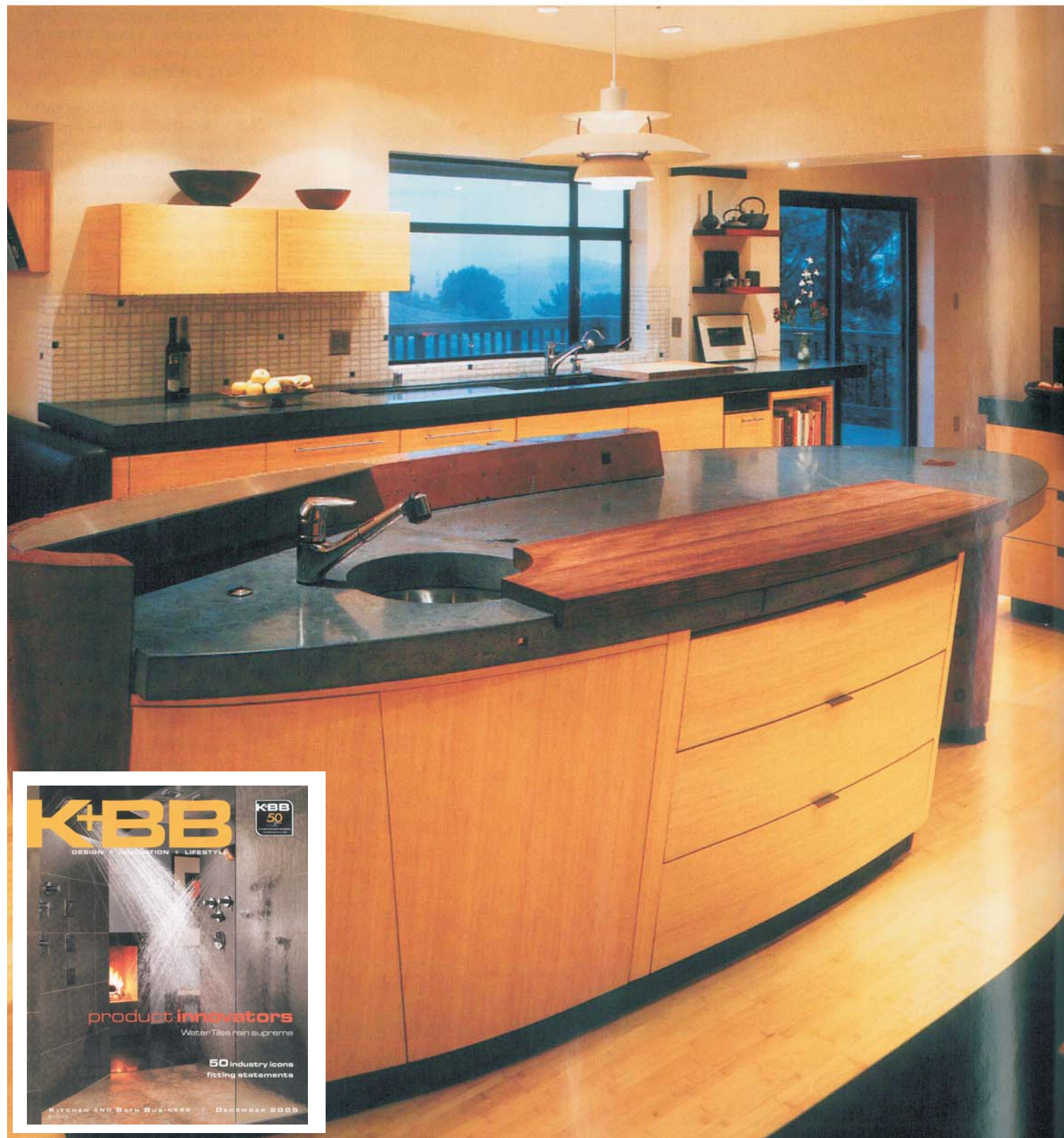


Just Like Heaven

A new kitchen allows one couple to reconnect with nature and each other

By Alexis Barnes



When a San Francisco-area couple built their dream house in the early '70s, they thought they had found heaven. Tree-studded hills, miles of wide-open spaces and the quiet serenity of nature greeted them. But then, almost 30 years later, so did a cramped, outdated kitchen. What they wanted was a room that matched the beauty and spaciousness of the hills beyond their home.

