



Practicing UX and accessibility design in the kitchen



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Returning home makes you discover the things you never saw in plain sight. In my case, I returned home realizing that our house has very little sense of organization.

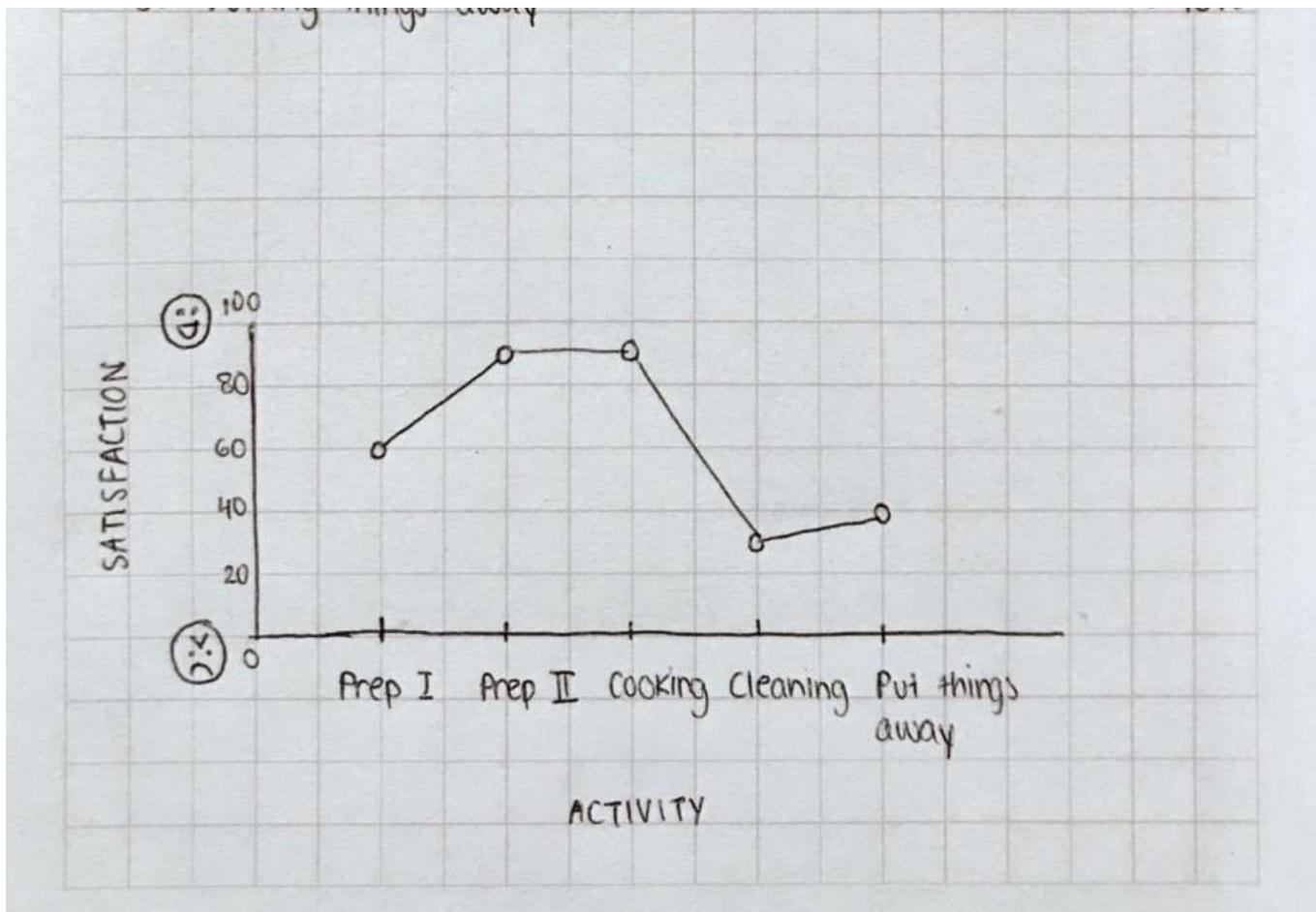
During my short time home before I return to school, I've been trying to be more productive with my time—whether that means working on my portfolio, resume, or side projects. But being home also means that I get to live out my Pinterest dreams and work on home-improvement projects. Naturally, I decided to work on the most problematic part of our house—the kitchen. I discussed the idea of reorganizing the kitchen with my mom, and she was on board immediately.

