



About Banquettes

History

Furniture historians trace the banquette, derived from the Germanic word for bench, back to 15th century France. Concealed entries to secret passages may have been located underneath banquettes in palaces and castles, and because today's building code doesn't prohibit secret passages, feel free to incorporate one into your design.

Banquettes appeared in American homes in the early 20th century. Many kitchens were still incorporating the table typically used in post-colonial kitchens as a work surface. When kitchens were no longer the realm of servants, the table served as a place for the family to eat informally. The banquette, with its space-saving design of bench seating, made more sense than including a full set of table and chairs in the space of the kitchen.



I have childhood memories of eating at my grandparents' banquette, which looked much like one in the photo on the right, with severe straight backs and so little room that the table edge crushed your stomach when reaching for the jam. It was a cozy spot, however, and the single high window on the wall let in morning light and looked onto the garden. Despite its uncomfortable design, the enclosed, light-filled space made me feel safe and happy. Since then, I've enjoyed sitting in many banquettes of the more comfortable variety. Having learned that hard lesson, I'll be sure to provide you with a comfortable one.

Factors in Design

- The banquette can be a focal point in the kitchen, a quiet corner or nook for homework or morning coffee, a transitional area between the kitchen and another room, or a multi-functional area in a living room.
- A banquette can be detailed in a modern or traditional aesthetic. Benches are usually built by custom cabinetmakers and would be included in the cabinetry budget of your project.

- The formality of the banquette design should be appropriate for its location; for example, a banquette in a living room might be fully upholstered with a fabric that coordinates with other fabric in the room, while a kitchen banquette might have a simple, washable seat cushion.
- The seating can be all built-in bench or a combination of bench and freestanding chairs. The banquette can be designed to be expanded from seating for two to seating for many when needed.
- It's important to consider how someone seated in the rear corner of a banquette will be able to get up without disturbing everyone at the table. Crawling under the table is usually frowned upon.
- The table can be built by the cabinetmaker who constructs the bench or purchased separately. A trestle table is best for a banquette, that is, one with a pedestal support in the center to allow for the free movement of people and their legs around the table. Tabletops average 29" to 31" high.
- Assuming it is to function as an eating area, and assuming that you might have children or anticipate having a guest younger than twelve years of age, choose fabrics that clean easily or design your banquette with removable cushions and washable slipcovers.
- The seat of the bench should be about 18" up from the floor, allow for 24" to 30" sitting space per person, be 14" to 16" deep. Cushion thicknesses should be factored into the dimensions of the bench.
- Allow for 18" to 20" of depth between the back of the bench and the leading edge of the table.
- The bench back varies in height, but the range is usually 30" to 48". A window sill can be incorporated into the bench back and be positioned to give good back support as well as a view.
- Costs will vary depending on the detailing and materials, but figure a budget of \$2,000 to \$4,000 for a U-shaped bench, and additional cost for the table.

