

KITCHEN OF THE MONTH

KENTFIELD, CALIFORNIA

It's a little Italian, a little French Country. We love Sandra Bird's mix of old-world materials and warm colors

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Sandra Bird designed the cabinetry, worktable, and hood over the Viking Professional Series range. Two GE Profile wall ovens offer both convection and microwave cooking. The cone-shaped Astrid pendant lights by Ironware International are available through designers. Vintage urn from Grasshopper.

CHRISTINE PITTEL: It looks like the whole kitchen revolves around that piece in the center with the wraparound hood. What's going on there?

DESIGNER SANDRA BIRD: That was our biggest challenge. A 4-by-4-foot chase—a column holding all sorts of electrical wiring and plumbing—runs right through the room and could not be moved. So I worked around it and built it out into four areas: a cooking area with the range, a buffet for the table, a desk, and then a baking area in back, where you can hide all the mess.

Great idea, to continue the hood all the way round. It wouldn't have looked right any other way. Rhonda Shipley, the interior designer who brought me in to do the kitchen, wanted to give this 1940s house an old-world feel. I saw a kitchen in Paris with a similar hood and took the curve from that. It's made of galvanized metal, like an old wash bucket—patinated so it's not shiny—with copper nailheads along the seams. We needed a focal point because the room was so big and blah, and we ended up with three—the work center, the bar on the left wall, and the pizza oven on the right wall. That wood-burning oven adds a lot of warmth.

With two large islands in the center, this kitchen has an unusual circulation pattern—almost like a figure eight. How does that work?

Very efficiently. I've been designing kitchens for 30 years, and if it doesn't cook, I won't build it. I like to have several work areas, all separated enough so people are not bumping into each other. One of the major complaints I get from clients is that they only have one sink, so this kitchen has three. The sink under the window is part of the major cooking triangle, with the refrigerator on its right and the range on the left. Then, just to the left of the two wall ovens, there's a secondary clean-up triangle that also works as a prep area, with another sink. And the third is behind the bar.

I like the wrought-iron detailing on the base of the worktable. Is that an antique?

No, it just looks like one. It's modeled after a table I saw in an Italian villa. I do a lot of unfitted kitchens, as they're called, with pieces that feel more like furniture than built-ins. It's a look inspired by Elizabeth David, the well-known English cookbook author, who had more dressers in her kitchen than anything else. Nothing matched. >>

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Country French Directoire chairs from William Switzer surround an Italian walnut dining table designed by Rhonda Shipley and C. Mariani. Benedicte chandelier by Ironware International. The safe in the corner came with the house. OPPOSITE: Desk and counters are topped with Velvet Taupe Antique Limestone from Daltile.

How do you make built-ins, like that 30-foot-long counter in back, look less monolithic?

The counter juts in and out in several places, and I also raised and lowered the height. The limestone itself has an intriguing textured surface, which helps. If you're going to use limestone, you have to live with the fact that it's going to absorb oil and get etched by acids. That's part of the look. Changing the cabinets from solid doors on the bottom to gridded doors on top also relieves the monotony.

What's the most common design mistake?

Not enough landing space. There should be 30 inches at least between the refrigerator and sink,

so you have a place to put things down. You need 42 inches of prep area beside the sink. One reason we have that big worktable nearby is that there was no way we could get enough landing space on either side of the range for serving hot food onto plates.

What else should a renovator be thinking of?

Make sure you're not underutilizing your cabinet space. Many items stored in a kitchen are only five to eight inches tall, but the shelves will be twelve to fifteen inches apart. Also, I always draw plans with the refrigerator, the dishwasher, the oven doors open. You want to make sure there are no obstructions and that people can get by easily.



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BENJAMIN MOORE
PHILIPSBURG BLUE HC-159

PRATT & LAMBERT
GLACIER SAND 11-21

PRATT & LAMBERT
BOUILLON 9-24

PRATT & LAMBERT
EDMUND'S BEIGE 14-26

ABOVE: The clients wanted a fireplace until they realized a Prima 100 pizza oven from Mugnaini would produce the same effect—and crisp-crust pizzas. ABOVE LEFT: Custom copper grilles on the upper cabinets

have a French Country look and glow when the lights are lit. LEFT: Colorist Janet Hart chose a mellow palette of earth tones to convey a sense of age. Blue is the accent color, used on just one wall that frames the bar area.