

A scullery is a second, hidden kitchen. It absorbs the mess of cooking and cleanup so the rest of the house stays presentable. Whether it's worth adding to your home comes down to two things: your budget, and how much you actually entertain.



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What Is a Scullery?

A scullery is a small working kitchen next to your main kitchen. It handles food prep, dishwashing, and appliance storage, tasks that would otherwise clutter the space your guests see.

The room has a long history. A scullery maid staffed it in Victorian households, washing dishes, scrubbing pots, and handling the dirtiest kitchen labor. It sat at the back of the house, near the water supply. Design kept it separate from the family's living spaces.

The room's name traces back to an old French word for the servant who kept the dishes. More on that below.

What's the Difference Between a Pantry, a Butler's Pantry, and a Scullery?

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Pantry

A pantry is a storage space. It holds dry goods, small appliances, and kitchen overflow. It can be as small as a closet or as large as a walk-in room. It needs no plumbing, because no one washes or prepares food there.

Butler's Pantry

A butler's pantry stages and serves food. Historically, it sat between the kitchen and the formal dining room. It typically includes cabinetry, a prep counter, and sometimes a bar sink, but food prep and cleanup don't happen there. Its job is presentation: storing china, staging plated meals, and keeping the serving process out of guests' view.

Scullery

Only the scullery handles actual cooking, prep, and cleanup. It needs plumbing for a sink, typically includes a dishwasher, and often houses a second range or cooktop. A pantry stores, a butler's pantry stages, and a scullery works.

	Function	Plumbing Needed	Typical Location	Typical Contents
Pantry	Storage	No	Off the kitchen	Dry goods, small appliances
Butler's Pantry	Staging and serving	Sometimes (bar sink)	Between kitchen and dining room	China, serving pieces, prep counter
Scullery	Prep, cooking, cleanup	Yes	Adjacent to main kitchen	Sink, dishwasher, range, storage

What Is a Scullery Used For?

A typical scullery includes a second sink for washing dishes or produce, a dishwasher, and counter space for prep work. It also includes cabinetry for everyday dishes, cookware, and dry goods. Many sculleries also house small appliances, like coffee makers, microwaves, and wine or beverage fridges. That keeps the main kitchen countertops clear.

Open-concept floor plans have made this room more relevant. These layouts removed the walls that used to separate kitchens from living and dining areas. Now the kitchen stays visible from the rest of the house. A scullery gives homeowners a place to prep and clean up out of view. It also helps during entertaining. The volume of dishes and prep work during a holiday meal can overwhelm a single kitchen.

Do You Actually Need a Scullery?

I would add a scullery only if money and space are both available. If either is missing, I wouldn't build one. A scullery is an addition, not a necessity. Treating it as a given in a remodel budget is how homeowners overspend on a room they don't need.



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The reason to include one, when you can, is that it hides the mess from the kitchen. I put the creativity into the main kitchen instead: the finishes, the layout, the design choices guests actually see. I've written more on how I approach that balance in [how to design seamless interiors](#). The scullery holds the practical aspects instead. Those are the parts of running a kitchen that don't need to look good. They just need to work.

Because of that, I keep the scullery hidden most of the time. I don't treat it as a showcase space. Its purpose is practical, not decorative. A scullery designed to be shown off has lost the reason it exists.

FAQ

Why was it called a scullery?

The word comes from the Old French [escuelerie](#), the office of the servant in charge of plates. That traces back to the Latin *scutella*, a serving platter. The room kept the name because keeping the dishes was its original job.

How is a modern scullery different from a Victorian one?

A Victorian scullery was staffed by a servant and used mainly for washing dishes and handling the dirtiest household chores. A modern scullery is unstaffed. It functions more like a second kitchen, built for homeowners rather than domestic staff.

What did a scullery maid actually do?

A scullery maid was a low-ranking domestic servant. She washed dishes, scrubbed pots and pans, and handled other dirty kitchen work. The role sat at the bottom of household staff hierarchies and kept the messiest labor separate from the family.

What is a scullery on a ship?

On a ship, a scullery is a space near the galley where crew clean pots, pans, and dishes. They often work assembly-line style to handle the volume quickly. It serves the same basic function as a household scullery: keeping cleanup separate from food preparation.

For more on planning practical, function-first kitchen spaces, browse the [Kitchen category on Home Narratives](#).

About the author

Hamza is the founder and sole writer at Home Narratives, a home-improvement site he built and runs himself. His background is in coding, SEO, and web development, and he writes about kitchen and interior design decisions from a cost-and-function-first point of view.