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DOING IT HER WAY

*An interior designer creates a kitchen
in her own home that's perfect
for entertaining*

BY BRENDA O'FARRELL
PHOTOGRAPHY: TRACEY AYTON
STYLING: VICTORIA MCKENNEY

WE'VE ALL HEARD the old professional standards. A surgeon should never operate on a family member; or a lawyer who represents himself or herself in a courtroom has a fool for a client. But what is the rule for interior designers?

If you ask Victoria McKenney, she may not offer you a hard and fast rule, but she will be quick to say that designing a kitchen in her own home was much more challenging than working on behalf of a client.

McKenney is the principal designer and owner of Vancouver-based Envable Designs. She and her husband, Adrian Stevens, are also the owners of a duplex in Kitsilano.

"We lived in our home for about two years before deciding to renovate the kitchen," she says. "This timeframe allowed us to inhabit the space and realize what worked and what didn't work for us. We also lived in the house while the kitchen was being renovated, by using a makeshift kitchen."

The old kitchen was an enclosed space that, as she puts it, "was tucked away," very separate from the living room area.

Wanting a more open and inviting space that would accommodate social interaction, she changed the location of the kitchen, putting it where the family room had been. ☛



The island has a quartz countertop, which measures three feet wide by 5.5 feet long. McKenney found the two black metal pendant light fixtures in a consignment shop, and spray-painted the interior of the shades a metallic gold.

One of the most noticeable elements in the exquisitely styled space now is the luxurious coffered ceiling. But the detailed work on the ceiling was not part of McKenney's original concept. "Originally, we were going to have a simple ceiling," she says. But reconfiguring the space meant removing a load-bearing wall, which required the installation of a 20-foot steel beam that runs across the ceiling. The beam descended a full eight inches from the ceiling, creating an obvious visual distraction. Designing the coffered ceiling "was a way to disguise the beam," McKenney explains.

And although it added to the cost of the project, McKenney says, given the final effect, she would do it all over again, even if she didn't have to disguise a beam. The look adds a refined and elegant finish to a room that has an 11-foot-high ceiling.

But the ceiling is not her favourite part of her new kitchen. Actually, she cannot pick just one favourite aspect of this space. She has two: the new layout and the craftsmanship of the cabinets.

"I love having an island," partly because she has never had one, she says. "That is where we eat every night." ☞

The Shaker-style cabinets are made of MDF, painted in Benjamin Moore's Simply White. They have polished nickel hand pulls, beaded detailing, and a 1.5-inch frame that is flush with the door, providing an elegant and refined look.



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The south-facing window over the sink provides a lot of natural light; the counter here is three feet deep.

But she also loves the look of the cabinetry. Made of MDF that is painted in Benjamin Moore's Simply White, the Shaker-style cabinet doors have beaded detailing and a 1.5-inch face frame. This frame is flush with the doors, providing an elegant and refined look that is not often seen because of its expense and the fact that it requires all of the cabinets to be completely custom-made.

Although she designs interior spaces for a living, McKenney admits that getting the kitchen she is thrilled with was not an easy process. And this is where the old professional adages come in. You would think that an interior designer could easily plan her own kitchen.

"It's much harder designing for yourself," she confesses, because of the emotion invested in one's own space. "It took a lot of time to get it right." ☞

Woven resin stools with upholstered seats: Palecek.



The backsplash provides an element of sophistication with its Carrara marble tiles. The floor is a natural stained oak.

McKenney found herself fussing over every detail: a pull-out recycling centre, storage space for serving trays, what the pantry should be like. "I was measuring all my pans and dishes," she says. "I needed a junk drawer, but then I was questioning what to put in it and how much room I really needed."

One unexpected result, she says, came after living through the five-month renovation process: She now has a greater empathy for what her clients go through.

Despite all the meticulous work that was involved, she loves her new kitchen. "It's a lovely space to spend time in," McKenney says, describing the room as "classic and timeless with a little urban farmhouse feel."