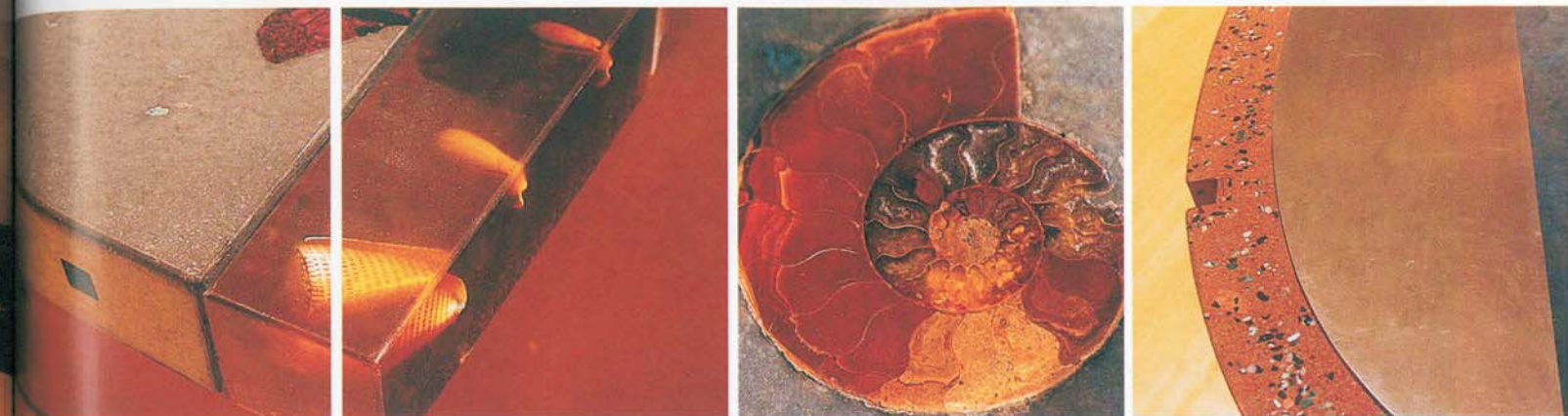
"When they built the house, I don't think they could appoint it exactly the way they wanted to, so the layout was a little choppy," said principal designer Fu-Tung Cheng, who was hired to transform the kitchen, which was actually two rooms—one a quasi-dining room that served as a kind of all-purpose room and the other, a smaller functional kitchen with plain, lacquered box cabinets.

"The space was very boxy and cluttered and definitely not in harmony with the view or the rest of the house," said Cheng, whose first steps were to remove walls in a quest for balance. "The owners wanted something

to cantilever it, so it actually sits out away from the house a little. It gives them better access to their wonderful view," said Cheng.

As a way to further enhance the view and reduce visual clutter, Cheng opted for almost no wall cabinets. Instead, smaller gadgets are hidden behind a bamboo appliance garage that runs the length of the dividing wall between the kitchen and dining room. Built-in shelves above the garage serve as a landing place for Asian- and English-inspired teapots as well as for dishes. Pullout base cabinets, also in clean-lined bamboo, house everything from cookbooks to pots and pans. A tall bank of bamboo cabinets lines another wall, helping not only to frame the room, but also to hide the refrigerator and freezer, undercounter wine storage and microwave. "Everything now has a place and none of it competes with the view," said Cheng.

To offset the neutral cabinetry, Cheng added a dramatic black granite countertop to the cooking area. "It looks almost like



more open, a space where they could enjoy each other's company without being in the way, as well as a room with a sculptural bent."

Taking cues from the owners' extensive collection of art and carved stones from Africa, Cheng created an island from concrete with curves and sweeps to mirror those found in the art collection. Tapered and curved cabinet doors add to the island's appeal, as does an amber-toned resin bumper at one end that eliminates sharp corners (a concern since there are often small children in the kitchen). To further enhance the artistic feel of the space and to add a true personal touch, the resin bumper was embedded with shells the homeowners found during their travels.

