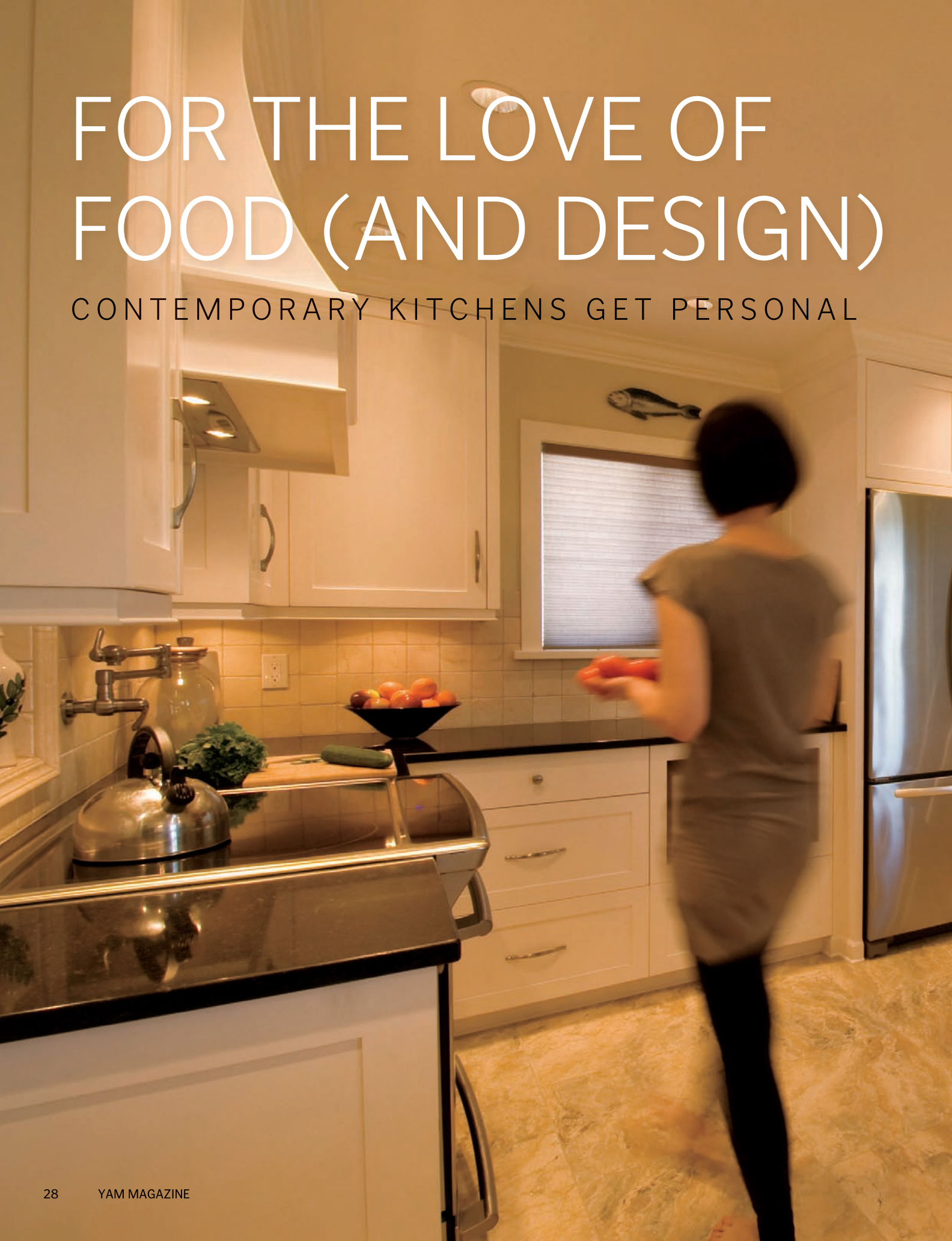



FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD (AND DESIGN)

CONTEMPORARY KITCHENS GET PERSONAL





There's a 19th-century French saying — *dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es* — that means, “tell me what you eat and I’ll tell you what you are.” In the 21st century, as passions for food and design merge, it might be more fitting to say, “tell me what your kitchen is like and I’ll tell you what you are”... By Kerry Slavens

LET'S GET PERSONAL

Now, more than ever, the kitchen is being consciously celebrated with design and décor that reflects our renewed desire to connect with our food, our space, our families and friends — and ourselves. As we gather up the loose ends of our busy lives, the kitchen has become a space that reminds us of who we are and what matters.

