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Putting the Fun in Multi-Functional



Photo by Karen Palmer

In a kitchen designed for entertaining and cooking, there's eye-candy everywhere - from the checkered floor to the copper ceiling.

GRATON, CA, 2025-May-12 -- The homeowners knew what they wanted their kitchen to be: unique. Comfortable, playful, elegant-but-not-taking-itself-too-seriously. They wanted a kitchen where they could not only cook and entertain, but that was, in itself, entertaining. They wanted an octopus, and they got one... along with a bar, a 1960's cocktail lounge banquette, and a bright copper ceiling that will never appear old.

The husband-and-wife doctors who own the home, built in 1899 in St. Louis' sought-after Central West End, had strong ideas about the remodel of their kitchen. They talked with Dana King's design/build firm a year prior to starting design, and thought long and hard about the feel and the features they wanted. "She is a really good cook," explains King, "who takes both pride and pleasure from her cooking, and wants to be able to host a guest or two while she is in the kitchen. Her husband is adept in the art of mixing drinks, and also likes to tend bar while he's entertaining."

Husband and wife were each to have their own domain within the kitchen. “The goal,” recalls project designer Renna Barnes, “was to expand the kitchen to incorporate what is now the dinette/bar area, to have it be cohesive with the kitchen, but to have the kitchen workspace totally separate from the bar area.”

There were also very specific requests. “They like eclectic and whimsical,” relates King, “and didn’t want the kitchen to be unapproachable and typical.” They asked for a copper ceiling, a seating banquette like the one they enjoyed in a local restaurant, a black and white floor, a bespoke space for the dog’s bowls, and the eye-catching Yama Cold Drip Brew Tower - part cold coffee maker, part mesmerizing art piece.

The challenge for Barnes was not merely to include all the clients’ requests into her design, but also to incorporate them into an efficient, navigable, highly functional 21st Century kitchen that fits into a 19th Century house. The first step: reconfiguring the basic space. The house was built with its kitchen at the back, where tradesmen could deliver groceries to the cook via the back door. Adjacent was the back staircase, both down to the basement and up to the second and third floors. The only routes from the front of the house to the kitchen were through the dining room or around and down a back corridor.

Unlike the homeowners 120 years earlier, the clients not only expected to cook for themselves, but wanted to entertain guests in their kitchen while doing so. More direct access was needed between the front and the kitchen. This required moving a wall, which in turn necessitated tearing out the back staircase. The space where the stairs had ascended became a large, very accessible pantry with a two-story ceiling. A Juliet balcony was added on the second floor to look down into the pantry, and the existing window of the stairwell would now function as a clerestory window, pouring light down into the space during daylight hours. A space-saving spiral staircase was added for access to the basement, elegantly enclosed behind period glass doors that were salvaged from elsewhere in the house.

Despite the generous footprint of the room, space was at a premium for creating two individual focal points. With so many functions to accommodate, considerable thought was put into making maximum use of every square foot. The central island is built for cooking, flanked along two walls by the refrigerator, oven, stovetop, and sink. The bar area is built in the opposite corner, including a counter for mixing, a platform to display the Yama coffee maker, a commercial bar-style glass-rinser, and cabinetry in between. A seating/eating space is located between these two foci, comprised of a quarter-circle red leatherette banquette and a beautiful Mid-century Modern table.

The kitchen is laid out to make maximum use of the space while minimizing steps between functions. The oven, for example has doors that open to the side rather than down. “It allowed us to have a bigger island,” explains King, “because you can swing the doors out of the way to cozy up to the oven, and just do a little pivot around the island to land there with your food. It’s a big kitchen, but the cook doesn’t have to walk very far to do her thing, and then the drink-master, her husband, doesn’t have to walk far to do his thing. It’s a big kitchen but every area has a purpose.”

The island has a tiled nook underneath it on one side, housing a dog feeding and watering station with its own faucet and floor drain. It is lined in white subway tile, echoing the large tile back-splash behind the sink and the range. While the dog-area is eminently practical - containing any messiness around the dog bowl and making it easy to clean up - there is also something undeniably whimsical about it.

The island accommodates a vintage, industrial-style draftsman’s chair - where the cook can take it easy while chopping vegetables on the marble countertop, or a guest can sit near the action and enjoy a glass of wine.

The bar area centers on the quarter-round red banquette with its Space Age table in white-veined black marble. The banquette was custom-made by Vitro Seating (St. Louis). Lining the wall is a counter of black-veined white Danby marble

("The only marble we really recommend for a home," remarks King, "because it's pretty dense marble."), with a wine cooler, sink, and cabinet space beneath. The home's original breakfront has been preserved, now serving as a Butler's Pantry for bartending needs.

"We have the wonderful little banquette seating that is in the middle of the activity, where guests can sit, look to the right and to the left and have plenty of things to look at. Everywhere you turn in the kitchen," remarks King. "You have eye candy, something to catch your interest."

The black-and-white monumental checkered floor is eye-popping, and the Danby marble countertops are equally dramatic. The appliances are brushed stainless steel, as is the custom range hood which features boldly-riveted brass straps, a material echoed in the gold girdle on the globe-like chandeliers. "We used four different metals," comments King, "gold, copper, black and stainless. People think you can't mix, but we show that you can and it can look interesting, as long as it looks balanced and intentional."

