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By Sandra Barrera



Spacious kitchens and luxurious master baths. If anything makes or sells a house, it's rooms like these, says Ryan Brown, the 35-year-old owner of Brown Design and host of Bravo's reality TV series "Flipping Out." Many of his design projects in and around Los Angeles involve updating early 20th century homes, especially those with small functional kitchens and cramped utilitarian bathrooms.



"Our formula is to go in and really open up the space, and to create a great room or what I call a live-in kitchen," he says. "Someone can be cooking and the kids can be in the same room doing homework or playing or whatever. We're just not as disjointed as we used to be."

Brown incorporated this philosophy in renovating the traditional-style Los Feliz home he shares with his partner, Dale, and

their 3-year-old daughter, Chloe. Brown tore out the wall separating the kitchen and formal dining room (which he relocated) and created a family-friendly great room. "It feels like you're sitting at the chef's table in the kitchen, which, when you go to a great restaurant, is always an amazing experience," Brown says. "You get the sights, the smells, the sounds, everything." Here, he provides some insight into the design process:

Where do you begin when it comes to creating a live-in kitchen?

I look at the space and figure out how to make it larger. My next immediate question is, how much do you cook? If somebody's big on cooking, I'm going to go with an industrial space, a functioning hood to ventilate the room and plenty of space for prepping. If not, I'm more likely to set a pretty countertop into the island.



I like to make every bathroom feel like a spa vacation.

Has the island replaced the kitchen table?

People are hanging out in the kitchen more these days, so why not make them comfortable? I always try to put in a decent-size island or peninsula with at least four bar stools. Everyone can be in the kitchen when someone is cooking or preparing food and no one feels left out.

Everyone seems to want granite countertops. What makes it so appealing?

It is an amazingly durable stone. But there are so many other beautiful stones. I love using Carrara or calacatta marble. Everyone says, 'It's going to stain,' or 'It's too porous.' But my response has always been that if you go into any bar or restaurant in France, Italy, Germany or Spain, you're going to see these marble countertops that have been there forever, and they're beautiful. They get better and better with age. It's true they stain. But short of red wine sitting on the bottom of a bottle overnight, I haven't gotten a stain on marble that I haven't been able to get out.

You do a lot of open shelving in your kitchens. What's the thinking behind it?

I like the look and functionality of just being able to reach up and grab something without having to open doors. On those shelves I might mix cookbooks with spices, dishes, glassware and, sometimes, even flowers. It becomes this multi-use, horizontal surface for accessories and items that you're likely to use on a daily basis.

One of your kitchens features a tomato-red china cabinet in a wood-and-stainless steel space, which seems so unexpected.

The owner liked Asian-inspired antiques and vintage pieces. So, I found what I thought was a really interesting piece. It kind of became this functional art piece for the room. What I like about Asian-inspired pieces is that even though they're antique, they have modern lines.

Would you say clean, modern lines are your signature?

Actually, I'd call it a casually sophisticated



look. It's a warm, lived-in look that's still neat and tidy. It's just a matter of planning. One thing that I do is I make storage accessible to the kids in all of the kids' rooms as well as the kitchen-great room.

Your master bathrooms are often decked in chandeliers, animal-skin rugs and gorgeous free-standing tubs. Why so luxurious?

I like to make every bathroom feel like a spa vacation.

How do you accomplish that?

My standard has been the double shower. It's a wonderful experience to walk into

that big shower and turn on huge rainheads to wash away the worries of the day. But the other thing you see quite frequently are free-standing bathtubs, which bring a lot of interest as opposed to having a built-in. Personally, I just think it looks a lot better. And if the bathroom has a hillside view then I always try to orient the tub and the room around that. If it doesn't have a hillside view, then a big trend is having a view of a little private garden off the master bedroom and bathroom. It's totally Zen.

And well lit.

I love having a lot of natural light. In the planning stages, if we're doing windows, I always try to get in as many as possible. And if the room is on the second floor, there's always the option of putting in a skylight which can bring in a ton of light into the bathroom as well.

But you're not against pendant lighting in your bathrooms.

Again, it's kind of a functional art piece for me. You can walk in at night and just have that light on as opposed to all the lights in the bathroom, and it just gives this nice glow.