If this sounds a bit lofty, just think how many parties you attend where people crowd into the kitchen as if drawn by a magnetic force. Instinctively, we all know this room is the soul of the house, the place where we are nurtured — and today's designs embrace that idea in a big way.

According to Bart Griffin of Griffin Design, “Trends come and go. What matters today is that people mostly want kitchens to reflect who they are.”

So no personality tests or kitschy “discover your style” horoscopes are necessary to learn about a home and its inhabitants — just head for the kitchen.

OPENING UP

Gillian MacDonald knew the kitchen in her family's 1950s bungalow didn't meet the needs of her busy family of four, and it certainly didn't reflect their personal style. Her kitchen was separate from the dining room, and that felt isolating to MacDonald. Instead, she dreamed of a stylish, functional space that integrated with the rest of the house: a welcoming space where she could indulge her love of cooking, while her husband worked on his laptop or read and the children chatted and did homework.

With the help of Rannala Construction, MacDonald's kitchen evolved from a standard cooking room to a functional yet inviting destination with a breezy flair that echoes her husband's Mediterranean roots.

To open the room up, Rannala removed the wall between the dining room and kitchen to create a “great room,” and built the counter space into an L-shaped design that defines the two areas and includes a food bar where family and friends can pull up a stool and enjoy the kitchen ambience — and the cook can still feel connected to the goings-on.

“This kitchen feels like us,” says MacDonald, “and it feels good to be in here. There's a sense of connection. It's amazing what you can learn about your kids when you're all in the same space.”

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FUNCTION AND FORM

MacDonald’s kitchen took careful planning to achieve the right balance of function and beauty. David Rannala says that while it’s fun to jump right into thinking about kitchen layout, there are important things to consider before you start building or renovating.

Think about lifestyle. How do you like to live? Do you entertain a lot? How many cooks are in your family? If you have a young family, your needs will be different than if you are a baby boomer thinking of retirement. If you’re vegetarian, you may not want the same kitchen as an avid griller.

Focus on function. It’s easy to forget functionality when faced with spectacular design options, but if you forget this important step, your kitchen may drive you crazy eventually. When Rannala worked with MacDonald, he asked her about even the smallest details of how she uses her kitchen. How big are her pots and pans? Where does she like to store cookbooks? And, yes, he would find a way to keep her 1950s built-in ironing-board cupboard because that was important to her.

Aesthetics allure. Do you want something ultra-modern, traditional, or timeless? What is the style in the rest of your home? Generally, it’s a good idea for kitchen design to tie in with the other areas of a home to create a feeling of continuity.

At last, the layout. Your layout will flow out of your answers to the above considerations. Whatever you choose, it has to work for you and your family. For instance, an open concept may be all the rage, but if you prefer a separate dining room, don’t force yourself to go with the trends. The same holds true for islands; they don’t work in just any space, says Rannala. They can be great additional eating or food prep areas, but wrongly placed islands can become frustrating obstacles.

A ROOM TO VIEW

All of these considerations played into the design of MacDonald’s kitchen, and the end result was worth the careful planning. Her once-outdated kitchen now features Cambria black quartz countertops with subtle flecks, reminiscent of a night sky. This quartz has the look and feel of granite, but it is nonporous and won’t absorb foods and liquids like granite can. The countertops are dramatically offset by creamy Italian tiles and sleek custom-made cabinets painted snowfall white in a durable high-catalyzed lacquer.

To attain a clean, streamlined look, many of the appliances are concealed or integrated. The fridge is set back so it doesn’t dominate the space; above the



fridge, a TV is concealed in a cabinet with retractable doors. The range fan is hidden behind a custom-made hood shroud, adding a classic touch in contrast to the stainless steel Electrolux convection range. Inset tiles behind the range further add to the Mediterranean ambience.

