



BY ELIOT NUSBAUM

KITCHENS for the ages

DESIGNERS BRING A SENSE OF STYLE AND
SUBSTANCE—NOT TO MENTION PHILOSOPHY—
TO A '40S KITCHEN IN PASADENA
AND A '90S KITCHEN IN SAN FRANCISCO.



Style isn't about elaborateness . . . it's more about doing well with what you have.

—INTERIOR DESIGNER MARK CUTLER

MARK CUTLER HAS A THEORY about design at the start of the new millennium: "It's less about technology and gadgets and more about finding a comfort with the past." That belief more or less inspired his team's design for the kitchen and breakfast area in the Pasadena Showcase House of Design. The fact that they started with a 1940s kitchen that had never been remodeled gave them a fine place to test the theory. "The old kitchen was very basic and utilitarian," says Cutler. "And while it was well laid out with a great scale and size, it didn't have a lot of style to it."

So style became the order of the day. "We tried to introduce some subtle architectural changes that would enhance the idea of a kitchen of the 1940s," explains Cutler. That meant adding an arch over the refurbished vintage range with a niche for spices next to it and a farmhouse sink over an arched and skirted storage cupboard. Cutler kept the original cabinets, but replaced the wood insets with glass in the unusual sliding doors of the upper cabinets. He then lined the backs of these cabinets with gingham to give them a little more depth and to create a warm backdrop for white dishes. Vintage-looking rectangular wall tiles and beige marble counters add to the period feel. The original kitchen had no place for a refrigerator or a wall oven. So, Cutler opened up a broom closet to house the refrigerator and borrowed space from the pantry for a wall oven. He designed the new island to look like a farm table, with a mahogany top, a sink that sits on it like an old-fashioned dishpan, and linen skirting underneath.

Rather than place a small table and chairs in the tight eating area, Cutler pushed a big table into the space and surrounded it with a banquette and a pair of ottomans at the end. Above the table, Cutler designed a fixture with a gold fish bowl. "It's probably the most stupid idea I ever realized," he says, "but it was fun." Underneath, he stretched a piece of celadon green linoleum punched with holes through which yarn has been tied to make it look like a rug. The walls of the niche are crisscrossed with ribbons holding vintage postcards of Pasadena.

"In general, we try to do things very simply," says Cutler. "People could walk into this kitchen and see that style doesn't have to do with elaborateness, but rather it is more about understanding the philosophy of doing well with what you have, of dressing it up a bit without changing its essence."

Pasadena Showcase House of Design
Pasadena, California
Interior designer: Mark Cutler
Photographer: Jon Jensen
Regional editor: Carla Breer Howard

For more information, see the
Buying Guide on page 144.





San Francisco Decorator Showcase
San Francisco, California

Interior designer: Eugenia Erskine Jesberg

Photographer: Bill Holt

Regional editor: Carla Breer Howard

For more information, see the Buying Guide on page 144.

FOLLOWING THE STRANGE EDICT that "blah" is best for resale, the kitchen in the San Francisco Decorator Showcase had been done in beige sometime in the '90s. *Really* beige: beige marble, beige limestone, beige walls, and beige cabinets.

On the other hand, the original appliances were fine, and the layout was OK. So designer Eugenia Erskine Jesberg focused her energies on kicking out the blahs. And that she did by introducing a palette of soft greens set off by a sparkling mosaic tile backsplash that brought a bright new character to the room. Jesberg started with the room's crown molding, which ties together the kitchen and the eating area. She painted the molding and perimeter cabinets robin's-egg blue, then put an antique glaze over the paint. She also replaced some clear-glass cabinet doors with softer-looking laminated glass. In contrast, she chose unfinished teak for the island, which she also antiqued to make it look more like a piece of furniture. Playing off the blue cabinets, Jesberg chose a gray Italian marble for the perimeter counter, and went with a pale yellowish green concrete top on the island. But the glittering star of the show is the glass-tile backsplash, which sets ribbon-like curls of silver and gold metallic tiles in fields of iridescent tiles above the cooktop and the prep sink, a soft and playful counterpoint to the rectangular arrangement of the room.

To anchor the large dining area, Jesberg chose a solid—not to mention solemn—Irish wake table, which she surrounded by equally dark but more contemporary-feeling ladderback side chairs. A lacy chandelier tops the arrangement. A French pine buffet with fine surface details plus a grouping of simple, food-related prints finish the space with just the right playful contrast. □

