

# Steal These Ideas

By Tiffany Carboni | Photography Deborah Sherman

## Make Your Kitchen Look Great



**T**imes are tough, but if you're serious about remodeling your kitchen this is a time of great opportunity.

If money isn't accessible right now, have fun making a wish list by collecting ideas. Study friends' kitchens, visit showrooms, clip magazine cutouts of specific improvements you want in your dream kitchen. Mulling over different concepts offers significant advantages in the long run, because there's nothing more disappointing than making rash decisions on a project you'll be stuck with for years to come.

If a remodel seems an unaffordable prospect, the economy can work in your favor. Many times

tradespeople are willing to cut rates during a slump, and manufacturers have been known to negotiate remarkable deals on materials.

The following kitchens are examples of careful planning, and a few fortuitous finds, that resulted in the right kitchens for the right households. Everyone's taste differs, but when it comes to designing the ideal kitchen for your home, the best strategy is to be resourceful, creative — and don't be afraid to steal other people's rousing ideas. →

# Light, Color, Action!

**A**fter a fire destroyed this Hiller Highlands house, a builder reconstructed it for a quick flip. When Nancy and Byron Wood bought the home in 2007, their first order of business was to breathe character into the generic, stark white kitchen. “You have to live in a house for awhile before it will tell you what to do with it,” explains Nancy Wood. “And this house desperately needed color.”

Given the couple’s penchant for antique Chinese furniture, the boldness of red was a natural choice for them to carry through to the kitchen – and most importantly, a color they knew they wanted to live in for the long haul. The red upholstered banquette, dining chairs and pendant lights add a dynamic pop to the eye-catching red hues of the alder cabinets. To draw the eye up to the dramatic slope of the ceiling, with its decorative track lighting system and substantial skylight that brighten a potentially dark room, the cabinets step up in height offering a subtle artistry to their functionality.

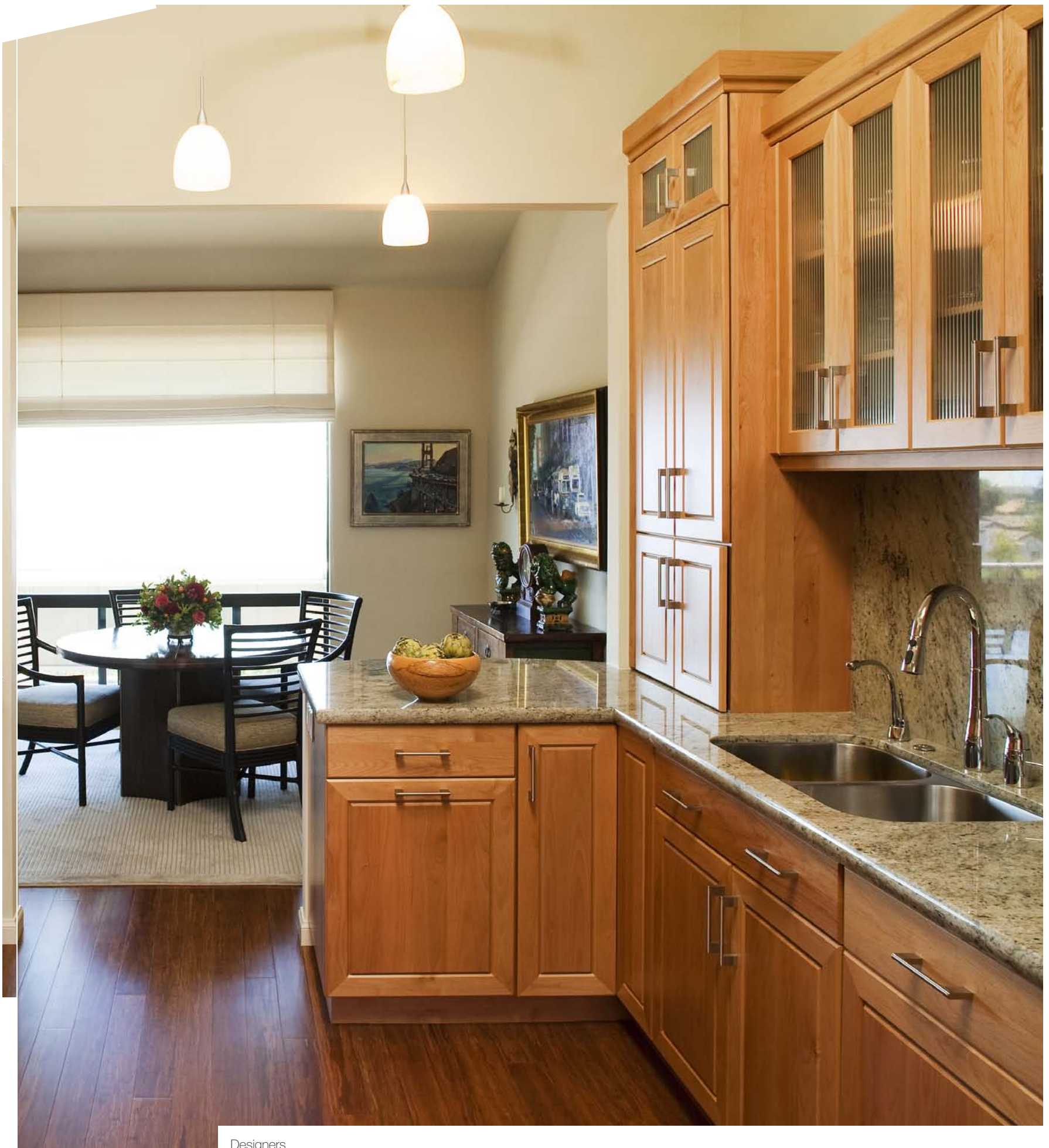
To capture more natural light and take advantage of the spectacular bay view that the