Cabinets of formaldehyde-free maple plywood resemble freestanding pieces of furniture. Their classic toe kicks complement the hood shroud and crown moulding. Stainless steel fixtures pick up on





: A Chicago pot filler is positioned next to the range. - : The range fan is hidden behind a custom-made hood shroud, adding a classic touch in contrast to the stainless steel range.

full use of an otherwise awkward space — far more functional than the old lazy susans.

If the success of a kitchen design is based on how much everyone, especially the cook, loves to spend time in the kitchen, then MacDonald’s renovation is a winner.

“We’re social people,” she says. “We’re always in the kitchen. It is really the heart of the home. With the new open design, if we have people over and I’m making something like salsa, my guests can see me choosing ingredients and chopping things up, and we can talk about the food. The kitchen breaks down barriers and the food is a common denominator because people either love to eat or cook, or both.”

THE FOODIE INFLUENCE

Kitchen design has been heavily influenced by TV shows like *Iron Chef* and the popularity of the “foodie” trend, which has lasted so long it can hardly be called a trend. A foodie (a term coined by Paul Levy and Ann Barr, authors of *The Official Foodie Handbook*) is a person driven by a passionate desire for knowledge about food, combined with a quest for freshness,

the stainless steel of the fridge and stove.

It’s an ideal space for someone who loves to cook as much as MacDonald does. The locations of the appliances create a highly functional work triangle, and a Chicago faucet pot filler is conveniently positioned next to the range. Above-counter cabinet space is ample and, instead of base cabinets, Rannala recommended oversized drawers on full-extension slides, eliminating the need to bend down to find items. A corner cabinet features a shuffle system to make



Iv n Meade expanded his kitchen by moving the wall between the kitchen and the hall.



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The credenza adds storage, has a built-in desk, and is used for serving.



simplicity, sustainability, and, yes, design.

Ivan Meade of Meade Design Group, a self-confessed foodie and the son of a Cordon Bleu chef, understands perfectly how the worlds of food and design complement each other.

“It is said that you start eating with your eyes — the final presentation of a dish represents all the creative work of the chef or the cook: the quality of the ingredients, the flavours, the seasoning, the technique with which the dish was prepared. It’s an evolving process that is presented at the

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“...I could also say that you start cooking with the eyes,” Meade continues. “The kitchen is that laboratory where the alchemy of food is prepared — a good design, a good layout, good appliances, and quality materials make the process more enjoyable.”

Meade has created a culinary heaven in his Fernwood condo, transforming the small, typical condo kitchen into a stylish space that feels intimate despite its open concept. With its sleek lines, halogen pot lights, and sophisticated, contrasting colours, Meade’s kitchen is the ideal stage for the food he prepares and the dinner parties he likes to host.

He expanded the 11’ x 10’ kitchen to 14’ x 10’ by moving the wall between the kitchen and the hall. The extra space meant he could add a custom-built credenza on the wall opposite the food preparation area. The credenza serves multiple functions: it adds storage, it has a built-in desk, and it’s a serving centre. As Meade prepares food, he sets out the plates on the credenza and creates each dish with the style that is his trademark.

The top of the credenza is lower than the kitchen countertop. This layered look is increasingly popular as people strive to add visually enticing features to kitchens. He also had two cube “windows” cut out of the wall behind the credenza. Distinctive touches like these turn ordinary into exciting.

While most people assume kitchen renovations are always pricey, it’s noteworthy that Meade’s entire kitchen cost only \$5,000 (minus the flooring) five years ago. Eschewing the expense of granite, he chose a Formica countertop in textured ebony, and he custom-designed his cabinets and credenza, using melamine with the grain and the texture of real wood.

In an open concept kitchen like Meade’s



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“So all homes need a good heart... one that is strong and functional and aesthetically beautiful for everybody to enjoy.”

or MacDonald's, it's important to create focal points and continuity with other rooms. One way to achieve this is with paint. Meade's kitchen walls are neutral sand tones with an accent wall that blends with the ebony countertops and backsplash. The rich ironwood colour of the living room fireplace references the colour of the cabinets. Upper cabinets are a neutral blue/gray; lower cupboards are charcoal. Walnut flooring with four-inch planks adds warmth, especially under the pot lights, which tend to bring out the texture. The entire effect is one of harmony, or, as a foodie might say, beautifully “plated.”

