

Creating a chef's kitchen

When it comes to designing your dream kitchen, success is all in the details

BY ANNA CIPOLLONE





SARAH RICHARDSON



CHEF MARK McEWAN

CONTEMPORARY KITCHEN DESIGN EXTENDS WELL BEYOND WHAT'S REQUIRED FOR COOKING, AND INTO THE DAY-TO-DAY REQUIREMENTS OF THE FAMILY—FROM DINING TO ENTERTAINING. DESIGNER AND TV PERSONALITY SARAH RICHARDSON REFERS TO THIS AS 'THE LIVING KITCHEN,' WHERE MODERN FAMILY LIFE CONVERGES.

SARAH RICHARDSON'S KITCHEN



A COMFORTABLE SEATING AREA AND PLENTY OF NATURAL LIGHT ARE HALLMARKS OF A NEW DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

The best recipe for a beautiful kitchen begins with an assessment of how you live and entertain in your home. “Designing a high-functioning kitchen that stands the test of time is not merely a visual pursuit,” says Richardson. “Being brutally honest with yourself is important.”

In order to find the right balance of quality, design and value, she suggests you think of all the possibilities, and outline your tastes, lifestyle needs and colour preferences during the initial meetings with your designer. First, know your look and style. Second, know your lifestyle. If you don’t know where to start, there’s no shortage of inspiration online to help you realize whether your dream kitchen is contemporary or traditional, colourful or monochromatic, city or country.

Since all the decisions you make in your kitchen are big-ticket items, forethought and strategic planning can help prevent regrets later. “It’s definitely a place where it’s important to think about resale and investment, but at the end of the day your dream kitchen needs to be your dream kitchen, and not anybody else’s,” says Richardson.

The interior designer becomes an advocate for the process—ideally, involved at the very beginning when a house is first being dreamed up by its architect. And you don’t want to come in too late in the process because then things can’t be changed, “but we work closely with the builder or contractor throughout, and we act on behalf of the client,” says Richardson.

“With a kitchen renovation, anything you do is like an orchestra,” she adds. “It involves a lot of different players and trades, and there are a lot of moving parts. And if one thing goes wrong, it impacts everything else.”



SARAH RICHARDSON'S KITCHEN

SARAH RICHARDSON'S KITCHEN, THIS PAGE AND PREVIOUS: STACEY BRANDFORD

THE FUNCTIONAL KITCHEN

“How you actually function in the kitchen is first and foremost,” says Chef Mark McEwan, because a firm understanding of how you like to cook will ensure every decision is carefully crafted with your desires in mind. “Sometimes, too large a space can be a bit of a disadvantage if you don’t organize it well,” he says. “You have to look at how you entertain.” For example, if you’re the type of person who tends to host large numbers of people, then two refrigerators and double dishwashers might be practical.

With induction giving gas a run for its money, that’s certainly an important choice to

make, along with what type of fridge, sink and dishwasher suits you. “I think a dishwasher drawer is amazing, and having multiple dishwashers is fantastic,” says Richardson, noting that instead of a single full size, you can have one by the bar for glasses.

“The pursuit of great design is tied to your enjoyment of your home and how you live at home,” she says. And if you love to cook, by nature you often love to entertain. “But you can’t always rush food,” says Richardson, who points out that some things are meant to be enjoyed and savoured without a race to the finish line. With the move towards whole

foods, that are locally and organically grown, for instance, you may not need a huge chest freezer and fridge if you’re always buying fresh at the market.

The relationship of sink to counter space is essential for McEwan, who prefers to have a large area to queue up on when he entertains at home. “If I’m doing a dinner party, I put everything on the counter that I’m going to use and then I prep it all,” he explains. “And I like to have lots of space with big sink compartments next door and a faucet with a big sprayer on it, so that it almost functions as an industrial kitchen but looks a little bit slicker.”





