

# Home & Garden

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DESIGN DILEMMAS

## Greening the kitchen

## Project 1, Monte Sereno

**Clients:** A growing family of four in a ranch-style house in Santa Clara County who wanted a more eco-conscious kitchen that better suits their busy lifestyle.

**Challenge:** Improve the flow between the kitchen and adjoining spaces, including the living room and dining area.

**Solution:** The kitchen's handsome wood flooring is Australian beech from sustainable forests. This same wood floor was also used for the adjoining rooms, visually uniting the spaces. To mitigate the use of imported wood, they sought out energy-efficient appliances. Increasing the size of the kitchen window allowed more natural light inside, eliminating the need for extra lighting. A well-chosen selection of under-cabinet fluorescents and recessed LED ceiling lights offer energy-efficient illumination at night. The taupe wall paint with hints of sage used for the kitchen and surrounding spaces come from Benjamin Moore's eco-friendly Aura line and offers a nice counterpoint for the kitchen's warm-toned cabinets. The pale wheat-colored backsplash behind the cooktop is lined with recycled seafoam green tiles.



## DESIGN DILEMMAS

# Greening the kitchen

Pros suggest smart choices  
— from floor to ceiling

By Jeannie Matteucci

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Designers Denna McLaughlin and Celeste Le Sage-Gish, co-owners of the full-service interior design firm City Studios of San Francisco, specialize in innovative kitchen design. But lately it seems many of the homeowners who contact them — no matter the project — have one thing in mind.

“A lot of our clients are interested in being eco-friendly or green,” says McLaughlin.

“Our challenge is helping the client understand what green truly is. It's more than just choosing a wood that's sustainable. There are a lot of different viewpoints on what is green and what is not. The criteria we need to meet to be green is constantly changing.”

Many components of a kitchen — from appliances and cabinets to countertops and flooring — are now available in energy- and resource-efficient options. But more selection means tougher



Photos by Mike Kepka/The Chronicle

**Denna McLaughlin and Celeste Le Sage-Gish in the kitchen they designed in Monte Sereno.**

decisions for the consumer. McLaughlin says homeowners need to make sure they hire designers and builders who understand the rules and regulations of green building. She also suggests homeowners educate themselves by going online and doing their homework.

“You really have to do your research to make sure the products you want are green,” she says.

An example: While choosing a sustainable

*Dilemma continues on L4*





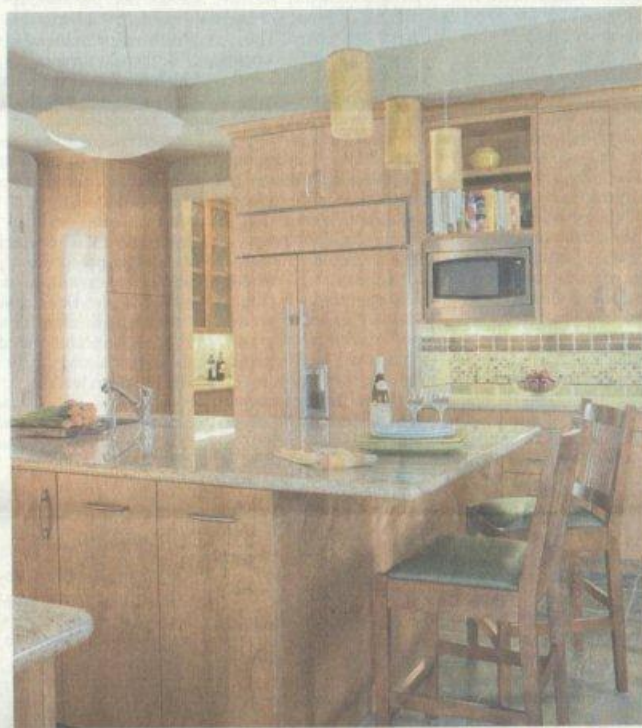
# First rule: Think local and go sustainable

## *Dilemma from page L1*

wood for your cabinets or furniture seems like a no-brainer, a product that needs to be transported a long distance — and how that material is transported — increases its carbon footprint. Sometimes clients will opt to stick with an imported sustainable wood and make green trade-offs elsewhere. Your best bet, says McLaughlin, is to look closer to home whenever possible.

"A good rule if you really want to be green is to get it locally grown and go sustainable," she says.

If new appliances are on your radar, McLaughlin says pay attention to your selection of refrigerator, considered the biggest "energy hog" in your kitchen. For cabinets, some of her favorite materials include sustainable bamboo, lightweight wheat board (a waste product of the farming industry) and sustainable traditional woods that

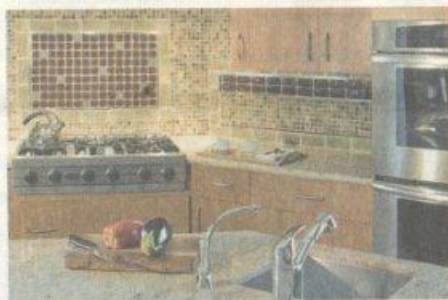


## **Project 2, Los Altos**

**Clients:** A retired couple downsizing into a custom-built Craftsman-style house.

**Challenge:** Use the Craftsman aesthetic as a guideline and incorporate sustainable and energy-efficient materials wherever possible — especially in the kitchen.