“In the end, isn't the kitchen the heart of the home?” Meade reflects. “So all homes need a good heart — one that is capable of sharing your personal lifestyle with family and friends, one that is strong and functional and aesthetically beautiful for everybody to enjoy.”

BEAUTIFUL, NATURALLY

The ardent focus on food has elevated the kitchen — a room once described by Frank Lloyd Wright as the “workstation” of the home — to a starring role. But there's more to the foodie movement than style, says Jed Grieve of Cook Culture, a cooking school and shop.

“The biggest trend in cooking and kitchens right now... comes from a movement being driven by some U.S. and Canadian journalists who have been writing about local food, food shortages, and food security.”

It's only natural that an eco-aware and “foodie” city like Victoria is embracing this movement. People are buying food that is grown or produced locally, much of it organic, and more Victorians are growing their own food and learning new ways to cook. That means we're cooking and entertaining more at home. The kitchen, as Grieve puts it, has become the “community centre.”

This passion for food and concern for sustainability influences kitchen design. A renewed desire to cook “from scratch” (Grieve recalls one of his customers who found her grandmother's cookbook and marvelled at the “simple ingredients”) places more emphasis on designing to accommodate professional-quality

appliances, properly stocked pantries, accessible spice racks, and cabinets for specialized cookware and tools. There's increased interest in bringing the kitchen and garden together by growing herbs in a garden window or creating easy access to a backyard vegetable patch or container garden.

Interest in food sustainability has led to greater awareness about the materials with which we build our kitchens. Increasingly, we are choosing eco-friendly materials and products and we're buying more of them locally. They can be very stylish and sophisticated, or they can retain an earthier appeal. Choose what reflects your personality and lifestyle.

“There are many options, and we're not saying people have to use those options; we're saying ‘please consider them,’” says Bart Griffin of Griffin Design Kitchens, adding that Victorians have ample opportunity to buy our materials within 100 miles of where we live to eliminate the environmental impact of transporting goods over long distances.

Marble is one example. Michelangelo loved it and so do people renovating kitchens in the 21st century. It's a naturally occurring stone and a durable choice for countertops, sinks, and floors. “We have

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access to lovely quarried marble right here on Vancouver Island,” says Griffin, “so there’s no need to ship from places like Italy.”

Matrix Marble and Stone, based in Duncan, cuts white, black, and blue marble from its island quarries. The marble comes in blocks or slabs and can be custom cut. It’s a beautiful material that is appropriate for kitchens of any style, from country to contemporary.

Recycled glass, too, is found locally, says Griffin. Silastial Glass in Sidney uses a patented process that allows them to manipulate recycled tempered plate glass in unique ways. This glass can be used to create stylish backsplashes or architectural features such as curved or sculpted room dividers.

Reclaimed materials are also readily available, and because they often come with histories, they are excellent ways to personalize kitchens. Several companies in B.C. and on the coast reclaim wood from old barns, homes, bridges, and industrial buildings, then reshape it into planks for cabinets or floors.

David Rannala has also seen an increasing demand for eco-friendly materials for the kitchen — including formaldehyde-free cabinetry made with no or low VOCs (volatile organic compounds). He notes a trend towards natural countertop materials like zinc (known for its anti-fungal properties), stainless steel, and wood. They need polishing and care, and you need a greater tolerance for nicks and scratches, but according to Rannala, “Many people see this as an interesting part of the process and something that gives the look its beauty over time.”

THE HEART OF KITCHEN STYLE

Whether you are a foodie or not, whether you love contemporary design or traditional, whether you love space age or au natural, what really matters is creating a kitchen that meets your personal style. If you prefer raw foods, you may not care what kind of cooking appliances you have. If you’re an ardent baker, you might want a specialized area. Kosher cooks or people with gluten allergies might also want dedicated cooking areas. And some people don’t like to cook at all, but they still want kitchens that look amazing.

Yes, we could talk about U kitchens versus L kitchens, nooks versus islands, and convection versus induction, but the most important conversation you can have about your kitchen is this — how do you want to feel when you’re in it? ::

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