WOLF INDUCTION COOKTOP

TOP CONTENDER Wolf Induction Cooktops

More efficient than traditional cooking surfaces, induction heats via a magnetic field. Instead of losing energy to the environment, energy is applied directly to the cooking vessel. Wolf is leading the way with offerings such as its 36" Induction Cooktop. Turn an element up or down and the temperature response is instantaneous—up to 40% faster than gas or electric. Wolf induction produces more responsive temperatures for faster sears and boils or gentle simmers and melts. It has five elements and five bridging options. Black ceramic glass surface resists scratching, staining, impact and heat, and the illuminated white LED sliding touch controls are easy to read. Plus, the minimalist design works with any kitchen décor.

In the pantry

Special items you might consider adding to your cabinet.



SMOKE SHOW HOT SAUCE

Made from lightly smoked jalapeños, Smoke Show Hot Sauce is now available online—as well as at select retailers. It's an incredibly delicious add-on, with a hint of sweet and a lot of kick. smokeshowsauce.com



JOE BEEF SPICES

Created by the good folks at Joe Beef in Montreal, these spice collections come in Butcher's Blend (good for steaks, or—let's be honest—Caesars), BBQ Rub and Country Salt Blend. Make your meat dishes come alive! Favuzzi distributes Joe Beef and a host of other great products from around the world. favuzzi.com



OTTO EXTRA VIRGIN

If you're looking for a top olive oil, look no further than OTTO's award-winning L'Ottobratco Extra-Virgin Olive Oil. It offers notes of artichoke, sour apple and bitter banana, and is smooth and clean with a spicy finish. Goes great with bitter greens, tomato salad, pesto, soup, stew and fish. sarafino.com



O SOLE MIO CARBONARA

Sometimes even the most capable chef needs a helping hand. (Or a quick save.) O Sole Mio now offers a creamy Carbonara with pancetta that is the perfect pairing for fresh pasta. Use it as it comes or add your personal touch, but no one needs to know you didn't slave over it. osolemio.ca



BALSAMIC VINEGAR OF MODENA

One of Maille's signature offerings, this vinegar from Modena (in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region) is bursting with flavour, and a little goes a long way. Drizzle or brush, it's the perfect touch to grilled vegetables, grilled meats, pasta salad or desserts. maille.ca



GAROFALO PASTA

Gagnano is "the home of pasta," where historians, poets and writers have celebrated the art of making this staple for centuries. The Garofalo legacy began in 1789, when, by Royal Decree of The Kingdom of Naples, Signore Lucio Garofalo was granted the first permit in Gagnano for production and sale. Today, Garofalo continues to offer pasta made from the finest durum semolina, and is distributed here in Canada by Martelli Foods. martellifoods.com



BERTOZZI EPICURE VEGETABLES

The Bertozzi Epicure Flavours of Italy in-house line features fantastic vegetables grilled by hand over an open fire pit, and then packed in olive oil. The line-up includes mushrooms and eggplant (roasted, hot or sweet), as well as hot roasted peppers and artichokes, in several varieties. bertozziepicure.com



KAMPOT PEPPER

Cambodia once supplied the world with Kampot Pepper—the so-called 'King of Peppers'—but decades of war and strife nearly destroyed the supply. Fleur d'olive is helping restore the harvest by actively contributing to the continuation of pepper farming in Kampot. They buy from the producers' cooperative, supporting farms directly. So, not only are you getting the best seasoning, you are also helping restore a community. fleurdolive.com



TOP CONTENDER **MYKO Kitchen Sinks**

With their minimalist lines, Canadian-made MYKO sinks are well crafted, robot welded and hand polished for a superior brushed satin finish. Each is made from ultra-thick stainless steel that is both heat and corrosion resistant. The MYKO drainboard sink offers an expansive work and prep area, with accessories that slot in easily—such as a colander, cutting board or compost container.



Richardson chooses to entertain more casually because that suits her busy schedule. “If you’re coming to my house for dinner, I am never going to be sitting down on the sofa in the living room having a cocktail with you because everything is ready to go,” she says, with a laugh. “Hopefully the groceries have all been unpacked, but the wine will be chilled, and the bar will definitely be open.”

Chef McEwan relies on the convenience of a good-sized sink and colander to clean beets, carrots and onions fresh from his garden. Though it may sound very ABC fundamental, McEwan points out the importance of placement in relation to how you move through your space. “Otherwise, you’re traipsing across the room with wet garbage and no place to land.”

