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CONTACT US

Lynette Evans
Home & Garden editor
lynette@sfchronicle.com
415.777.6247

top drawer



Photos courtesy of James H. Del Pino

COOKING CENTER: The island in Reid Minuth's and Megan Scully's San Francisco kitchen contains the sink and prep area and is just steps from the cooktop and wall ovens.

S.F. designers turn a dead-end '60s kitchen into an award-winning cooking center

By Lynette Evans

CHRONICLE HOME & GARDEN EDITOR



FAUX STONE: The island's half wall is finished to resemble stone, as is the concrete-covered pillar, but besides providing support for the clear glass eating counter, the wall hides dishes in the sink and contains the electrical wiring for this end of the island.

The best kitchen in America is right here in San Francisco. At least that's how the National Kitchen and Bath Association judges saw it when they chose the kitchen interior designers Gail Tran and Vernon Applegate created for Reid Minuth and Megan Scully on Crestmont Drive to receive the association's highest design honor, the James H. Foster Jr. Memorial Award.

(The kitchen, part of a remodel of the couple's 165-year home, lost out to one from England for the world title, but as Tran says, "It was an honor to represent the United States.")

The award will be announced at the Kitchen/Bath Industry Show in Chicago next week.

The homeowners agree with the NKBA verdict. "We love it," says Minuth, who does most of the cooking for his family of four.

The San Francisco designers, partners in Applegate Tran Interiors, are working with Chris Gray Construction, also a San Francisco firm, on a remodel that updates the mid-century developer house without changing its clean, modern character. Another important member of the team is Richmond craftsman Allen Miesner, who designed the dining



CURVES: The island's curved end reflects the shape of the pillar and provides undercounter storage. The countertop is honed granite, the cabinets eucalyptus and the floor African doussie.

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room table and the railings for the stairway that opens off the entry.

Given the caveat that your idea of a good kitchen and my idea of a good kitchen may not coincide exactly with NKBA's criteria, it is nevertheless interesting to see just what constitutes the best kitchen in the country.

The Minath-Scully house faces the ocean but the original eat-in kitchen was walled off from the view. Tran and Applegate removed the wall and, in doing so, not only gave the cook a view of the Pacific but opened up the floor plan to accommodate today's more casual family and entertaining styles.

"We had remodeled another kitchen (in a similar house just up the street) a couple of years prior and basically we wanted to open the kitchen to the dining room," says Minath. "Everybody hangs

out in the kitchen."

"Workability" was one factor in the NKBA competition, said Tran, and the kitchen — which won first place in the medium-size category before going on to the top honor — is eminently functional, at least for a single cook.

The center island concentrates prep, cooking and cleanup chores along a pullman-like aisle, with recycling, sink, dishwasher and storage drawers on the island; ovens, range top and warming drawer along the wall behind, only a few steps away. The refrigerator, built-in coffeemaker, wine and glass storage and display shelves line the back wall, accessible both from the work area and from the "social" side of the island, with its raised-glass countertop.

"It works really well for us in terms of the paths we move around in there," says Minath, who finds the work area does accommodate two cooks and makes it easy to serve his school-age children at the counter.

A wall-hung bullet along the exterior wall offers more storage, a serving area for the adjacent dining room table and an anchor for some of the couple's artwork set off against the brick-red wall.

Maximizing storage was another NKBA requirement — as well as a priority for the homeowners — and a challenge Tran and Applegate met by using full-extension drawers rather than undercounter shelved cabinets (to my mind,

such drawers are the best storage available for the variety of cookware shapes found in today's kitchen).

They also built a pantry for nonperishables and small appliances in the area behind the stove wall and continued the wall cabinets to the ceiling. "We wanted everything put away," says Minath.

The ceiling itself is low — a common element in houses of the era and, "why we didn't do moldings," says Applegate. Recessed, pendant and under-cabinet task lighting put the light where it's needed without making the ceiling look lower still.

Low ceilings were not the only limitation the designers faced. A supporting pillar bisects the kitchen, and the original floor plan had an entrance to the kitchen from the garage but not directly from the front door.

The clients, too, had a number of requests. "We wanted a contemporary, modern-looking kitchen, minimalist-looking," says Minath. "We told them we liked natural materials like wood and stone and then manmade materials like steel."

Tran and Applegate took the material-mix mandate seriously, using natural quarter-sawn vertical eucalyptus for cabinets; honed Absolute Black granite for the working countertops and clear glass for the raised serving/leaving surface; douglas, a richly variegated African hardwood, for the kitchen floor set off by chert-finish Flammet quartzite pavers that run from the front entry through the powder room and hall and end in a point on the refrigerator wall — acting not only as an aesthetic counterpoint but a practical surface in high-traffic areas.

The supporting post was fleshed out with concrete and faux-finished to look like stone — a design element Tran and Applegate repeated with the end cap on the island that appears to be stone pierced by the glass counter but, in reality, is a regular wall that houses the island's wiring. Minath chose the marble slab that forms the backsplash for the cooktop.

Unlike a lot of designer kitchens, this one showcases a range of appliance manufacturers — chosen by the clients — and in-



Photo courtesy Anna M.

DINING AREA: Richmond craftsman Allen Miesner's koa wood table with metal inserts extend kitchen's natural wood tones into the dining area. The gently curving table is complemented by Dakota Jackson chairs and bar stools.

cludes Thermador ovens and a six-burner cooktop, Miele dishwasher and built-in coffee system, Sub-Zero side-by-side refrigerator and custom hood by Ventahood, all in stainless steel, as is the under-counter sink. Sink and faucet are by Franke, and the pendant lights over the island are by Policelli.

Hardware is by Husley.

Miesner's koa wood dining table with metal inserts is surrounded by Dakota Jackson chairs. The custom cabinets were made and installed by Western Cabinets of Rohnert Park, and the rich red of the bullet wall is a modified version of Benjamin Moore's Burst

Brick color (an exterior paint).

In all, a happy confluence of style, materials and craftsmanship. "The way it came out was much as we imagined it," satisfied Minath.

E-mail Lyvette Evans at levans@sfgchronicle.com.

Resources

■ **Applegate Tran Interiors**, San Francisco, (415) 487-1241; www.applegatetran.com

■ **Miesner Design**, Richmond, (510) 234-5828

■ **Gray Construction**, San Francisco, (415) 285-8111

■ **Western Designs**, 5715 Redwood Dr., Suite 3, Rohnert Park, (707) 586-3445.

—L.F.



STORAGE: The kitchen's back wall serves as the beverage center, storing wine, displaying glassware and containing the built-in coffeemaker and refrigerator. The bullet is at left.