

SERIOUS COOKS WHO SEEK KITCHENS WORTHY of their skills pose daunting challenges for designers. However, this home in California's Napa Valley involved much more than practicality: The homeowner wanted his 500-square-foot kitchen to be a walk-in sculpture, a work of art in itself.

He concluded that Berkeley, California-based designer Fu-Tung Cheng most closely shared his vision. Cheng, a residential, commercial and industrial designer renowned for his innovative work with concrete, sensed he would have to bring all 20 years of his experience to bear in this almost larger-than-life project.

The frame for this work of art was a new 12,000-square-foot house with walls of glass, wood and rammed earth. (Rammed earth is a mixture of a special engineered soil with water and cement, which is poured into molds. The water and cement portions are small; 8 percent water and 3 percent cement is typical.) To harmonize such contrasting materials, Cheng turned to his signature concrete, a material that he uses in sculptural and expressive ways.

Good design, Cheng says, is not gratuitously decorative but "an expression of the use of the space." Several angular forms define and anchor the large kitchen. The major structure in the entire room is an imposing L-shaped "wall-countertop," its slanted base molded on site in forms built of laminated plywood and fiberboard. One leg of the L holds a clean-up counter with an integral drain board that

# paving grace

Concrete makes this kitchen  
a piece of sculpture that cooks



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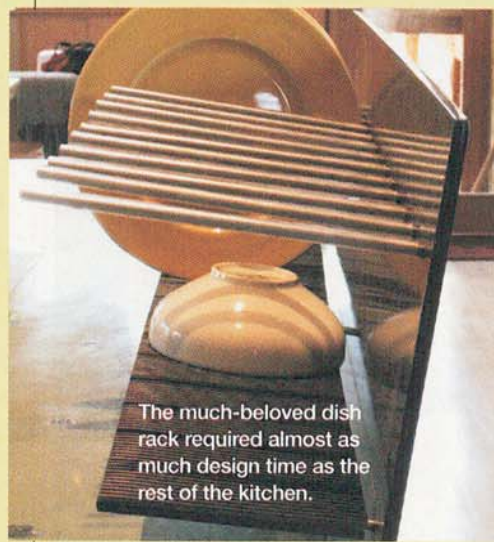


**DESIGNER**  
Fu-Tung Cheng  
Cheng Design  
Berkeley, California

ABOVE: Fu-Tung Cheng's concrete wonderland makes a vivid visual impression—and serves its owner's needs.

RIGHT: Brass bars inlaid directly into the concrete countertop form a drain board that slopes into the sink.





The much-beloved dish rack required almost as much design time as the rest of the kitchen.

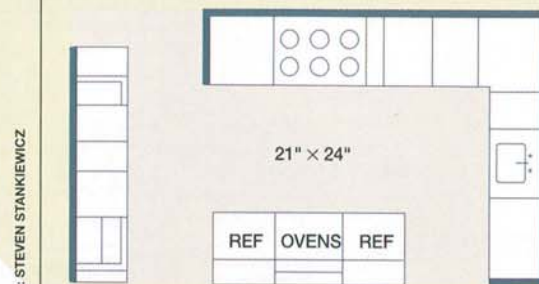
features inlaid raised brass strips which slope into a stainless steel sink. Above the sink is a custom dish rack Cheng assembled of steel rods and a rubber-lined shelf projecting from a backing of steel plate. "I spent as much time designing that rack as I did the whole counter," he says. "The family loves it and uses it all the time."

Beneath a Cheng Design vent hood that measures more than 7 feet long is the other leg of the counter's L, which faces out to the living area. This segment houses the cooktop: four regular hobs plus a wok burner, deep-fat fryer and grill. To the right of the cooktop, a trough sink separates the concrete wall and countertop from a butcher-block work surface. Sliding between the two, over the sink, is a custom-made flat colander made of perforated stainless steel. The trough sink is lined with tile, and the kitchen's other two sinks are stainless steel, as concrete is unacceptable for sinks, Cheng says. Over time, running water, banging pots and pans and scrubbing would erode and ruin concrete sinks.

RIGHT: Beneath a custom Cheng Design hood is a cooktop with four standard burners, a wok burner, a deep-fat fryer and a grill.