**Solution:** The kitchen includes a tile backsplash made of recycled glass in various shades of amber and green and cabinet glass inserts that are 40 percent post-consumer content. Excluding the cooktop, all appliances are Energy Star compliant and have panel fronts made from the same sustainable cherry wood used for the upper and lower cabinets. The furniture is also made from sustainable cherry. Energy-smart upgrades include insulated double-paned windows, a tankless water heater, solar panels on the rooftop and a high-efficiency furnace.



Photos by Christopher Stark

ant, which means they come from companies that adhere to environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable practices. Using zero VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints, salvaged countertops or installing cork floors are other options. While McLaughlin says an environmentally friendly kitchen can cost about 20 percent to 30 percent more, she believes the benefits are worth the extra effort and expense, as three City Studios projects show.

"You're reducing your carbon footprint, you're not polluting and you're using items that are kind to the environment and good for your health," she explains.

"It's important to remember every little bit helps."

*E-mail comments to  
home@sfbchronicle.com.*

## Resources

**City Studios**, 2942 Turk Blvd., San Francisco, (415) 386-2521; [citystudiosinteriors.com](http://citystudiosinteriors.com)

**Energy Star**, [energy.gov](http://energy.gov)

**Forest Stewardship Council**, [fsc.org](http://fsc.org)

**Build It Green:** For a green product directory and directory of certified green building professionals go to [builditgreen.org](http://builditgreen.org).



David Duncan Livingston

**Clients:** A couple, with three young boys, who wanted to give their kitchen a fresh look and a low-carbon footprint.

**Challenge:** Modernize while maintaining the charm of their early 1900s Edwardian-style house.

**Solution:** The designers included rustic details like the warm-toned recycled antique terra cotta floor. The kitchen's curved soft ivory countertops are made with concrete — a locally produced material — and were given a patina for an aged look. The off-white and subtle blue tiles used for the backsplash are made from shavings of stone tiles. The sustainable maple barstools at the island and attached breakfast table have a low VOC water-based finish. The kitchen has energy-efficient appliances, insulated and double-paned windows and door and drawer hardware made from high-quality recycled metal.

## Three more kitchen challenges

Here are designer Celeste Le Sage-Gish's tips for solving three more kitchen-related design dilemmas:

**Incorporating color:** "Paint is one of the least expensive and easy ways to add color to your kitchen," she says. Appliances are now available in a wider selection of colors — from bright reds and vivid blues to deep purples and warm golds. Floors and countertops are two other ways to incorporate color. A backsplash made from shimmering glass tiles can add a touch of drama and elegance. The right combination of a dominant color mixed with accent hues can create a room that is visually appealing and welcoming.

**Tip:** Take the time to test drive a paint color in your kitchen before you commit. Many paint companies now offer sample sizes of paints so you can test a small section of your kitchen wall. Observe the color during different times of the day, and make sure it works with the other finishes in your kitchen.

**Storage solutions:** "Storage is always an issue, whether you have a big or small kitchen," says Le Sage-Gish, who suggests thinking beyond your standard upper and lower cabinets. While a large walk-in pantry is a luxury for most homeowners — especially those in space-challenged kitchens — consider the storage possibilities behind your cabinet doors. Le Sage-Gish thinks lazy Susans, specialized inserts added to the inside of cabinet doors and vertical spice racks are all great ways to maximize storage capacity. You can also incorporate a stand-alone hutch or hanging pot rack. Le Sage-Gish likes to include decorative storage whenever possible. Open shelves for cookbooks or collectibles are a great way to share your passions and personalize the space.

**Tip:** Don't forget about appliance garages. They help avoid clutter on countertops and keep small appliances you use often within easy reach.

**Appliance placement:** Where you position your appliances can "make or break a kitchen," says Le Sage-Gish.

**Tip:** When designing, pay attention to how the kitchen will function on a daily basis. The location of your sink, cooktop and refrigerator is crucial — these three components make up the classic work triangle — but Le Sage-Gish suggests also thinking about the location of other often-used appliances, such as your microwave. If you have the space, consider installing one of the newer drawer-style microwaves in a center island. She also likes raising dishwashers a few inches off the floor to help prevent back strain. The placement of electrical switches and ventilation requirements for some kitchen appliances are other issues to consider.

Remember to consider the location of cabinet doors before you choose a refrigerator. Many of today's family-size refrigerators have large doors that can impede traffic flow or cause conflict when you open nearby cabinets.