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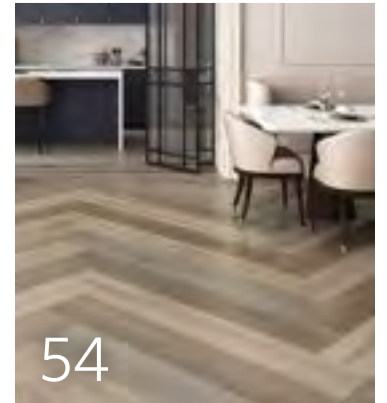
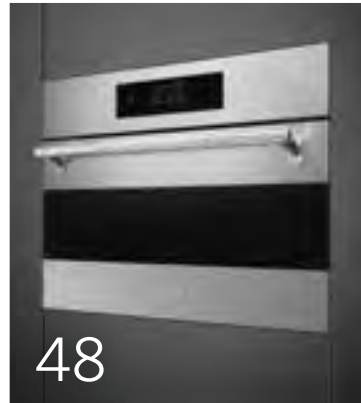
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ON THE COVER

In this kitchen, designed by Eb Min of Min Design in San Francisco, CA, the contrast of dark gray/black, white and light wood provides a clean and modern backdrop for the open floor plan apartment kitchen, allowing the client's artwork and collectibles to shine.

Photo: Brooke Holm



Photos: Peter Rymwid

Ease of maintenance was a top concern for this hard-working summer home kitchen designed by Sharon Sherman.

Inspired Getaways

From vacation homes to investment properties, second homes offer unique opportunities for personalization.

BY AUTUMN MCGARR

These days, in residential design there's a great deal of focus on the "forever home" – that one and only landing place that, ideally, should accommodate its occupants through all the seasons of their lives. But not everyone calls just one place home. For a fortunate few, the concept of home might also encompass a seasonal abode elsewhere, whether it be a private, luxurious vacation spot, a shared gathering space for family and friends, or a solitary woodland retreat.

Kitchen and bath designers working in these second homes may encounter a host of unique client requests and challenges. Often, square footage is at a premium, necessitating some creative space-saving and storage solutions. In other instances, the kitchens and baths of vacation homes need to be able to handle a heavier load of friends and family than the average home. This month, *KBDN* chatted with a few designers who have helped their clients create their dream home-away-from-home.

HERE AND THERE

For Sharon Sherman's expat clients, the home nestled among the rolling hills and woods of northern New Jersey served as both a landing place for summers spent stateside and a gathering spot for their large family. Sherman, ASID, CKD, CID, owner and principal designer of Thyme and Place Design in Wyckoff, NJ, took on the challenge of remodeling the kitchen in her clients' scenic second home, along with the dining room and several bathrooms.

"Since the property was very heavily treed and shaded, we needed a light and bright feeling to all of the spaces," Sherman says. "The client was also a natural light aficionado, so it was all about the windows and not so much about artificial lighting. That can be a tricky situation, but by using bright colors, sparse window treatments, strategically placed task lighting with undercabinet lights, and glass door accents, we were able to keep a light-filled feeling."



☑ Sherman utilized airy and bright finishes, along with some strategic task lighting, to allow natural light to be the star of the space.

☑ The muted veining on the quartz countertops supports the platinum-colored subway tile backsplash.

Above all, the kitchen needed to be able to keep up with the cheerful chaos of summertime fun. “The theme of the kitchen is entertaining, and this space is truly built for that mission,” Sherman notes. To accommodate the homeowner’s love of baking – and distinct distaste for large oven doors – Sherman selected an easily accessible French door wall oven. With the family often engaged in different outdoor activities such as hiking and lounging poolside, meal schedules are frequently unpredictable or staggered, and a warming drawer provides a handy solution.

Ease of cleaning and upkeep was another paramount concern for such a high-traffic kitchen. “There are very few floor coverings in the home due to allergy sufferers. All of the materials in the home had to be low maintenance and easy to spot spills and dust on,” Sherman says, pointing to the softly patterned quartz countertops as an example. Stainless steel features prominently as a finish across the appliances, range hood and cabinet hardware.

The process of creating the bright and highly functional new kitchen wasn’t without its challenges, not the least of which was timing: the clients were living abroad and wanted the home ready by the time they arrived for summer. “All of the selections were done while the client was halfway across the world,” Sherman explains. “Communication was key throughout the project.”

PART-TIME CITY SLICKERS

In preparation for the next phase of their lives as empty nesters, Cynthia Masters’ clients sold the family home and purchased a condo in a new-construction downtown Greenville, SC high rise. They planned to split their time between this new pied-a-terre and their lake house, located an hour from the city. “They wanted to be within walking distance to all the great dining and entertainment the city has to offer,” explains Masters, founder and creative director of interior design firm Panageries in Greenville, SC. “They are very social and wanted this to be a place to entertain their adult friends.”

According to Masters, because the building was brand new, the unit was “an empty shell” when she began the whole-home project, allowing her to start with an empty canvas and endless possibilities. Settling on an overarching aesthetic for the design, however, required a bit of mediation: “The lobby and public spaces are contemporary, and I felt creating something very traditional would feel out of place. The wife wholeheartedly agreed, but it was a tougher sell for the husband as his tastes lean very traditional,” she explains. “We satisfied both with a soft modern aesthetic.”



Kelly Blackmon for Emily Followill Photography

☑ This downtown condo kitchen by Cynthia Masters nods to its urban setting with custom iron upper cabinets with frosted glass inserts.



