# Grete Schütte-Lihotzky, "The Frankfurt Kitchen and Modern Household Appliances" (1927)


## Abstract

Commissioned as part of city planner Ernst May's "New Frankfurt" project of the 1920s, the Frankfurt Kitchen was designed by architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897–2000) and is now regarded as the first example of a modern built-in kitchen. Schütte-Lihotzky's design aimed to enhance efficiency by reducing the time and effort needed to carry out kitchen tasks.


## Source

The relationship between the rationalization of housework and the New Building is recognized today as extraordinarily important, not only by housewives but also by building experts. Therefore, "The New Dwelling and its Interior Design," a building exhibition held in conjunction with the Frankfurt Spring Trade Fair, includes a special section by the Frankfurt Housewives' Society called "The Modern Household."

Above all, this exhibition promotes the critically important collaboration among architects, industry, and housewives. It was especially good to see the extent to which modern industry is already focused on the practical needs of housewives. For the time being, though, this applies more to purely technical things, such as kitchen fixtures, household appliances, and machines. Wherever considerations of taste and emotion come into play, as with furniture, lamps, etc., industry often believes that it must continue manufacturing ornate, decorated, and dust-collecting models, so as not to lose business. But this exhibition – which, in contrast to other trade fairs, was curated from a particular viewpoint – should show women, in particular, that they do not have to mindlessly accept whatever appears in shops.

The greatest effort was made to display exemplary kitchen fixtures.

An original, fully equipped dining car kitchen by Mitropa was presented as a particularly instructive example of time- and effort-saving design. Very well thought-out in terms of space, this kitchen is 2.90 meters long and 1.90 meters wide. The aisle between the stove and the work counter is 90 cm wide. The kitchen utensils rest on shelves, on racks, or in cupboards; they hang on hooks from the ceiling; the ingredients from which dishes are prepared, such as meat, potatoes, eggs, butter, bread, etc., are kept in storage cabinets and refrigerators. Cabinets, boxes, and compartments hold wine, beer, mineral water, liquors, soft drinks. Still other cabinets hold pieces of tableware so plentiful in variety and number that lay people are astonished. On a fifteen-hour journey, well over 400 guests will be served. It is clear that the workers who occupy these two spaces, which together total 8 $m^2$, would never be able to provide this sort of service if they constantly needed to move back and forth within a larger space. Our kitchens are usually 14 to 16 $m^2$ large. Why do we need twice as much space for only a small fraction of the work?

The fixtures of the "Frankfurt Kitchen" are designed in precise accordance with these time- and labor-saving principles.

Three different fully equipped Frankfurt Kitchens by the City Building Department (design: Grete Lihotzky) are on exhibit; the three models take into account a variety of needs. They were designed for: 1) households without

servants, 2) households with one servant, and 3) households with two servants.

The first was planned as a cooking area attached to a living room. While working in the kitchen, the housewife can watch the children in the living room through a wide sliding door. The kitchen includes cupboards for pots and pans, food supplies, and dishes; a gas stove with a vapor trap; a warming shelf; a ventilated pantry cupboard; a worktable with a waste bin; a double-basin sink with a drain board; a built-in ironing board; a spice rack; a dish-drying rack, and 19 drawers. An adjustable lamp allows for exact direction of the light in the work area.

Designed for a one-servant household, the second kitchen has a pass-through to an attached dining room, instead of a door to the living room. In addition to the fixtures described above, there is a place for the maid to sit.

The service area for the two-servant household is divided into a kitchen and a serving pantry. It is important to note that, even in a large household, there is no need for a large kitchen where personnel have to cross each other's paths. Each member of the household staff is to keep to his or her own designated working area, in this case the kitchen and serving pantry, which are separated by a continuous china cabinet with a pass-through.

Since wooden furniture in new buildings will invariably wear down, the Building Department of the City of Frankfurt strives to make built-in furnishings from other materials. Thus, a metal kitchen, in the form of a cooking niche, was exhibited as an option for single-occupancy apartments. Furthermore, an attempt to manufacture kitchen fixtures from artificial stone slabs showed just how hard architects and industry are working to find technically perfect solutions for the housewife.

The movement to rationalize household economy is by no means limited to Germany. Here, America holds first place, for, with respect to technically perfect work, its cabinets and tables constitute an extraordinarily exemplary model of efficiency. Unfortunately, these items and the American dishwasher, which is built into the sink cabinets of middle-class homes over there, could only be shown in a picture. In Germany, these kinds of machines have only been manufactured for large hotels up to now. Pictures of Swedish, Norwegian, and Viennese kitchens offer evidence of a parallel development, for the same problems are arising in those places as well.

The benefits of standardization are emphasized [in the exhibition] in pictures and charts, so as to demonstrate to women the labor and cost savings that result from it. Standardized, smooth, easy-to-clean doorknobs are contrasted with old, dust-catching brass knobs; a chart by the Standards Committee explains the importance of standardized glass jars, household appliances, etc.

A separate room was dedicated to electricity, which will certainly be a part of the household of the future. In Frankfurt, the price of electricity is fixed by the power company at a unit price of 10 cents per kilowatt hour; it could thus be said that electricity has been discounted, primarily to encourage the utilization of electric appliances. The Siemens company showed a new stove at the exhibition; with the 10-cent unit price, it would not be no more expensive to use than gas. A stove with two burners and a baking oven costs 150 Reichsmarks in a shop.

As for the proper lighting for living and working spaces, the new Midgard lamps, which can be adjusted to any position, were recommended. With their truly minimalistic form, they represent an ideal solution for area lighting.

Among the numerous labor-saving devices [on exhibit], some new ones should be highlighted: an enameled bin for kitchen waste built into a worktable (D. G. M.), a flour hopper (D. R. P.), different types of dish drying racks (D. G. M.), adjustable swivel chairs for the kitchen, hygienic bins for kitchen waste, new kinds of refrigerators, etc. A new cabinet for electrical devices and modern electric freezers are good representatives of modern industrial

products, which, at present, are unfortunately affordable only to people of means.

Household bookkeeping, which can save so much aggravation, time, and money, is still nowhere near where it should be today, mostly due to the lack of suitable ledgers. An extremely good new household ledger based on the American system of bookkeeping (prepared by Mrs. Pfannes, Frankfurt) was very much welcomed by the housewives [in attendance].

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that the Building Department of the City of Frankfurt has received countless inquiries from all over the country and abroad due to its outstanding execution of labor-saving kitchens and also on account of the excitement generated by the exhibition, for whose organization the department was responsible. For this reason, the city set up an advisory bureau for the labor-saving kitchen. The bureau is responsible for designing and building these kitchens and for informing other city administrative offices, housing cooperatives, architects, and private parties about the sale of various new household furnishings and fixtures, some of which are trademarked by the Building Department itself.

Through the exhibition described here, however, we hope to have given women great inspiration. To be sure, all matters concerning the management of a labor-efficient household are intrinsically connected with dwelling construction. It is important that building experts pay more attention to these connections than previously. But it is also important that women gradually become technically informed enough to know what they can demand. It is of foremost importance that they recognize that the problem of the New Building, including not only housing but also furnishings and appliances, consists in creating standard models that have been carefully thought-through and tested in every respect. Through the greatest rationalization of production, these models will also benefit the less well-off and thus the masses.

Source: Margarethe Schütte-Lihotzky, "Die Frankfurter Küche und neuzeitliches Hausgerät," *Neue Frauenkleidung und Frauenkultur* 7, Karlsruhe (1927), pp. 196–97.

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