To keep the cook connected to guests in the larger space, several seating areas were worked into the design. The island's slate blue countertop cantilevers over the edge, allowing for more casual, interactive seating. For the husband, who likes to be in the kitchen with his wife but well out of her way, a breakfast bay with a booth made of bubinga wood and chestnut cowhide-cushioned benches was installed. "To accommodate the bay, we had

furniture," Cheng said of the counter, which extends the length of the cooking wall and continues to the floor. The result is that except for the indoor grill, the five-burner induction cooktop blends seamlessly with the countertop, taking the clean, uncluttered look of the kitchen to the next level. A patterned, glass tile mosaic backsplash and custom stainless-steel hood add sleekness and organic artistry to the space.

As an added element, and at the homeowners' request, Cheng added a prep station specifically for tea across the room from the cooking area. "Tea is always associated with feelings of serenity and relaxation, so we situated the area to take advantage of the views and the calmness and serenity of nature," said Cheng.

The large windows that frame the tea area also allow natural light to penetrate the space. And combined with recessed lighting and a classic Danish 1950s' decorative light fixture, the room's only original item, the windows provide plenty of warm light, drastically brightening a once dreary kitchen and bringing the owners closer to the heaven they found when they first built the house. ■

(Opposite top) A rouge-colored, elliptical concrete prep island with a large cutting board made of bubinga wood, is centrally located, serving as a functional base between all of the cooking appliances, while keeping the cook connected with guests. The island's slate blue countertop extends over the side, creating a seating area. Rounded corners were incorporated into the island's design to protect children and others from hurting themselves on sharp edges. As a truly personal touch, seashells collected by the homeowners during their many travels were set in the island's amber-hued resin bumper. Across from the island, large windows allow anyone in the room to take advantage of the beautiful view. A banquet was installed for this reason, as well as to provide a relaxing place to sit and either watch TV, talk to the cook or just daydream.



COOKING AREA

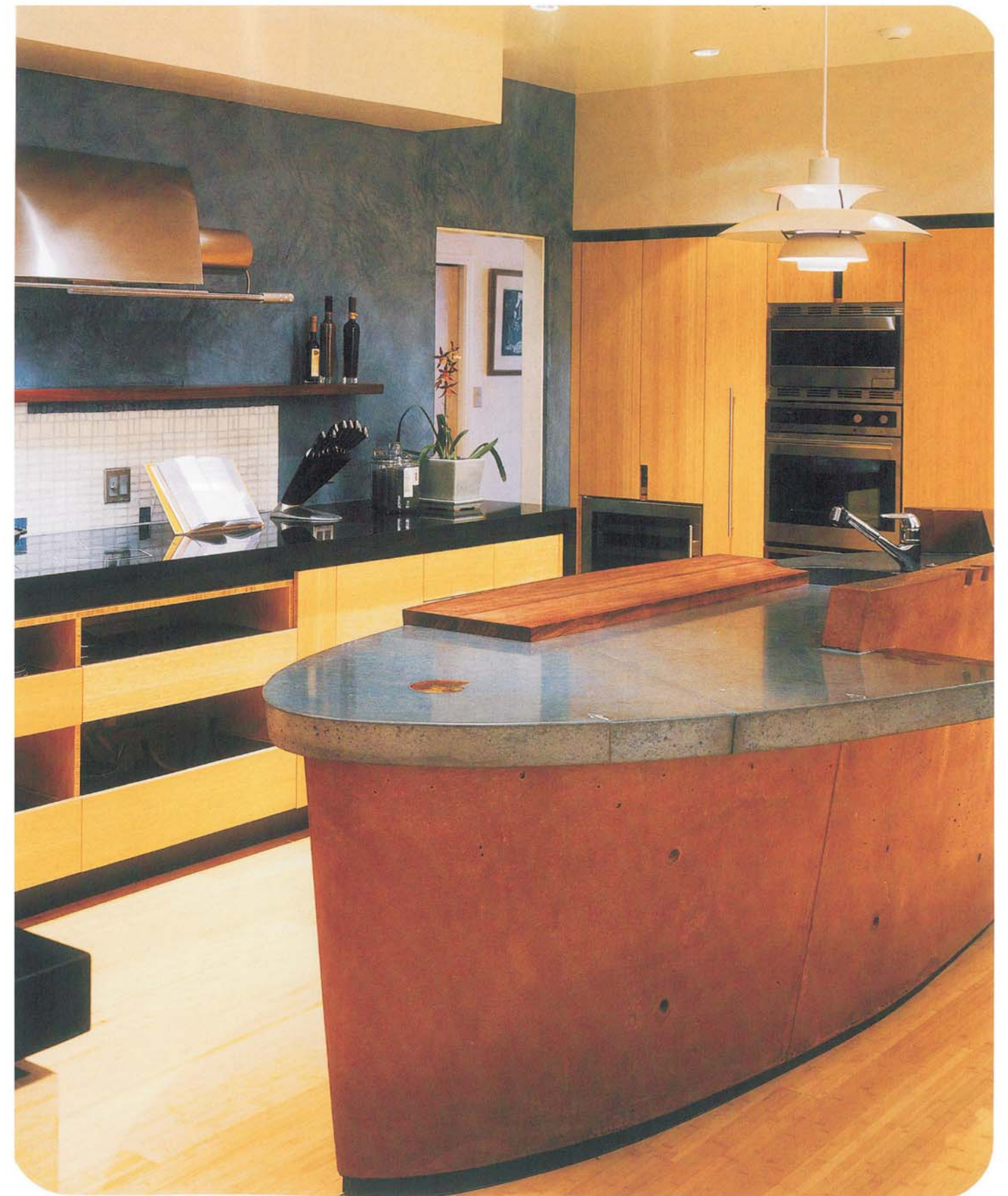
- A ceramic glass cooktop blends seamlessly with the Absolute Black granite countertop, which extends over one side all the way to the floor
- Contrasting with the countertop is an iridescent white backsplash made of recycled glass tiles
- The hood is from Cheng's own product line. Called Flux, it features an inline fan installed in the attic for easier access and maintenance, plus a "muffler" on the fan to reduce noise
- A bright blue plaster wall adds yet another dramatic element to the room and helps offset the neutral cabinetry and flooring