"A well-designed kitchen can be life-changing in how you spend time with your family and friends," she says. "We see our friends and family more because we now have the space to do that."

"It has had an impact on how we live and use our home." ☛

WARM CONTEMPORARY

A sleek and streamlined kitchen is given cozy elements

BY BRENDA O'FARRELL • PHOTOGRAPHY: TRACEY AYTON • STYLING: GREER NELSON AND JAMIE HAMILTON



SOME HOMES HAVE WHAT ARE COMMONLY referred to as good bones. These dwellings are sturdy, structurally appealing, and have not merely stood the test of time; they have almost improved with the years.

But Greer Nelson and Jamie Hamilton look beyond the bones when they design a home's interior, especially in a new home. They focus on what they call "the heart": The kitchen.

This space pumps the life and energy into a family's day, they explain. It is the room that filters all the activity – from meals to homework, and casual conversations to entertaining. The kitchen is the home's most vital organ.

"Making it cozy and comfortable, and still functional is important," says Nelson. And almost in rhythm, Hamilton adds: "It's the heartbeat of a home."



Three black metal dome pendant lights provide both lighting and visual contrast.

These two designers are co-owners of Oliver Simon Design, an interior design studio that specializes in residential spaces. They put together the plan for this kitchen in a new three-level home, built in Vancouver.

It started with the homeowners' desire for a contemporary look. "We put together a complete design package," Nelson says, which included two phases: the specifications that cover such basics as tile selections, flooring, surface materials and colours; and then the furnishings.



The stainless-steel appliances coordinate well with the warm grey lower cabinets and natural oak floors.



The dining room chairs, which complement the island's stools and the table were purchased at CB2.

Part of the process includes extensive consultations with the owners, Hamilton says. This is when she and Nelson get to know the owners' likes and dislikes. It is a procedure that involves spending time with the clients and pouring over images and styles so that the designers can also develop a sense of how the family lives.

"We needed to make sure it would work for them," says Hamilton. And in this case, the need for a lot of storage along with practical and easy-to-maintain surfaces were key for this busy family. ☞



The matte black single-handle faucet by Brizo adds contrast in this almost-all-white kitchen.



"For me, the important thing about a kitchen is to have organic elements – wood, flowers, plants, fruit," says designer Jamie Hamilton.

"What we wanted to make sure of in a very modern home is to bring in some warmth," Nelson says. To do that, they introduced elements to soften the bright white features that anchored the crisp, modern tone. This meant incorporating highlights, such as the natural-wood cubbies in the upper cabinetry, designing the lighting, and adding small elements of colour.

The cubbies offer an interesting visual as the wood closely matches the natural oak floors. "It's also a place you can display something meaningful and beautiful," Nelson says. ☞





The Roman shade at the window in front of the sink is another softening element. The light pastels in the fabric add a dash of colour that can easily be updated and changed if desired.

Hamilton also points to the use of a light grey on the lower cabinets as another way of keeping the contemporary vibe, while at the same time softening the stark whiteness of the room. "It makes it more interesting than pure white," she says, while at the same time making the surface a bit more forgiving when confronted with children's sticky hands.

Hamilton's favourite feature of this design is the black domed pendant lights. The three metal fixtures above the island add contrast that is immediately noticeable. This contrast, she says, "is like punctuation in a sentence."

The designers also suggested the matte black faucet for the same reason. "It's dramatic. It pops out and makes it feel like a custom-designed kitchen," Nelson says.

As for her favourite feature, she points to the European stools that line the outside of the island. "They are practical for kids and still look cool," she says, adding that they have the added bonus of being "very comfortable."

The overall effect is stunningly crisp. Or, as Nelson puts it: "It's clean and modern, but still warm and inviting." Just what you want for a kitchen. Or, as Hamilton adds, this room "gets all the attention because it is open to the living room," making it, indeed, the heart of this home. ➤

The contemporary look the owners wanted was made possible with the combination of white elements in this kitchen: the quartz countertops, the white upper cabinets and the four-by-four-inch porcelain wall tiles. The softer elements, including the light-grey lower cabinets, the soft pastels of the Roman shade, and the natural wood cubbies offer a touch of warmth.

