





SETTING THE STAGE

*Designer Sandra Espinet
reveals her tried-and-true tips
for creating the luxurious
kitchen and bath of your dreams.*

*// By Rachel Williams
Photos courtesy of Sandra Espinet*

WHETHER SHE IS outfitting the palatial homes of her celebrity clients or hand-selecting one-of-a-kind treasures from her many travels, it is clear that Sandra Espinet of Square One Interiors and Interiors by Sandra has an unparalleled eye for design. Now focused on luxury residential design, Espinet works with her clients to merge the functional with the opulent to create kitchens and baths that bring the spectacular into the everyday. Her signature style includes an astute eye for detail and the ability to blend multiple elements into a room without overwhelming its occupants. These skills have served her well in everything from commercial design to yacht design to residential design, and now you can take her tips and incorporate her special touch into your own dream home.

TIPS FROM THE PROS

Q: Your designs show an incredible range of style, from traditional to modern and everything in between. How can homeowners blend details into their spaces based on their preferred styles?

A: In the contemporary setting, it is imperative to have minimal accessories but the important arrangement of accessories. So if I am doing contemporary, I might spend more money on tile that is going to be a strong focal point and less money on chatskis and little accessories. If you are doing traditional design, I think the same approach doesn't necessarily translate. In that design, you are going to have more accessories to complement what you are doing design-wise.

Q: On your blog, you advise against doing an L-shaped layout in the kitchen. Why is this?

A: The way we use our homes today is that everybody is in the kitchen. If you can separate the space out of the "L" and create an island, it will translate to a better use of the space. Of course, in some kitchens, you don't have this option, but if you do have this option, it makes the space more productive because it allows several people to be in the actual cooking space at the same time. When you have an L-shaped layout, you only have one exit. When you move away from this, you have a better flow in and out of the kitchen.

Q: How can homeowners effectively incorporate electronics and gadgets into the kitchen?

A: Incorporating electronics into the kitchen is gaining in popularity, and I'm a perfect example of this trend. I have a small television as well as an

iPad in my kitchen. Today, the typical utility of the kitchen is not necessarily just cooking. Instead, the kitchen is an open-ended room and floor plan. For example, my husband could come in and watch football, and since I'll want to hang out with him, I'll also be in the kitchen most likely on my iPad looking up FoodNetwork.com while cooking at the same time. So we have a lot of multitasking going on in the kitchen, and this is where I think electronics can really come into play. With today's electronics, you can entertain, be entertained, and they're also functional—you can look up anything you need while cooking.

In terms of fitting them into your kitchen, I think electronics should be kept out in the open because computers are now laptops, they are

now iPads, they are movable and flexible. They are so small that it's not necessary to hide them behind armoires and in drawers the way we used to.

When planning for electronics in your kitchen, it is important to ensure you have useable outlets. I also like to have a designated phone line to connect the main phone that needs to be plugged in all the time and a few cordless ones for the other rooms. It's nice if you can have a space where you can have paper, pens, a phone, and then your computer close by if you need it.

Cutting-edge technology is also being incorporated into kitchen appliances in new ways. In my kitchen, I have a touchpad Brizo faucet that also heats up when you touch it. While this requires planning to hardwire it in, it's great because you can just use your forearms to turn it on and off. The faucet has a heat sensor and is just beautiful technology.



Q: How do current style trends affect your design decisions?

A: A couple of years ago, we were doing counters that had two heights so you could hide utensils or hide dirty dishes. Nowadays, the trend is toward counters that are all the same height because the bottom line is that homeowners need the space to spread out. If you have kids, you can bring their homework into the kitchen. If you have friends come over, you can open a bottle of wine. Whatever the reason, I have found that today homeowners need more counter space than hiding space.

This also makes the home multifunctional. In the olden days, people lived in log cabins that consisted of one big room with a wood fire and a stove, and the whole family would talk there. It's almost like we are coming back to that. My kitchen opens up to the pool as well as the living room. It really opens up into the whole house.

In addition to these trends, every kitchen we are building right now has refrigerator drawers. The concept is to have all your food on one side, and

on the other side of the kitchen would be the refrigerator drawers. That's where you have the drinks. When incorporating this touch, it is important to put the drawers on the side of the room that has more foot traffic. These come in handy so the kids or whoever else comes into the kitchen can grab a drink without getting in the cook's way. This really helps the flow of traffic in the kitchen. We are also putting these drawers in almost all our bathrooms. For example, in a guest bathroom, you install the refrigerator drawers so your guests will have water and sodas, etc., without having to come into the kitchen in the morning. This also creates a little "getaway" feel for them.

Q: If a homeowner does not want to totally gut the space, what details and touches would you advise they incorporate to update the design?

A: The first thing I tell my clients is that you don't have to use these really top-

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of-the-line appliances that last for 40 years if you can't afford them because the reality is you probably don't want to have the appliance for that long.

If you can't afford the Viking stove or Sub-Zero refrigerator, there is nothing wrong with using appliances that are more accessible. The key would be to not use stainless





steel and get a trim kit instead. With a trim kit, you can panel it to your kitchen, and this alone will update your kitchen. If you need a new dishwasher, don't get the stainless steel. This is a big trend of the '80s and '90s.

Q: Shifting focus to the bathroom, in what ways are homeowners updating this space to match the redesign of the rest of their homes?

A: I love designing bathrooms because they are really evolving these days. It's more than just the bathroom—it's the makeup area, the closet, the in-home spa. There's a bathroom we are working on right now that should be done in two months where the tub is a solid rock that was carved out to create the shape. It also serves as an outdoor tub because you can open up the bathroom through locked double doors. Once the room opens up, you have a spectacular view of a waterfall. It's a prime example of how bathrooms have really become spas in the home environment—it's about the water, it's about the glass shelves, it's about the space for shoes, and on and on.

Chandeliers are another big trend that I see right now in both kitchen and bathrooms.

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It seems like before it was just down lighting, but now each kitchen and bath we do has an amazing chandelier, unless it's a really contemporary design.

Q: Can you walk us through a recent completed job? How did you meet the needs of the homeowners on this project?

A: Recently, I had a pair of clients who are in their 20s. Because they are young, you can see the modern style is representative of their age. This has been a really fun job to tackle. We used a trim kit on all the appliances, so everything is hidden behind the same colors and textures. This has created a very simple look. In contemporary design, it is about the wood. So you can see the beautiful grains, with the stain just right, and a wax finish. It was very important that the wood matched perfectly, as this job was a renovation, not a new kitchen. We also made the lighting

symmetrical and added new countertops. The backsplash is really beautiful with pieces of glass and copper and semiprecious stone, so they create that pattern. There is just a touch of a masculine feel with the copper. The job took about four months and also included a renovation to their bathrooms. «



SANDRA ESPINET is a luxury interior designer based in Los Angeles and San Jose Del Cabo, Mexico. An allied member of the American Society of Interior Designers, she has both an Associate of Arts and a Bachelor of Arts in interior design as well as a master's degree in production design. Espinet's time in South America, Europe, and Asia gave her the opportunity to indulge in many cultures and constantly inspires her to create interiors with international flair. Espinet will release her first book with publisher Gibbs Smith in summer 2013, and she has appeared as a featured designer on HGTV.