Consider whether you prefer a wide-open concept or slightly more segregated spaces, or if

you’d rather not have dishes in your sightline while you’re eating. With multiple stations and prep counters, everyone can co-exist within the ecosystem of the kitchen. Richardson likes to prioritize long runs of counter space for this reason. “If you assign your appliances placement based on the triangle philosophy, what you end up with is teeny little bits of counter space,” she says. “I like to think about work stations and about kitchens being collaborative spaces where people can work together, but also where a family can be in the space together doing different things without overlapping,” she says.

About to begin renovations on the kitchen in his Toronto home, Chef David Lee is planning a walk-in fridge within the overall style of a utilitarian kitchen crafted in wood and stainless steel, with an outdoor kitchen complete with wood-burning pit and smoker.

Opting for a minimalist design scheme that helps prevent clutter, Lee says you should “study the layout really carefully to make sure it makes sense,” and consider the flow of the kitchen, positioning of appliances, and easy access to storage with cupboards in reach.

There’s a sophisticated countryside feel to the kitchen at Chef McEwan’s cottage on Georgian Bay, which features a big working island in wood, with all the counter tops in marble. “I have a cabinet for all my vinegars that is an old pharmacy zinc cabinet from the turn of the century, and then all the appliances are professional-grade, stainless steel.”

According to McEwan, it’s a real working kitchen that accommodates cooking for large numbers. And if you’re spending a lot of time in your professional home kitchen, consideration should be paid to sightlines. “I think the views in the kitchen are important when you’re cutting and working, and if you’re able to incorporate windows and views, that adds a huge element.” ➔

MULTIPLE WORK STATIONS CREATE ROOM FOR EVERYONE IN THE KITCHEN



THE DESIGN SHOULD EMBRACE THE IDEA OF KITCHEN AS BOTH WORK AND ENTERTAINMENT SPACE



The Kitchen Triangle

Back in the days when kitchens were a place you only used for prepping food, the 'Kitchen Triangle' was *de rigueur*. Basically, it dictated that the fridge, range and sink were laid out in a triangle of no more than four to nine feet to a side. That reduced the travel distance for a single person preparing meals.

Today, kitchens are the heart of the home, and they have to accommodate far more appliances and lots more activity. Because of that, many designs are evolving to accommodate work zones—convenient spaces directly beside appliances that can be used for prep work. This allows cooking to be done more efficiently, but also makes room for other people in the kitchen.

Professional grade

Every worker (or chef) is only as good as their tools—and there are some things that just can't be replicated in the kitchen without the right helper.

THERMOMIX

The Thermomix was conceived in the '60s as a food processor that also heats up and cooks things. That great concept remains its core idea—but there's also a whole lot more. Like spiffy aesthetics by Porsche Design, titanium blades that can powderize a lobster shell, an internal digital scale that measures whatever you add to the bowl, a self-clean cycle, and a snap-on attachment that can, say, cook a fillet of fish with the escaping steam from the risotto churning automatically in the bowl beneath. In Europe, where kitchen space is invariably at a premium, it is considered the indispensable all-in-one domestic kitchen appliance. Here, the pricey item is instead ubiquitous quality restaurant kitchens—blitzing out a cup of lobster bisque sauce for a tasting menu without fuss or mess or waste, turning spelt into flour and a proofed dough at the touch of a button. You name it. It's an electronic sous chef that never calls in sick.



ROBOT-COUPÉ

If the Cuisinart is the elegant but affordable European workhorse—like, say, an entry-level Mercedes C-class—the Robot Coupe is its AMG edition, wherein the original efficient but thrifty engine has been supplanted by a fire-breathing, supercharged V8 that spews gobs of torque. Price of entry comes at a premium, but the results are worth it for any kitchen that depends on speed and efficiency. More than that, you can taste a difference in the soups, purées and sliced vegetables that emerge from it. Vegetables hate to be banged about and slowly bruised by a dull blade; it beats the starch and liquid out of them. Instead, the Robot Coupe cuts them up so speedily that their flesh hardly registers the indignity.