CHIC AND RUSTIC

*A Kerrisdale kitchen is designed with
a mélange of beautiful elements*

BY BRENDA O'FARRELL
PHOTOGRAPHY: TRACEY ATTON
STYLING: PAULIE DHILLON

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION DOES NOT need to be loud. Just as beauty need not be bold. But effective and beautiful design should be purposeful; and it should be scripted using subtlety, lighting and layers.

This is the philosophy Paulie Dhillon employed to design the look for the kitchen in this two-storey house in the Kerrisdale neighbourhood on Vancouver's west side.

"I like to layer details and see how the design progresses," she explains.

Dhillon is the owner of Design Therapy, the firm hired by the contractor who built this new home. "This house was built by a developer specifically to be put on the market. I got involved in the project very early in, on the floor plan," she says. ☞





Not having a specific client to cater the look and functionality of the space to, Dhillon had to improvise. "I created a client in my mind based on a demographic." She also relied on her experience of having completed other successful turnkey projects.

She describes the final result as being "modern-chic with rustic elements." But the words – "chic," "modern" and "rustic" – are not just descriptors. They are parts of a distinctive whole. They come together magically to create an exponential factor, making this kitchen greater than the sum of its three elements.

The Shaker-style cabinets, which are grey-taupe, feature curvaceous metal pulls.



Oriental White subway tiles are used on the backsplash from counter to ceiling. Their iridescence accentuates the height of the 11-foot ceilings and adds a timeless chic style to the space.

Take Dhillon's favourite feature of the kitchen, the window wall, as an example. The window was imported from Europe and features divided panes. It is set in a white frame at the centre of a wall clad in iridescent Oriental White subway tiles in a stacked pattern. "By stacking the tile, it really adds to the quality of the height in that kitchen," Dhillon says, pointing to the 11-foot ceilings.



The silvery pearl finish of the tiles, combined with the tiered setting play off the styling of the sconces on each side, which, in turn, complement the large chrome pendant lights above the island. The combination is the definition of chic.

The detailing on the ceiling above the island and the added elements attached to the crown moldings add a sophisticated flair. ☞



Two large drum pendants by Crystorama Lighting hang above the marble-topped island. The fixtures are in the same style as the sconces, one on each side of the window.

The island and the cabinetry provide the contemporary element. The Shaker-style cabinets have a subtle detailed profile. The upper and lower cabinets are finished in a soft grey-taupe. This colour scheme provides a hint of warmth, she adds. The countertops are a resilient quartz, also in a tonal grey-taupe, while the island top is finished in marble above a darker shade of cabinetry to provide contrast and interest. The same marble is used in the adjoining living room space to give the fireplace surround an upscale finish.



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The engineered oak floor with its cerused finish, the turned posts supporting the island, and the square-seat stools combine to add rusticity to the kitchen.

Look no further than the floors for the rustic. The engineered oak planks have been given a hint of a whitewashed finish in the crevices to accentuate the grain and produce a vintage look. The turned posts that support one end of the island, which are painted in the same hue as the lower cabinets, and the square-seated stools add to the rustic theme.

These elements give the space the feel of "a well-done renovation," Dhillon says. They add what she calls a sense of history and they minimize the new-build feel. "The modern elements carry the home," she says. "It's not trend-driven. I prefer using trends in other forms, through throw pillows and accessories. This kitchen very much has a timeless quality to it."



So what is the secret to drawing three distinctive looks together?

"The reason it works in this kitchen is because no one particular element was over-used," Dhillon explains. It's effective, beautiful, subtle and layered – all by design. ☛

The arches between the kitchen and the dining and living room areas are an interesting architectural element with molded detailing.