

# THE PERFECT KITCHEN



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PART I

## Matters of Style

As the heart of the home, the kitchen touches on realms of memory and intimacy—elements much more challenging to get right than functionality or flow. How the room looks determines how it makes you feel, which is why, in the kitchen, finding the right style remains essential.





## Keeping It Personal

How *does* one begin to think personally about the kitchen and then translate that into a design? The key lies in picturing it as a room that you have a relationship with and imagining what that emotional experience should be like—that, to my mind, is the essence of successful kitchen design. When pondering how you want your kitchen to look, you should absolutely refer to the tear sheets and books and online image banks that you’ve been saving. But no less important is thinking about all the kitchens in which you’ve had memorable experiences and examining those memories closely. Look at it this way: if you were designing the perfect beach house, you’d first think experientially rather than aesthetically, going back in your mind to all the great waterfront getaways you’ve visited. Was there a view, a veranda with curtains that fluttered in the ocean breeze, a chair that reclined at just the right angle? All of these components would come to mind precisely because you’d want to create a dependably enjoyable experience. And your kitchen—the room in which you and your family and friends spend so much time, your home’s default comfort zone—is no different. How it looks is tightly bound up with what you like to do in it—or think you might enjoy doing in the future—and how these activities make you *feel*.

So give yourself the time and the permission to fantasize about the kitchen experiences that would give you maximum comfort and enjoyment. Perhaps it’s brewing a perfect cup of coffee and sitting quietly with it at a table washed by the morning light. Or gathering with family members who help you prepare a sumptuous holiday dinner. Or perhaps you’ve always wanted to have your cookbooks on a shelf at eye level above your prep area, rather than in a cupboard, so you can immediately survey your options.

However you choose to design your kitchen, it’s useful to remember that every component—including the food itself and how you arrange and display it—is part of an overall experience combining aesthetics, utility, and, not least, taste.





ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: The components of this country kitchen—actually overlooking a body of water in Nova Scotia—conspire to capture a spirit of culinary collaboration, casualness, and comfort. Little is concealed, surfaces are user-friendly, and seating is inviting and abundant. Such an environment makes room for everything—even the vintage cloth shade on the hanging light.





And while you're fantasizing about the memories you're going to make, think back on the ones you've stored away. Many of the kitchens you remember most warmly probably weren't perfect in the conventional sense. My grandmother's kitchen, to cite a favorite example, wasn't what you'd call cutting-edge. But I recall with special poignancy the enormous porcelain sink and sitting around her table. By contemporary standards, my grandmother's kitchen was filled with flaws, but it had personality and it was welcoming and hardworking. These factors lie at the core of any successful kitchen design. Combining the memories you take and the ones you make equals the *truly* perfect kitchen.

I always encourage people to think very freely about design, to seek inspiration everywhere, and, above all, to keep an open mind. A prime example of the latter can be found opposite, where you'll discover an English kitchen swathed in a charmingly patterned wallpaper. As you might imagine, we pondered a multitude of images for inclusion in this book, and though every conceivable consideration was brought to bear on our choices, no one on my team had ever considered wallpaper. Yet the instant we caught sight of this photo, we all agreed it had to go in. That wallpaper evokes countryside, coziness, quirkiness, and craft. I could see myself sitting in that room, tea and a scone before me, in a condition of absolute contentment. The moral: don't say no to any design idea without first taking it around the track. You never know.

The combination of a baby-blue AGA stove and a charmingly patterned wallpaper makes this English country kitchen irresistibly cozy, a mood supported by the glass-front freestanding armoire, cut-glass ceiling fixture, and the dining/work table. An important note: the comfortable dining chairs seem ready-made for long meals and sustained contemplation.







ABOVE: The copper sink and its hardware have been allowed to patinate, which, in addition to relieving you of polishing duties, contributes an overlay of homespun personality. OPPOSITE: The brick floor, stacked stone wall, and lichenous lintel suggest an outdoor space that has been enclosed to create, appropriately, a flower room.







