice in NB bi-levels. It's waterproof, handles the humidity swings between seasons, and the floating installation works well over the plywood subfloors typical of this era. If you extend the flooring to the stairwell landing, you create visual continuity that makes the kitchen feel more spacious.

A mid-range bi-level kitchen renovation in NB — new cabinets, quartz countertops, LVP flooring, backsplash, lighting, and moderate electrical and plumbing updates — typically runs \$30,000-\$50,000. Book your contractor by March or April for a summer start, or consider a winter renovation for potential 10-15% savings. Get at least three quotes, as NB pricing can vary 30-40% between contractors for the same scope of work.

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**Q23**

## What are the best kitchen layout options for a narrow galley in an older NB house?

**A narrow galley kitchen in an older NB home works best as either a streamlined two-wall galley with optimized storage or, where possible, a modified one-wall layout that opens up floor space.** Many homes built in the 1950s through 1970s across Moncton, Saint John, and Fredericton have galley kitchens that are only 7-9 feet wide, which limits your options but doesn't mean you're stuck with a cramped, dated space.

The classic **two-wall galley** — cabinets and counters on both sides with a walkway down the middle — remains the most efficient layout for a narrow kitchen. The critical measurement is the distance between opposing counters. You need a minimum of 42 inches of clear walkway, with 48 inches being ideal for comfortable movement and allowing cabinet doors and drawers to open without blocking the path. If your galley is narrower than 7.5 feet wall-

to-wall (accounting for 25-inch-deep base cabinets on each side), you may need to use shallower 18-inch-deep base cabinets on one side or switch to a one-wall layout.

For a two-wall galley, place the sink and dishwasher on one wall and the range on the opposite wall. This keeps the work triangle tight — typically 4-6 feet per leg — which is actually the most ergonomic kitchen configuration possible. The refrigerator goes at one end, ideally near the kitchen entry so groceries don't need to travel through the entire space. In older NB homes, the sink is usually already on an exterior wall with existing plumbing, and keeping it there avoids \$1,500-\$4,000 in plumbing relocation costs.

## Opening Up the Space

If your galley has a wall separating it from the dining or living area, removing part of that wall can dramatically transform the kitchen's feel. A pass-through opening or half-wall with a countertop overhang creates visual connection to adjacent rooms and doubles as a serving area. However, **many walls in older NB homes are load-bearing**, especially those running perpendicular to the roof ridge. Before making any plans to open a wall, you need a contractor or structural engineer to assess it. If the wall is load-bearing, a steel or LVL beam must be installed to carry the load — adding \$3,000-\$8,000 to your budget plus a building permit with engineered drawings.

For narrow galleys where walls must stay, visual tricks make a real difference. Light-coloured cabinets and countertops reflect light and make the space feel wider. A continuous backsplash material (like a light subway tile at \$1,000-\$2,500) draws the eye horizontally and creates the illusion of more width. Skip upper cabinets on one wall and replace them with open shelving or a single row of floating shelves — this opens up the sightlines considerably.

**Flooring** runs the length of a galley, so choose materials that elongate the space visually. LVP planks (\$2,000-\$4,000) installed lengthwise down the galley create a sense of depth. LVP is also the most practical kitchen floor choice in NB — it's waterproof, handles our humidity swings between seasons, and is warmer underfoot than tile during NB's cold winters.

Lighting is often overlooked in galley renovations but makes a huge difference. Replace a single centre fixture with recessed pot lights spaced every 3-4 feet along the galley, plus under-cabinet LED strips on both sides. In a narrow kitchen, upper cabinets cast heavy shadows on work surfaces, so under-cabinet lighting is essential rather than optional.

Older NB homes often have inadequate electrical panels (60-amp is common in pre-1980 homes) and galvanized plumbing. A galley renovation is the ideal time to address both, since you're likely opening walls anyway. Budget \$1,500-\$4,000 for a panel upgrade and factor in the cost of replacing any visible galvanized supply lines. All electrical and plumbing changes require permits and inspections in New Brunswick.

A mid-range galley kitchen renovation in NB — new cabinets, quartz countertops, LVP flooring, tile backsplash, updated lighting, and moderate electrical work — runs \$25,000-\$40,000. Get at least three quotes from local contractors, as pricing varies significantly across the province.

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