original builder ignored, designers Eric Jackson and Heidi Weeds opened up the bay-facing wall and created a sliding door to the back patio with breathtaking views. The ornate stainless steel hood (custom-designed by Robert Lavezzo of Emeryville-based Lavezzo Designs), handy under-cabinet mounted lighting, space-saving pullout pantries, and built-

in breakfast nook create the perfect, modern gathering space for the Woods’ expanding family of grandchildren.

“Our son and his wife own the Wood Tavern in Oakland,” notes Nancy Wood. “Whenever he and his chefs come over to cater a party here, they love using this kitchen as much as we do because it’s so easy and such a pleasure to be in.” →



Designers

**Heidi Weeds and Eric Jackson of Custom Kitchens by John Wilkins Inc.** | Contractor **Custom Kitchens by John Wilkins Inc., Oakland**

# Striking Gold in Unexpected Places



Elizabeth and John Shaw were killing time when they happened past an open house in Piedmont that seduced them. The kitchen, however, was anything but seductive and felt more like a chilling scene straight from a Hans Christian Andersen fairytale.

The Shaws turned to Oakland architect Rebecca Lilienthal Schnier, AIA, to design a bright, flowing kitchen that fit the personality and needs of the family of five. In an effort to build sustainably, the team – which also included Jim Breska – decided to reuse materials wherever possible, so the new kitchen incorporates many reused and repurposed components from other sources.

Elizabeth Shaw – an inveterate crafter who frequents salvage yards and furniture importers – got her inspiration for the kitchen’s interior design from a pair of drapes. Gifted to her by a friend who couldn’t use them anymore in her own remodel, the silk Scalamantré-brand, garden-motif drapes were Shaw’s jumping-off point.

From there, the eBay huntress stumbled upon Raku tiles, which were the impetus for the family’s prized backsplash. The additional 80 tiles needed to complete the project were individually culled from boxes of broken, mismatched tiles found at Fireclay in San Jose.

By the time the team came to pick the center island, Shaw says she was mentally and financially fatigued. “I was looking for a small country-style piece in black so it didn’t have to match the rest of the soft gray cabinets,” she recalls.

So back to eBay she went, finding what she wanted for a price she could afford. Fortunately for her budget, Breska found her a leftover piece of appropriately-sized Carrera marble from a fabricator’s bone yard to top the island.

Just goes to show that being resourceful and creative about finding materials can add up to the right kitchen formula.

