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# The Kitchen Design Secrets of Top Restaurant Architects

For architects in the world of restaurant design, the home kitchen is a chance to mesh their personal aesthetic with insights gleaned from top chefs



DOROTHY HONG FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By  
*Amy Gamerman*

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**Architects Carol and Paul Bentel** have been so busy creating restaurants for marquee chefs and restaurateurs that it took them 20 years to get around to remodeling their own kitchen.

“We finally got rid of our 1957 Hobart dishwasher—that thing was still working,” said Ms. Bentel, 60, whose Midcentury Modern home in Locust Valley, N.Y., was designed by Mr. Bentel’s parents, architects Frederick and Maria Bentel.

After a recently completed \$80,000 DIY facelift, the Bentels’ kitchen and dining area are packed with some of the signature elements that won them several James Beard awards for outstanding restaurant design with their partner (and Paul’s brother), Peter Bentel.

Brushed stainless-steel cabinets juxtaposed against warm cherry wood walls recall the cherry wood-and-steel paneled dining room that Bentel & Bentel created for Le Bernardin, Eric Ripert’s New York restaurant. The Arne Jacobsen-designed Oxford chairs at the dining table are the same ones reserved for diners at the Modern, at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. And the bronze-and-steel wine rack

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is a diminutive version of the two-story wine wall at Craft—one of their many restaurants for Tom Colicchio.

For architects in the world of restaurant design, the [home kitchen](#) can be a four-star calling card: an opportunity to mesh their personal aesthetic with the insights gleaned from top chefs and hospitality gurus. Practical concerns like space, storage and scratchable surfaces are all part of the challenge.

Mr. Bentel, who acted as his own general contractor, estimated that his new kitchen would retail for around \$150,000. A suite of new appliances includes a [space-saving, under-counter microwave](#) and a GE Monogram induction cooktop. “Most of the chefs we work with are raving about induction cooking because it’s extremely even heat, and quick,” he said.

Unlike a bulky range, the cooktop’s flat, silvery-gray surface blends into the background and harmonizes with the stainless-steel cabinets, enhancing a sense of openness in the 150-square-foot kitchen.



Carol and Paul Bentel said their remodel was influenced by their work for some of New York’s top restaurants, including Le Bernardin, Craft and the Modern. PHOTO: DOROTHY HONG FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

“Brushed stainless steel acquires the colors of the environment because it’s reflective—it makes the kitchen feel much bigger,” Mr. Bentel said.

The emphasis on materials is luxurious but practical. The leather-covered kitchen chairs are more durable than fabric, and easier to clean. And the quartzo bianco stone on the Bentels’ countertops and kitchen table has been battle-tested. A natural white stone with greater resistance to staining and abrasion than marble, it also tops their 90-foot-long BIG Bar at Chicago’s Hyatt Regency.

“Generally we would never suggest white stone for a bar, but this stone just could endure anything,” said Ms. Bentel. “We have a spot in our office where we will pour balsamic vinegar on it, put lemon or citrus fruit on it.”

Jeffrey Beers has created restaurants for celebrated chefs and Food Network stars—his current project is a “Hell’s Kitchen” restaurant-cum-amphitheater for Gordon Ramsay, set to open at Caesars Palace Las Vegas. But his own 250-square-foot kitchen on New York’s Upper East Side is more workhorse than show pony. ←



Jeffrey Beers said his New York kitchen, renovated in 2007 for about \$70,000, includes ‘pretty much everything I’ve ever learned from working with chefs and designing restaurants over the years.’ PHOTO:DOROTHY HONG FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

“I’ve taken pretty much everything I’ve ever learned from working with chefs and designing restaurants over the years—little things from Daniel Boulud to Jean-Georges Vongerichten—and tried to incorporate them as best I could,” said Mr. Beers, 61, who designed the kitchen in 2007 for about \$70,000.

A polished black granite island forms the main leg of what Mr. Beers describes as a three-point working triangle—the other points being a Wolf range, a Sub-Zero refrigerator and a deep stainless-steel Franke sink, all within easy reach.

