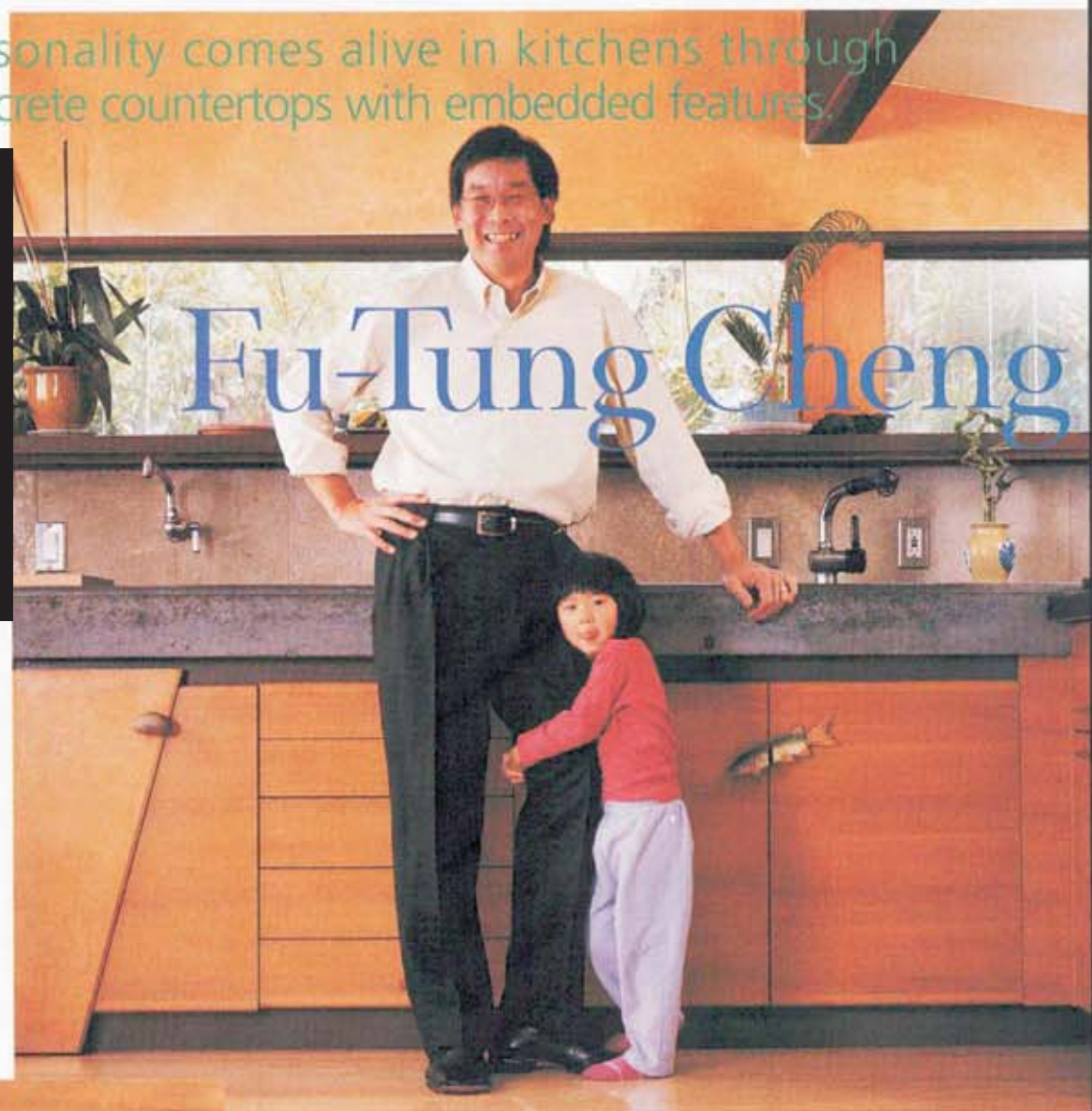


Personality comes alive in kitchens through concrete countertops with embedded features.