❏ A cluster of five hand-blown glass pendant lights above the island deliver texture without distracting from the cabinets and hood.

❏ A door disguised as cabinetry between the wall ovens and fridge leads to a mixed use laundry, pantry and storage room.



Photos: Kelly Blackmon for Emily Followill Photography

In particular, storage was one of the main concerns for the kitchen design, as the condo was substantially smaller than the couple's former home and the kitchen measured only 366 square feet. "We spent a lot of time on the front-end inventorying and measuring the items they would need, to ensure everything had a place," says Masters. "There is a door camouflaged as cabinetry between the wall ovens and fridge that leads to a mixed use space and serves as a laundry, pantry and storage room for appliances such as the toaster, Vitamix, mixer, etc. This helps provide for their much-needed storage, while keeping clutter out of view."

A palette of warm neutrals and a specific shade of blue beloved by the wife ("a cross between indigo and peacock"), as well as abundant texture, informed Masters' selections for the new kitchen. "Our selections began with the flooring, since that would flow throughout almost every room in the residence. We chose a lovely engineered wide plank European white oak. It has wonderful character and rich gray tones with notes of cognac, which keep it from getting too cool," she says. (This flooring can be glimpsed in another project that has been featured in *KBDN* – in fact, the powder room for this upfit took home Bronze in the Best Powder Room category of the 2025 Kitchen & Bath Design Awards!)

The alder base and wall cabinetry is stained in a warm honey hue that is echoed in the dropped header. Indigo-veined White Macubus quartzite is featured on the counters, backsplash and range hood. Custom iron upper cabinets with frosted glass inserts serve as a nod to the building's urban surroundings, while cabinet hardware in Dark Bronze from Ashley Norton "marries beautifully with the metal cabinets and adds depth to the space." Five hand-blown seeded glass pendants hang from the header, providing additional texture without crowding the upper cabinetry and hood.

FLEXIBLE AND FLAWLESS

Two years after Megan Siason worked on her clients' primary home, the property across the street – a huge lot with a tiny house that had seen better days – went up for sale. The clients, who had purchased their home mainly because of its gorgeous views, did not want to risk losing their panoramic vista to a potential new, taller build.

"With that being the main goal, the use of the new space was somewhat undecided as project progress was being made," shares Siason, CKBD, owner and interior designer at m studio interior design in Seal Beach, CA. "Initially, they were thinking of selling the home and went back and forth from that to renting it out as either a short- or long-term rental to professionals."

The new two-level structure measures approximately 5,000 square feet, with a main home on the upper level and a downstairs junior unit accessible from the exterior. "A few adjustments were made during construction to give the clients some flexibility of having three total close-off points if they wanted to rent out three separate spaces, or just the upstairs and downstairs," Siason explains.

With the space's use uncertain, Siason was faced with the additional challenge of creating a design that would be unique and highly functional, with finishes that offer a measure of universal appeal. "Since this was not their primary home, and also since we were assuming this place would be either rented or sold, we were incredibly mindful of the material costs and durability and longevity of finish selections," she says. "I presented a palette that embraced more neutral tones throughout, finding a balance of contrasting colors for depth that not only felt appropriate for a coastal location but performed well for any household situation – families, pets, young professionals, etc. Some of the materials include quartz countertops, porcelain tile flooring and TFL cabinetry."



Photos: Natalia Robert Photo

- 📌 Megan Siason's clients purchased the property across the street to avoid potentially losing their exquisite view.
- 📌 The new space had to be universally appealing but with a coastal flavor, as the owners were uncertain of its future use.

(VACATION) HOME ON THE RANGE

A cozy bungalow is just one of three residences designed by Ginger Rabe, MSD, M-Arch, on a Carlsbad, CA property presided over by a century-old pine tree.

"This vacation home exists because of a story that began decades ago," says the owner of Ginger Rabe Designs, LLC in Carlsbad, CA. "As a child, the client walked past this property on her way to school, always drawn to the land, the home, and especially the tree. Years later, with her twins grown, she and her husband purchased the entire property to preserve it, saving the tree and the land from redevelopment and transforming it into a place others could enjoy for generations."

Rabe's clients had a vision of a vacation retreat full of light and personality, but the little bungalow's interior was dark and awkward despite its charming barn-like exterior. A family of equestrians, the clients wanted to "honor the character of the original ranch-style property while embracing a more modern, elevated interior," Rabe explains.

To create an open and inviting kitchen on such a small scale, Rabe leveraged the capabilities of her own cabinet shop to craft custom cabinetry with "meticulous grain matching by Jason, our finish carpenter, ensuring a continuous and intentional flow throughout the space." She adds, "The client wanted a light wood that was natural, and we picked each piece of wood by hand and made sure the grain flowed seamlessly." She also sourced and repurposed a wood beam to accent the custom sculptural plaster hood, which serves as a focal point in the space. A white cast-iron Kohler apron-front sink lends a sense of timelessness to the design.

Rabe points to another space in the bungalow, the bathroom, as one of the client's favorite rooms. It's "a moody, calming retreat designed to evoke serenity," with a wall covering that mimics the night sky opposite handcrafted Japanese tiles from European Tile. A custom walnut vanity by Rabe's own GR Studio serves as a piece of functional art, topped by a custom curved and backlit mirror. ■

Photos: Preview First Photography



- 📌 Ginger Rabe sourced a reclaimed wood beam to accent the focal point plaster hood in this vacation bungalow's kitchen.
- 📌 A wall covering evoking the night sky and a custom walnut vanity from Rabe's cabinet shop pack a punch in a small space.