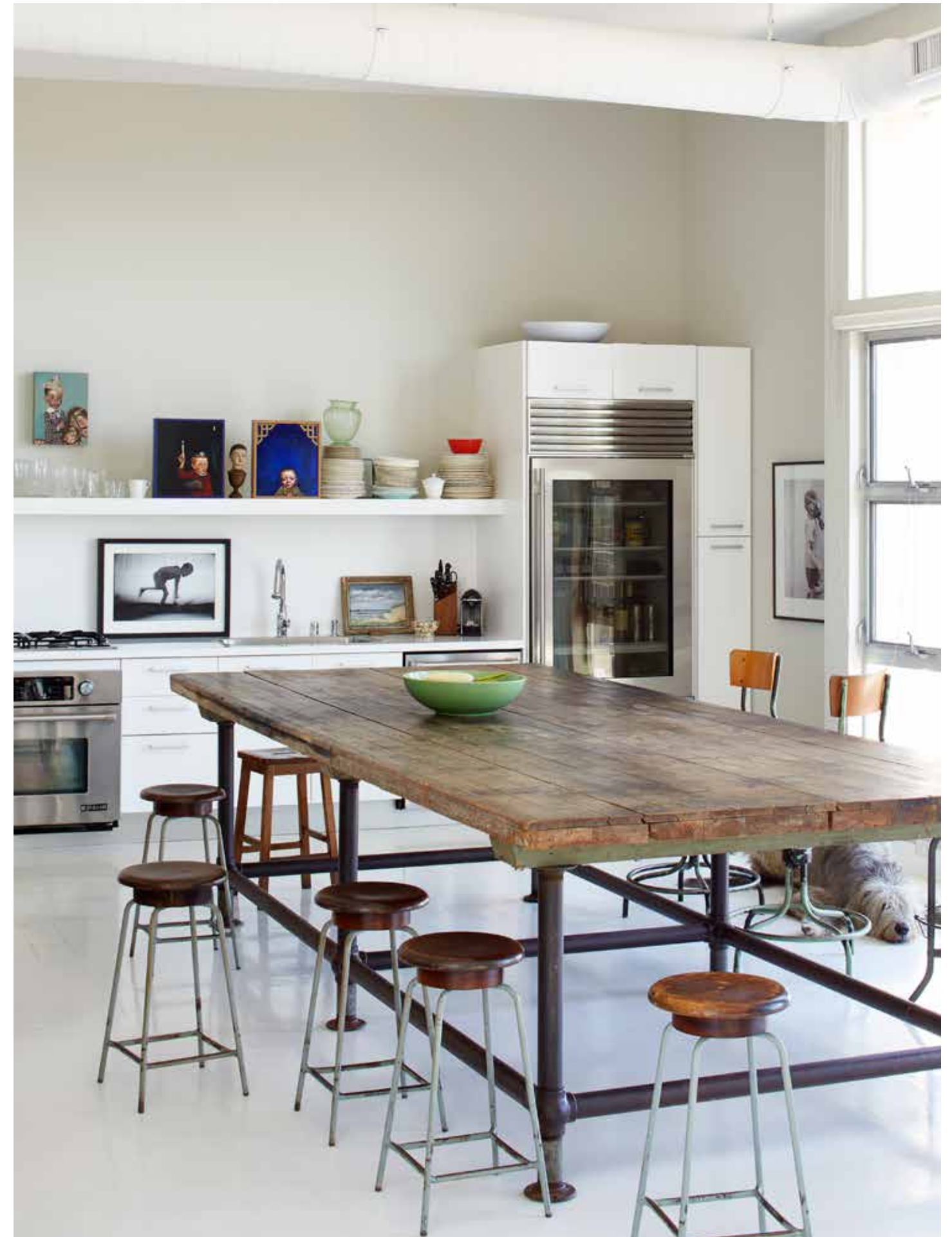
ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: Though many of us fear it, strong color can be our friend, adding an enlivening accent, tying a space together, or establishing a mood. Certain shades—in this case turquoise, lacquered to a high sheen—are particularly effective at pleasurably contravening expectations, as they represent what might be described as a fearless choice.







ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: It is a myth that industrial elements can only be deployed in high-tech settings. In both of these very different kitchens, the utilitarian speed rail supporting the tables seems not only at home, but also appropriate.







Color in this context is used not only to enliven a monochrome room, but also to create an unexpected, slightly surreal surprise.





ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: Though one may be hesitant to make an irrevocably bold choice in the kitchen, the virtues of so doing can be seen here. The copper sinks, range hood, back-splashes, pendant lights, and cabinet handles raise the impact of potent materiality to a new level. What's more, as these surfaces patinate, they will not only become more textured, tactile, and vivid, they'll also serve as a living, ever-changing record of the room's use.



The particular appeal of this kitchen, to my eye, is that it is grown-up and elegant and simultaneously young and hip. The marble supplies the chic, but the simplicity of the faucet, the absence of cabinet hardware, and, especially, the choice of color give the room an unmistakably downtown vibe.







OPPOSITE AND ABOVE: There is nothing so utilitarian or insignificant that it can't contribute to a moment of beauty—be it a rolling pin, a cutting board, an old-fashioned scale, or a casually arranged display of colorful tomatoes.