“You don’t need to take more than a step and a half to get to the refrigerator; in a step and a half you can be cooking something on your range,” Mr. Beers said. “All your prep is on the island—so you’re pivoting like a classic sous chef in your own kitchen.”

A spotlight positioned directly over the business end of the island provides extra illumination for chopping and prepping; low-voltage strip lights and incandescent fixtures bathe the rest of the kitchen in a softer light. “Lighting is a big thing for me. Chefs always say you want to look at the food in the same environment that the diner is viewing the plate,” Mr. Beers said.

His friend Bobby Flay gave him the idea for his beverage tower: a stacked set of appliances that includes a 60-bottle Sub-Zero wine refrigerator, a built-in Miele coffee maker and a combination microwave and convection oven. “That beverage tower is utilized quite a bit in the morning for coffee and heating up croissants,” Mr. Beers said.

The deep-red backsplash of tempered glass that wraps around the kitchen is his own custom design. (A glass blower, Mr. Beers has created chandeliers for many of his restaurants.) “Glass is a perfect opportunity to bring color and texture but it’s extremely clean and washable,” he said. “When you get rolling in the kitchen it can get pretty messy.”

No shoes are allowed in the immaculate kitchen that the architect Stephanie Goto designed for her penthouse office on New York’s Union Square—not even when her friend Mr. Boulud is doing the cooking.

“It’s not too often that I cook with my socks on,” said Mr. Boulud—a Michelin starred chef with a small empire of restaurants—as he prepared a sea urchin chaud-froid with pickled jalapeño in black-stockinged feet at Ms. Goto’s stainless-steel worktop.

“It’s really about the ritual of entering the space,” said Ms. Goto, who designed New York’s Aldea and Corton—as well as private kitchens for Cesare Casella and Mr. Boulud. Although she has a well-appointed kitchen at home, she envisioned the studio kitchen as a kind of idea lab for herself and her chef friends. “Architecture and cooking are quite similar—it’s about making things,” she said.

At first glance, it’s easy to miss the ultramodern kitchen hiding in plain sight. White laminated Bulthaup cabinets conceal a fleet of Gaggenau appliances, including a dishwasher, refrigerator and 70-bottle wine fridge. There are no handles on the wall-mounted steam and convection ovens, which you press to open. The smooth induction cooktop is vented by a retractable downdraft that vanishes into the steel counter with the touch of a button. “We wanted it to disappear—it’s this magical box you can touch and activate,” Ms. Goto said.



The layout of Ms. Goto’s kitchen optimizes efficiency and easy access to tools and appliances. The island—a stainless steel Bulthaup monoblock—conceals stacked drawers. PHOTO: DOROTHY HONG FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The layout optimizes efficiency and easy access to tools and appliances. The island—a stainless-steel Bulthaup monoblock—conceals stacked drawers which glide open with a nudge. “You can bump it with your knee,” she said. “Inevitably you have your hands full if you’re cooking or entertaining.”

She estimated the retail cost of her kitchen at about \$156,000—a cost that includes the \$10,900 commercial-grade Synesso espresso machine she has professionally tuned twice a week. “It’s the Steinway of the kitchen,” Ms. Goto said.

For a recent dinner at the studio, the Bulthaup monoblock was transformed into a sushi bar. Eiji Ichimura, a Michelin two-star sushi chef who currently presides over New York’s Uchu, composed plates of mackerel, tuna, fluke and cooked abalone sashimi with mizuna and borage flowers. Just inches away, Mr. Boulud and Stephanie Moreno, a junior sous chef at his flagship restaurant, Daniel, shucked oysters and prepared tiny, souffle-like blinis on the induction cooktop, to be topped with caviar.

Ms. Goto conceded that she doesn’t actually cook all that much.

“My energy has gone more into the cooking of design and architecture,” she said. “In my ideal life I would be cooking all day and designing all night, but then I would not be sleeping.”