The bright copper ceiling looks like early 20th Century stamped metal, but looks can be deceiving. Manufactured by the California company, Ceilume, the ceiling tiles are actually three-dimensional, thermoformed vinyl tiles with a metallic finish, dropped into a standard suspended ceiling grid. Two different tile patterns are used, both in Copper metallic. The central field is Empire, a moderate-relief pattern incorporating classical elements, which is paired with Continental, a style with a shallow-relief pattern that is easier to trim for use along the ceiling border where less than full width tiles are required. Both styles incorporate traditional ornamentation that would have been popular in the 1800s when the home was built.

"We installed it ourselves," relates King. "We wanted to make sure we had a good product and that it could accommodate the recessed lighting. We cut holes in the circles of the design so it looked intentional. We liked the many styles that were offered, the flexibility for lighting, and the support that we got through the company."

King points out that the Copper metallic finish on the ceiling tiles will not corrode or patina like metal tiles, but will retain its bright, shiny copper appearance. "The copper gives a nice rosy cast to the room. It picks up in some of the gold and the stainless. It gives a warm reflection to the room that highlights the wood cabinetry that we salvaged, the wood doors. It is reflected in the hood, the stainless almost mirrors it. It gives a slight blush tone to the room, which gives a warmth, a more cozy feeling to the space. Most people ignore the ceiling and they might just paint it white. And then your cabinets don't show as well. This allows your cabinetry to really stand out, the warmth of the wood-stained cabinetry and the white cabinetry, both are set off well by the ceiling."

Between the rows of ceiling tile stretches the painted octopus. "There was a soffit that we could not easily cover by the copper ceiling," King recalls. "What do you do with that? It's right above the seating area. The clients had this idea of something that could be kind of long and linear there: an octopus stretching out its arms. Why not have your guests look up and see an octopus?"

"Which is fun," says King.

About Ceilume

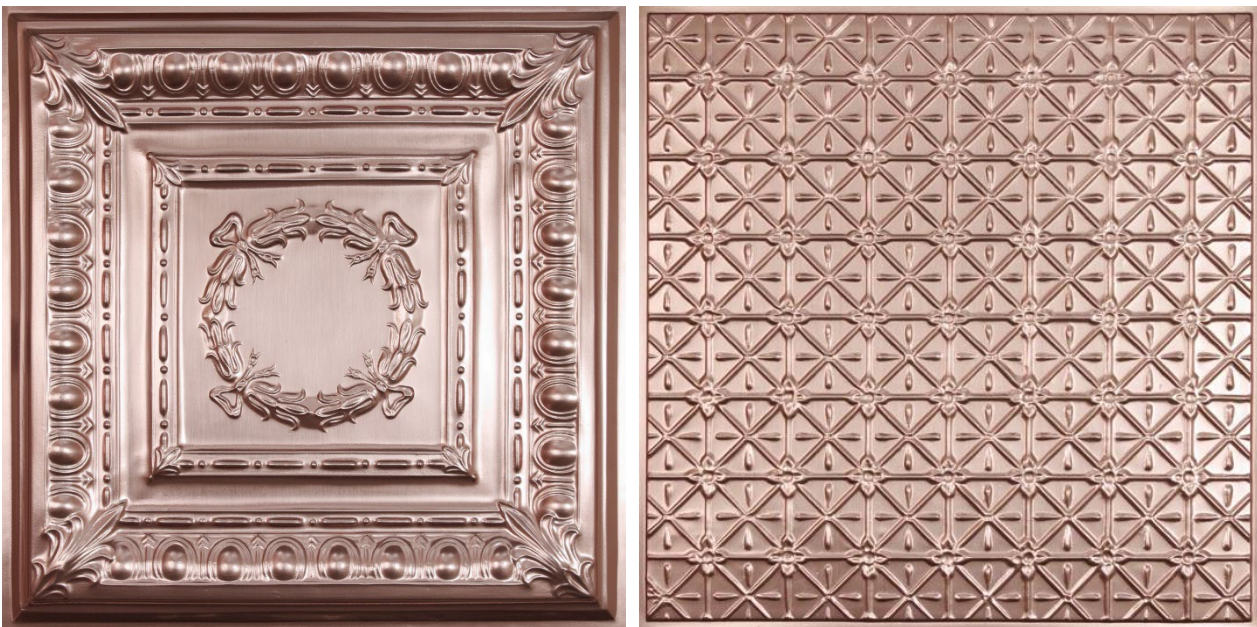
Ceilume is the leading manufacturer of thermoformed ceiling and wall tiles and panels. The company's roots go back to the pioneers of modular ceilings, when "Mid-Century was Modern." The family-owned business is located in California's wine country, manufacturing ceiling tiles in an historic apple-packing warehouse. With an eye on the future, Ceilume's research and development continues to improve interior finish systems to meet changing environmental, performance, and aesthetic needs. For more information, see ceilume.com/pro.

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Photos courtesy of Ceilume

The copper ceilings tiles that will never tarnish are actually thermoformed tiles from Ceilume: Empire (left) in the central field with Continental (right) as a border.

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Photo by Karen Palmer

Four metallic tones – copper, brass, gold, and stainless steel – set off the black-and-white motif of the kitchen.



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The bar area, with red banquette and table bridging the space to the cooking area, and the octopus mural overhead popping out against the bright copper ceiling surrounding it.

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