

Recipe for Success

WHEN SELECTING ARCHITECTS for his 27-acre Napa Valley estate, former America Online chief Barry Schuler chose Cutler Anderson, the firm responsible for Bill Gates' family compound in Medina, Wash. For Schuler, the architects designed a 12,000-plus-square-foot rammed-earth residential compound central to the property's vineyards, meadows and oak groves. But when it came to the kitchen complex—a centrally located 500-square-foot cooking, dining and socializing area—Schuler decided to bring a decidedly artistic voice into the mix.

"I love to cook, and we entertain a lot," says Schuler, "so I wanted a highly functional space that was also sculptural." Impressed with the work of Fu-Tung Cheng even before his house was built, Schuler invited the Berkeley, Calif., designer and artisan to submit several ideas for the kitchen. "His initial sketches were terrific," says Schuler, who, like most top-tier executives, is very active in every project he launches. "After a little fine-tuning, we were there."

Cheng, author of *Concrete at Home*, and known for his masterful work with concrete, set out to establish a



space that would complement the imposing presence of both the rammed-earth walls and the estate's heavy timber shell. "For the heart of the home not to be substantial, it would have felt lost," he explains. "Naturally, concrete was my material of choice."

Cheng anchored the space with low, angled walls made of Geocrete (his proprietary mixture) and, as a decorative foil, embedded each with "jewels" such as genuine fluorite and pyrite crystals, fossils and boldly colored mosaics.

Within these monolithic confines, Cheng's spatial expertise and love of detail kicked in—as did his artist's eye for proportion. A combination of textures was applied: vertical-grain Plyboo bamboo cabinetry and walls are juxtaposed with honed granite, cast polyurethane, steel, crackled tile, wood and zinc.

"Schuler did not want a restaurant kitchen in his house," says Cheng. "But he wanted everything to be beefy." To that end, a bank of high-powered Gaggenau cooking modules spans a 10-foot length of stainless steel counter, baffled by a zinc demipartition and topped by the designer's 10.5-foot Tidan vent hood.

A troughlike tile prep sink, bordered by a sizeable chopping board and sliding steel mesh strainer, sits to the right; a pair of Sub-Zero refrigerators with freezer drawers flank two Koppersbusch ovens.

To facilitate easy cleanup, Cheng fabricated a stunning Geocrete counter and drainboard edged by a natural steel dish rack. These work in conjunction with three Miele dishwashers and the stainless steel sink. Honed granite serves as a practical surface, complete with Cheng-designed outlets discreetly installed beneath stainless steel "trap" doors—cord slot and all.

According to Cheng, the kitchen is the culmination of his best work. "For me, it doesn't get much better than this in terms of design," he says. "I took all the ideas that I have utilized in different projects, and brought them together in this one space."

For Schuler, the results were nothing short of spectacular. "Functionally, it is a dream," he asserts. "There is nothing I would change. It is truly a work of art, and it makes me smile every day."

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