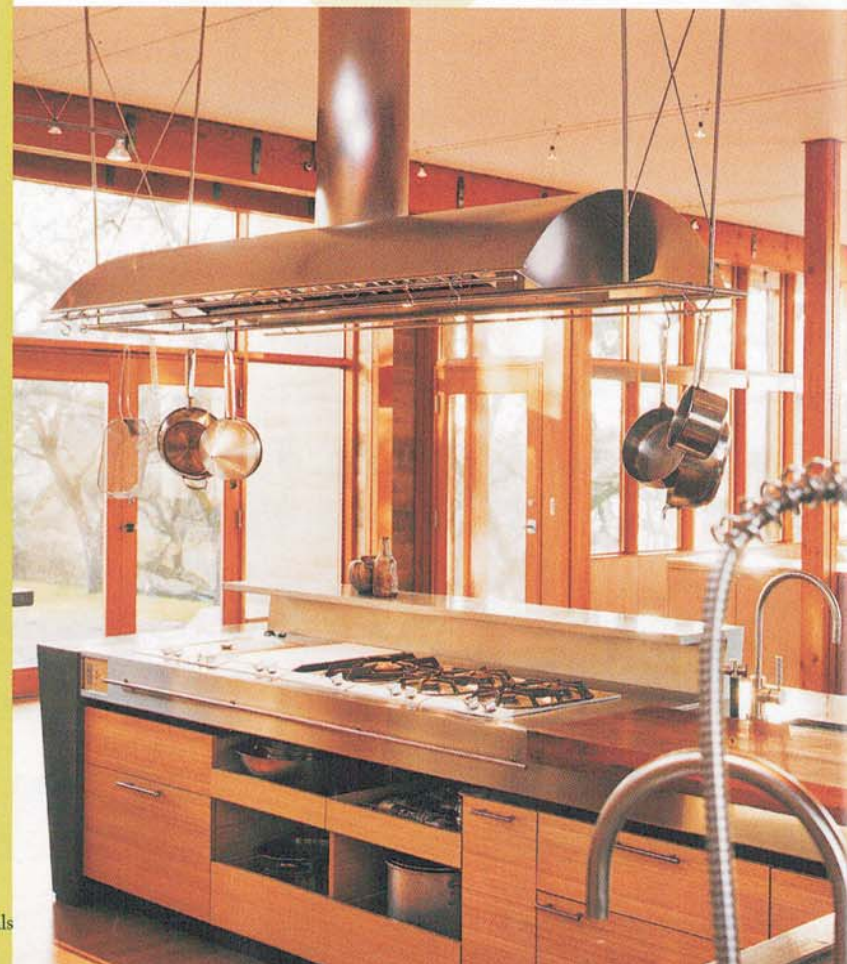
## A custom-made hood and dish rack add to the arty ambience

### Floor Plan



FLOOR PLAN: STEVEN STANKIEWICZ

ABOVE: The main L-shaped countertop is the heart of the space, but it covers only about a third of the entire kitchen.



Opposite the main L is a strip mall-like countertop, with an auxiliary sink, ice maker, wine refrigerator and trash compactor.



Surprise! It's not a drawer. The clever hinge placement embodies modern design in action.

A smaller concrete structure defines another side of the kitchen. This structure's outside wall slants 7 degrees to match the main counter. The side that faces into the kitchen boasts a wine cooler, trash compactor, bamboo base cabinets and a beverage sink. The countertop is made of both concrete and honed black granite. Set into the edge of the granite are two hinged steel plates that lift to reveal electrical outlets. "The client wanted the openings big enough to hold charging units that would let him reach in and push in a plug without having it stick up from the counter," says Cheng. A small cutout in each cover functions as a finger pull and a pass-through for cords.

The dual Küppersbusch ovens, a concealed KitchenAid microwave and a pair of Sub-Zero refrigerator/freezers are encased in a three-sided box of 3/8-inch steel. The kitchen continues beyond this in the form of a butler's pantry with additional facilities for caterers' use, but the appliance monolith creates the visual and spatial backdrop for the main kitchen area.

In a trademark Cheng move, inlaid objects in the concrete include an exquisite ammonite fossil and a corner block of translucent urethane embedded with coral and shells. They're constant reminders that, although this is a practical, hardworking kitchen, it is also a space in service to art. ■

### Concrete Idea

Concrete is a beautiful—and premium—surface, which you should choose primarily for aesthetic reasons. For a functional kitchen, you'll need to include a surface that's less heat-sensitive or knife-hostile, such as stone or butcher-block—or else plan for constant cutting-board use.

Although it's associated with contemporary motifs, concrete can be equally at home in traditional decor with the right surface and edge treatments. Maintenance is similar to that recommended for stone. Because concrete can be stained and etched, particularly by such acidic liquids as vinegar, lemon juice and red wine, Cheng advises treating new counters with a penetrating sealant, then waxing them as often as once a month. Abrasive cleansers should always be avoided. The material can be damaged by a hard blow, and though heat resistant, it may crack if an extremely hot pot is rested on it. And for the sake of knives as well as countertops, concrete should never be used as a cutting surface.