I gathered inspiration for kitchen organization to see what worked and didn't work with our kitchen. I thought about where our problems lied. I considered what would be the most effective way to solve the specific problems that we have in our kitchen. And I considered how we can use our resources and build on what we have instead of starting from scratch.

It was in the midst of transforming our junk drawer into a spice drawer when I realized that I was considering the same things as I would when tackling UX problems. As a designer, I've become so used to designing for screens, and I thought it'd be fun to document the process of applying the same UX principles to practical purposes. I figured it would be valuable to go back to basics and learn to apply the same skills to a different domain—even if it sounded kind of silly. I think it's important to learn with whatever means you have and have fun doing so.

At the same time, I've been interested in learning how to design for accessibility. It's a field that requires designers to consider physical disabilities and environmental factors that can inhibit people from engaging with a certain technology, and I thought this offered the perfect opportunity to learn how to consider accessibility on a small scale.

User Journey	Satisfaction
1. Prepping : Finding spices, tools	→ 60%
2. Prepping II : preparing food → cutting, mixing	→ 90%
3. Cooking	→ 90%
4. Cleaning	→ 30%
5. Putting things away	→ 40%



3-minute research, written on the nearest notepad I could find

User insights

Right after I realized wanted to document the process, I decided to take it up a notch and gather some quick insights. I grabbed the nearest notepad and listed the major steps involved in cooking. Afterward, I asked my mom to rate how happy she usually is when applying each step.

Target users

My mom is the primary inhabitant of our kitchen. She's 5'2" and feisty. She cooks delicious food every day, and delicious cooking requires a lot of spices. She absolutely takes pleasure in cooking, but she hates cleaning up and the mundane task of putting things away.

My stepdad is also a frequent visitor to the kitchen. He doesn't cook much, but he does enjoy whipping up snacks like nachos from time to time. He's usually in charge of

putting the dishes away. And because he's tall, he's the only one who can reach certain items.

Problems

The spices happen to be stored in our top cabinet. My mom being 5'2", it's very difficult for her to look for spices, so she dangerously climbs onto the counter every time she has to look for some. My mom actually stands on the counter because the spices are inaccessible.

Because she hates cleaning up, she tends to throw everything into the cabinet or drawer; out of sight, out of mind. Over time, this accumulates into a giant mess.

Note: the junk drawer I mentioned earlier was so bad that I found four obsolete TV remotes, two unused chargers, and an earring amongst a range of kitchen tools.

Solutions

I wanted to make sure that everything was organized and accessible. I arranged items in a way where the more frequently used items in our kitchen were at an arm's reach, while the lesser used items were farther away. At the same time, I wanted our kitchen to still feel familiar and intuitive, so I decided to keep the existing flow.

I also wanted to ensure that I wasn't simply patching the problem by doing a simple clean up; rather, I focused on fixing the entire system so that the solutions are sustainable. While it's a substantial task to complete right now, it will hopefully garner long-term success—like rearranging an entire information architecture.

For example, rather than simply cleaning up the spice cabinet and still allowing my mom to struggle reaching for one, I moved all the spices into a more accessible drawer. This way, she can easily find her spices and still be able to put them away quickly.





While we reorganized the spices

I also considered moving the more frequently used cups to the same cabinet as the more frequently used plates for easier access, but my parents were opposed to the idea for two very valid reasons. My mom wanted to keep all the cups in the same cabinet for consistency and aesthetic reasons. My stepdad disagreed and argued that the new cabinet location would actually make it less accessible due to the location of our dishwasher. When the door to our dishwasher is open, it hinders easy access to certain cabinets. So the plates and cups stayed where they were originally. Just like UX, I had to get rid of my assumptions and solve problems according to user needs.

Perhaps the most critical part of this clean-up process was getting rid of the stuff we didn't need. My mom had to go through every item and decide what was to be thrown out or be kept in the garage. It was difficult but necessary, and I was again reminded of how design makes us go through this very process constantly—to consider every design decision and only keep things that serve a purpose.

Wrap up

We're still in the process of reorganizing the kitchen. It's a big task and it's easy to lose momentum, but that's why it's important to have teammates who can help and with whom you can bounce ideas.

It's been refreshing to apply my design thinking skills with something so relevant to my family's daily experience. As cliché as it sounds, design is everywhere, and I believe that the UX-design hat that we put on should be applied beyond our work life.

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