CABINETRY

- For a cleaner look, Cheng eliminated much of the wall cabinets, instead using pullout base cabinets and glass shelving for storage
- Bamboo was used to conceal appliances, giving the room a sleeker feel. It was also used for shelving in the tea area so that the couple can display art from their extensive collection
- So as not to compete with the view and the home's natural surroundings, a neutral color was chosen

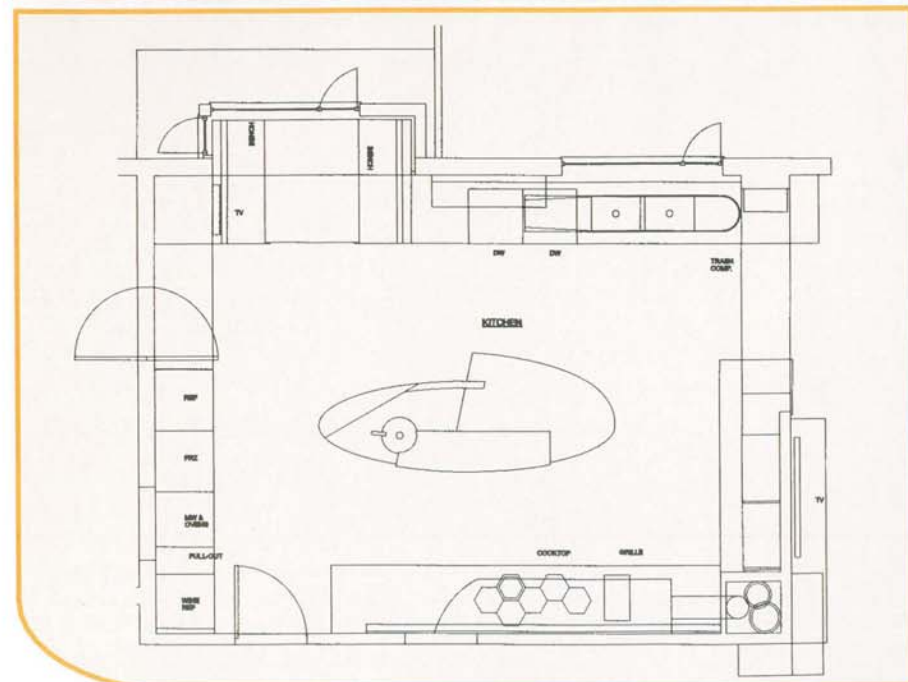
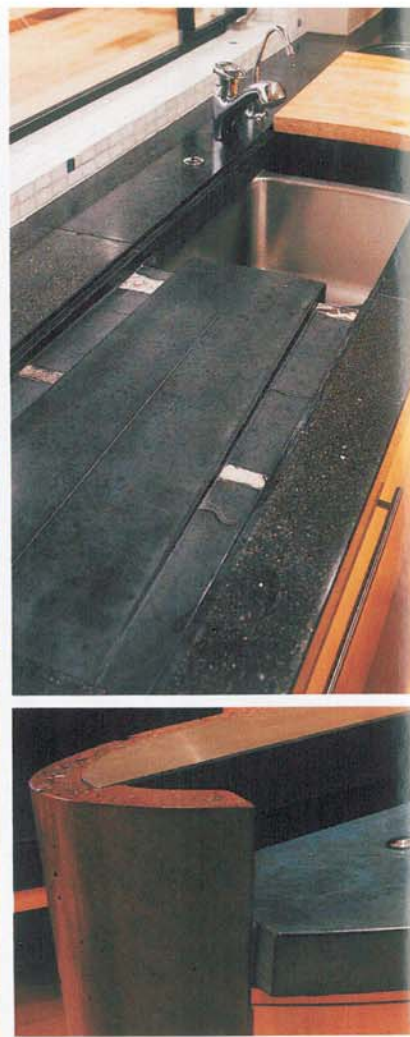
FLOORING