IMMERSION CIRCULATORS AND VACUUM-PACKING MACHINES

Back in 1972, the great chef Pierre Troisgros initiated a singularly French research project—how to make a better terrine of whole *foie gras*, while simultaneously cutting back on waste. The eventual answer proved to be to cook it *sous-vide*, which is to say very gently indeed, sealed up in a plastic bag, and heated in a water bath barely hot enough for bathing in. Slow controlled cooking meant less rendered fat and so a richer, smoother result. And the method was later found to have far broader applications. Ultra-slow cooking renders even off-cuts supple, and flavours are intensified. But the biggest reason restaurants love the system is that programmable cooking times and temperatures take the power of error away from their inexperienced line-cooks. Less passion on the plate, maybe, but a whole lot more perfect medium-rare steaks, too.



PACO-JET

The last time you ate at a good fine-dining restaurant and enjoyed a dessert course that featured some ice cream so fresh, smooth and creamy as to seem almost otherworldly, you probably tipped your hat to the exceptional skills of the pastry chef. But, more likely than not, you shouldn't have. The man you want to thank is Swiss engineer Wilhelm Maurer, who invented a process called "pacotizing" and the machine that does it, the Pacojet. What it does is convert frozen ingredients into mousses, sorbets, ice creams and sauces without thawing them. Instead, capitalizing on their solid form, it slices them with a 2,000 rpm blade, under pressure, into micro-thin layers, which results in textures of a previously unimaginable smoothness. And, no, domestic editions do not exist.





CAESARSTONE

PITFALLS IN THE PROCESS

“When renovating an older house, you’re always going to find stuff behind the walls that you wish you hadn’t,” says Richardson, noting that she’s renovated over 300 rooms for television, and has uncovered everything from knob and tube wiring, things that don’t meet code, structural challenges and asbestos. And once the space is gutted, you’re in for a penny, in for a pound.

“You should not try to live in your house through a kitchen renovation,” says Richardson. “Be practical. Know that it’s always worth it in the end, but every kitchen is a little bit of no pain, no gain.”

Chef McEwan suggests researching and finding the best designer to realize your vision and style. “If you work with a company like Falcon Kitchens, you will create a kitchen that is majestic, beautiful and timeless,” says McEwan. “I tend to gravitate towards classic European,” he says, and then you can build modern elements into the space.

“Examine the practicality of the kitchen, which I don’t think many people do,” recommends McEwan. If you store pots and pans thoughtfully, you won’t be scrambling once guests arrive. “That’s just the restaurant guy in me,” he says. “I have all my moves covered, and I know exactly what I’m going to do before dinner so that I’m not looking harried.”

When it comes to dreaming up and designing the ultimate chef’s kitchen in your home, Richardson reiterates that a renovation is intended to improve the space. “I think people should never lose sight of the fact that this is their home, this is their oasis,” she says. “And this is about creating a space that is uniquely you and filling it with the finishes, layout and elements that make you happy.”

INSTALL APPLIANCES, SUCH AS UNDERCOUNTER FREEZERS AND DISHWASHERS, IN LOCATIONS THAT SUIT THE WORK ABOVE



TRENDING MATERIALS

With contemporary kitchens moving toward a European-style design, prominent features include lower cabinetry and more hidden elements, so that everything slips away into its rightful place for peace of mind. Prevalent trends like disguised appliances, panel dishwashers, and things that disappear so the kitchen can offer a quiet, harmonious visual statement are going to be essential for a kitchen to last the long haul.

Man-made surface materials like Caesarstone, Silestone and HanStone allow you to get what you want with total customization. “Quartz is my hands-down favourite,” says Richardson, who’s been using it for about 10 years. Among its touted benefits are its durability, as it doesn’t scratch, stain or crack, and it comes in a wide range of colours, she says. Patterned tiles with a Spanish or Moorish influence used on floors and backsplashes have also begun to replace mosaic.



Silestone Quartz

These high-quality non-porous surfaces offer a unique anti-bacterial protection technology known as bacteriostatic. It can handle spills of coffee, vinegar, olive oil or whatever else you happen to have in the pantry, and it’s extremely strong and built to last. Available in over 60 colours, Silestone Quartz is ideal for countertops and work stations, and adds value to your professional-grade home kitchen.