

TIMELESS DESIGN

Fu Tung Cheng and David Howell ponder the meaning and value of “timeless design”

Fu Tung Cheng, Cheng Design, Berkeley, CA and David Howell, David Howell Design, New York, NY have different views on the value and meaning of timeless design. Presented here is a kitchen designed by each in different time frames in the hope of discovering what designs last and why.

The first kitchen is Fu Tung Cheng’s current kitchen, which he built 20 years ago. Fu Tung is the master of concrete and his own kitchen counter was one of the first concrete counters

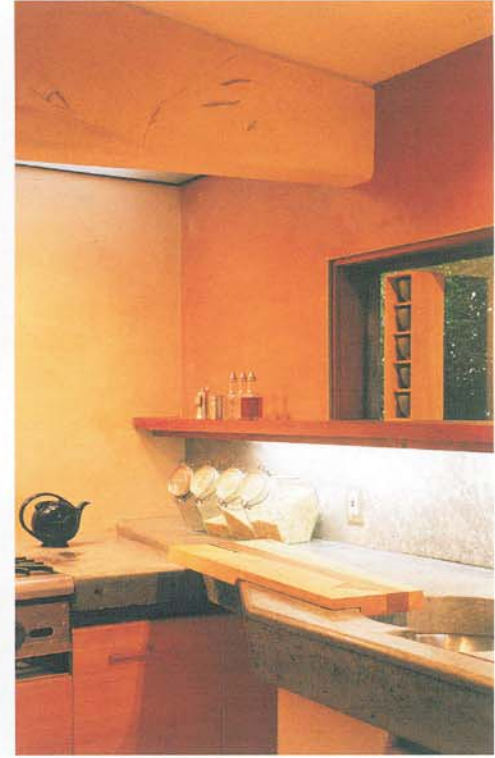
he’d ever installed.

“The ceiling comes down to 7 feet at the beams and goes up to 8 feet, 6 inches. So I didn’t include wall cabinets,” he says. “There is a horizontal ledge beneath the windows that we use to store dishes.” The range and carved plaster hood are tucked in a corner to the left of the sink counter. Two undercounter refrigerators and a dishwasher are grouped adjacent to the right of the sink counter.

Long before environment-friendly houses became a hot topic, Fu Tung had been living in a

“green” house. The cabinets’ redwood, the window glass, the maple flooring, the ceiling beams and wood work are all reclaimed materials.