- Environmentally friendly bamboo was used in keeping with the homeowners' appreciation of nature
- Flooring extends into the neighboring room, providing visual continuity
- The same color and type of bamboo were also used for the cabinetry





The owners of this kitchen have been married for some time. And while they like being together, having a kitchen that was spacious enough for them (and company) to be in the room at the same time, but not in each other's way, was key. Details were also important. Hence, the island's built-in drain board and curves that add softness and a more organic feel to the space.



sources

Designers: Fu-Tung Cheng, principal, and Ann Kim, AIA—Cheng Design, Berkeley, CA; www.chengdesign.com

Manufacturers

Flooring: Plyboo by Smith & Fong
Cooktop/ovens: Küppersbusch
Ventilation hood: Cheng Design Products
Countertops: Cheng Design Products
Refrigerator: Sub-Zero
Wine refrigerator: Sub-Zero
Dishwasher: Fisher & Paykel
Faucets: Grohe
Pendant light: Louis Poulsen

Photography: © Matthew Millman

products



1 Cheng installed an instant-hot-water spout from **In-Sink-Erator** in the kitchen's tea area. Model GN1100 features a high-arching spout that swivels for easy accessibility, as well as filtrated water and adjustable thermostat control. It comes in nine finishes, including chrome, black, almond and satin nickel. **Circle No. 125**

2 Cheng chose a glass ceramic cooktop from **Küppersbusch** similar to the Honeycomb. Part of the I-Class series, the cooktop features the latest advancements in "touch-me" technology, shunning control knobs in favor of "sensor-touch" controls that regulate heat settings while managing multiple cooking zones with the touch of a finger. **Circle No. 126**

3 Plyboo from **Smith & Fong** was used for the floors. Made of 100 percent bamboo, Plyboo comes in lengths of 2 ft., 3 ft. and 6 ft. and measures 3⁵/₈ in. wide and 5⁵/₈ in. thick. Colors include natural and amber. And because the flooring is tongue and groove, it can be either nailed down or floated over an existing concrete slab or plywood sub floor. **Circle No. 127**

4 The only item held over from the original kitchen, the PH5 pendant from **Louis Poulsen** was retrofitted to work in the new space. Providing glare-free illumination, the pendant directs light both vertically and horizontally. Light is also diffused through a sandblasted glass shield in the lower shade. The pendant comes in three finishes: white, graphite grey and wet painted. **Circle No. 128**

5 **Oceanside Glasstile** was used for the backsplash. The Tessera collection features hand-cut glass mosaic tiles in four sizes: 1-in. x 1-in., 1-in. x 2-in., 2-in. x 2-in. and 1³/₄-in. hexagon. The tiles come sheet-mounted in 21 iridescent and 17 non-iridescent colors. **Circle No. 129**