Architect

Rebecca Schnier Architecture, Oakland | Contractor Breska Associates Inc., Oakland

# Going Green With Ease



Designer

Rebecca Fulton, owner of Paragon Kitchen & Bath Studio | Contractor Paragon Kitchen & Bath Studio, Oakland

Being eco-friendly is huge in the kitchen industry these days. Though to a homeowner investing in a remodel, the “green” that usually comes to mind is the additional cash one might have to shell out for such a result.

The good news, as Joel and Sacha Grippando happily realized when they decided on a kitchen remodel for their Rockridge home, is that it’s possible to go green without even knowing it. Thanks to the Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturers Association’s creation of the Environmental Stewardship Program, a voluntary program designed to help cabinet manufacturers preserve the environment, going green starts in the manufacturing plants. Elyse Hochstadt of Paragon Kitchen & Bath Studio in Oakland explains, “Cabinet manufacturers offer a variety of box and door constructions ranging in various degrees of green-ness and it’s up to the customer to decide where on the green spectrum they can afford to land.”

While the Grippandos weren’t necessarily seeking an über-green remodel, they were looking to make more efficient use of a space that was both aesthetically pleasing and responsibly derived. They achieved this by purchasing sustainable wood cabinets made in the United States by Showplace Wood Products, an employee-owned company based in South Dakota. The counters are made from Greenguard-certified Caesarstone, a quartz product that never has to be sealed (thus eliminating petroleum-based sealers from this kitchen’s equation). The Grippando’s Caesarstone was produced on an Israeli kibbutz where workers live and have a vested interest in maintaining the health of the land and its surroundings.

Window seats with storage, built-in wine storage, pull-out waste bins for recycling and trash, and cabinets specifically designed for large trays provide ample storage for the family of five’s needs. A thoughtful peninsula of cabinets with glass doors on both sides keep the room naturally bright, and an ample eat-in table with plenty of seating round out this family’s favorite room for hanging out. “If we have friends over,” says Sacha Grippando, “we can fit eight adults comfortably around the table. Since the remodel, this has become the heart of the house.” →

# A Fashion Forward Victorian

Interior Designer

Lisa Dell'Osso, Berkeley | Contractors John and Bruce McNeil of McNeil Construction Co., Alameda

Lois and Bill Sonneman wanted more space in their Alameda Victorian that was built in 1882 on another lot before it was moved in 1897 to its current location on the outer edges of the Gold Coast. Even though the couple had lived in the house since 1972, the home didn't start feeling cramped until their kids moved out and the grandchildren began to multiply.

Staying true to character of their Italianate-Eastlake was an absolute must, but not without making some well-concealed, turn-of-this-century modifications. With the help of designer Lisa Dell'Osso and contractors John and Bruce McNeil, the couple settled on compromise by transforming an attached cottage – at some point an in-law unit – into a rear bedroom, bathroom, laundry room and kitchen. “Although these rooms would never have been configured this way in the Victorian era, we made sure the results look as if they had always belonged to this house,” explains Dell'Osso.

Thanks to the expertise of the McNeil crew, which specializes in authentic restorations of Alameda period houses, the home's Gothic features inside and out were re-created to perfection, and in many cases that meant milling by hand.

To make full use of the kitchen's 12-foot ceilings, the team added windows and transoms everywhere they could to bounce in bountiful sunlight while retaining privacy. Tall, custom-designed, hand-painted cabinets and a matching island appear to be vintage, but with their inset doors and drawers, contemporary hinges and re-created drawer pulls, they are modern through and through. New Carrera marble countertops, new oak flooring stained to match the old, stainless steel and paneled appliances, a built-in desk that serves as command central and deep drawers for today's storage needs all lend themselves to a state-of-the-art kitchen that still honors its historic roots.

Even with the extra space, the new kitchen – which never strayed from the house's 1897 footprint was still narrow. To increase its feel, Dell'Osso and McNeil set off an adjacent laundry room with stylish see-through pocket doors. That room, complete with a sink and marble counter, creatively doubles as a bar or place for arranging flowers. A much-needed porch off the kitchen gives the couple a spot to enjoy their coffee and offers access from the kitchen to the garden. “We often sit back and say, ‘Can you believe we did this?’” Lois Sonneman says. “We're so happy we did.” 🌱