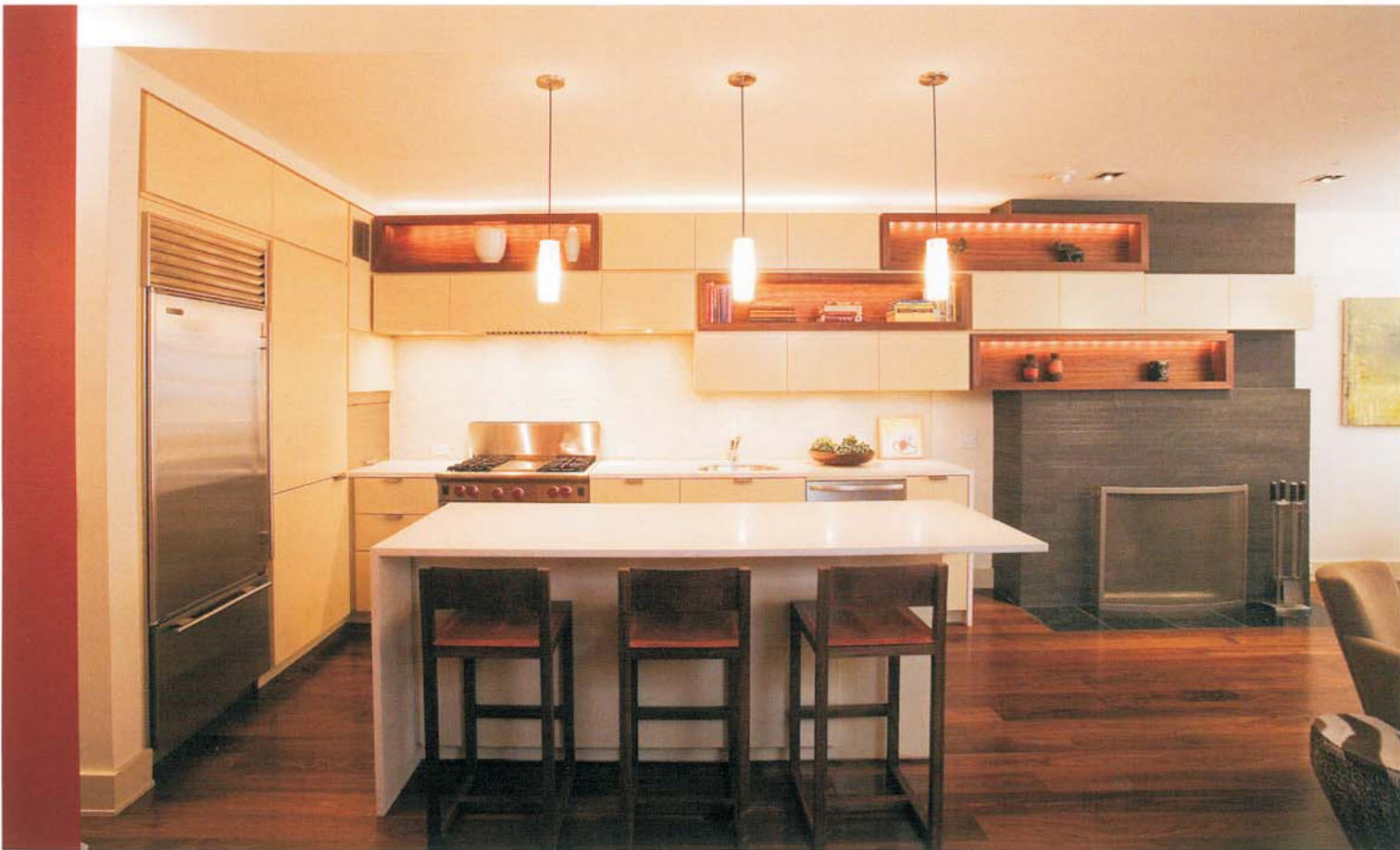
“My kitchen is only about 10 feet by 14 feet, but when I bring high-profile clients in to see it, they want it,” he says. “even though the counters are worn and stained. I challenge people to say when it was built and they really can’t identify it as a reference of a trend. It’s not the style, but their emotional response to the space that indicates a timeless quality.”



"Timelessness happens when a kitchen design is appropriate for the space, regardless of what's being offered in the marketplace. And it's the crafting of it—the hand of the craftsman—that elicits an emotional response," says Fu Tung. "We replicate product for economic value and are forced to add style on to mass products that are out there. Achieving timelessness involves not being forced into creating a matrix of slabs and boxes."

Fu Tung's Kitchen: Above: Fu Tung's 20-year-old kitchen includes one of the first concrete countertops he ever installed. ■ Right (top): A shelf holds plates in lieu of wall cabinets. ■ Right: The cabinetry is reclaimed redwood. ■ Below: The flooring is reclaimed maple. ■ Opposite page: Handcraftedness helps elicit an emotional response that makes the kitchen appealing in any time





Condo Kitchen designed by David Howell: Above: The pantry is next to the refrigerator. ■ Right: The horizontal display cases visually unite the kitchen and great room. ■ Below: The countertops are French limestone. The flooring is American walnut



In the New York City condominium kitchen designed by David Howell for a couple and their child, the kitchen is visually united with the adjacent great room by integrating staggered walnut display cases for the owners' collections of art objects with slim horizontal cabinets. The horizontal lines detract from the relatively low 9-foot ceiling.

"Height in wall cabinets becomes dysfunctional at a certain point because you can't reach the contents. So more and more of my clients are moving away from wall cabinets and toward using pantries," David says. There's a nice-sized pantry next to the refrigerator.

The counter and cabinet run along the wall is deeper than the standard 24 inches, coming in at

28 inches so the vent hood is totally concealed in the cabinetry above the range.

It can be argued that this kitchen possesses a degree of timelessness due to its clean-lined custom features and rich materials—things that probably will always be in demand. But in David's view, timelessness is not the issue in kitchen design—meeting his clients' present day needs is. "A kitchen has a relatively short life. When the apartment is sold, it might suit the next person who buys it, or that person might want it changed," he says. "But I think it's fine for things to show their age or to be applicable to the particular time in which they were designed."

Timelessness, then, can be a by-product of good design, especially when the designer is

afforded the luxury of creating custom elements. The better the resulting design suits the clients, and the time and place in which it is located, the more cherished it will be as a vibrant part of a home environment—whether the owner inhabits it for five years or 20. **D**



more information

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