Standing in his California kitchen, designer Fu-Tung Cheng, above, shown with his daughter, Anna, created his design firm around the goal of proving his kitchens could be both creative and functional. A small pool on a kitchen island, left, creates interest.



Photographed by Fu-Tung Cheng

No longer relegated to strictly urban spaces, concrete countertops are used in all types of design styles today and in just about every room of the house. Designer Fu-Tung Cheng's name is typically not far behind discussions on the topic of using concrete in the kitchen, but his design work goes far beyond that. As owner and founder of Cheng Design based in Berkeley, California, he focuses his firm on everything from custom-home design to product design. In addition to his numerous award-winning projects, he is the author of the recently published book *Concrete Countertops* (The Taunton Press, 2002). ▶

Continued from page 20

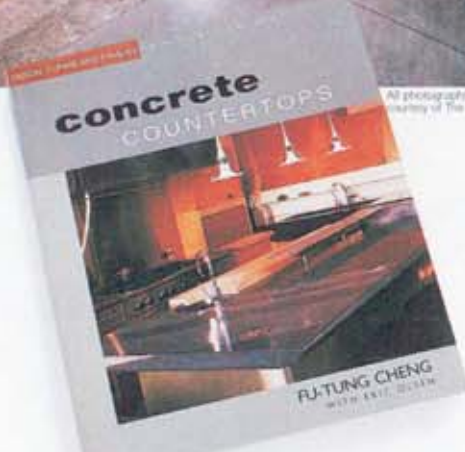


Photographed by Anne Sarpola



Photographed by Fu-Tung Cheng

All photographs on this page courtesy of The Taunton Press



BK: How did you launch into design as a major focal point of your life? Did you have early influences that led you into design?

CHENG: Morn Cheng was an artist, a colorist, and did cell painting for Disney—she filled in the colors for the animation of Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*. She had four kids and a master's from the University of Southern California in fine art. ... It set a direction for me and gave me an important matrix from which to work.

BK: Your own work is like sculpture. Do you consider yourself a designer or an artist? What makes the difference?

CHENG: I don't like to call myself an artist. For instance, I teach Tai Chi, but I don't consider myself a master. An artist is someone who is working on high research in tune with their being and about their art. In college, when I was just painting and doing conceptual art, I considered myself an artist. Now that I am doing what I call "practical art," it doesn't apply, because it is a combination of engineering and art.

Part of what I like to do is not take design too seriously, I like whimsy, such as the pot rack made out of kitchen utensils and a Gumby embedded in a counter. Most of the time, my work is not sacred. I like having a mistake, not having something too perfect.

BK: Turning to the state of kitchen design, where do you see it going in the next five to 10 years?

CHENG: I see the kitchen as the big entertainment center. Now there are two or three people working there. What we try to do in our designs is to encourage everyone to be there. We keep all the dishwashing in one area. Then another area for food prep. There are going to have to be different designs for different places, but there is a certain size where it gets ridiculous and loses any intimacy.

BK: What's next on your own agenda?

CHENG: I would like to do whole houses that are like a total sculpture. I was inspired by Australian architect Glenn Murcutt, the 2002 Pritiker Architecture Prize winner, who uses a lot of local Australian vernacular materials, such as galvanized and corrugated metal. His use of those materials was my inspiration for a house I created in Del Mar (California) in 1996, which is only the third house I've done.

My latest project is on an island off of Puerto Rico. It is a most exciting house that has been two years in the making. The house takes the shape of a hill with a 160-foot-long curved concrete wall. The house is entirely of concrete and designed to withstand 300-mph hurricane winds, heat, and tropical moisture.

From top: Sahara gold marble and wood counters combine in this ski lodge in Utah. Using a sgraffito technique, Cheng carved in the hieroglyphic-like design with a crafts knife in this range hood. An embedded Gumby satisfies Cheng's desire for a bit of humor in his own kitchen countertop. Water often plays a part in Cheng's design. Here, water moves over a slate-and-stone inlaid channel in this countertop. *Concrete Countertops*, Cheng's first book, is a complete guide to the techniques and design possibilities of concrete in kitchens and baths.