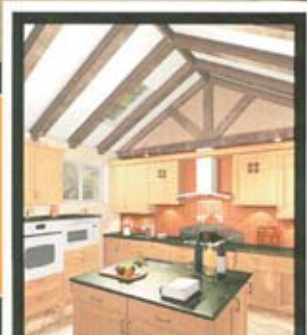


kitchen & bath designer

Design inspiration for interiors specialists

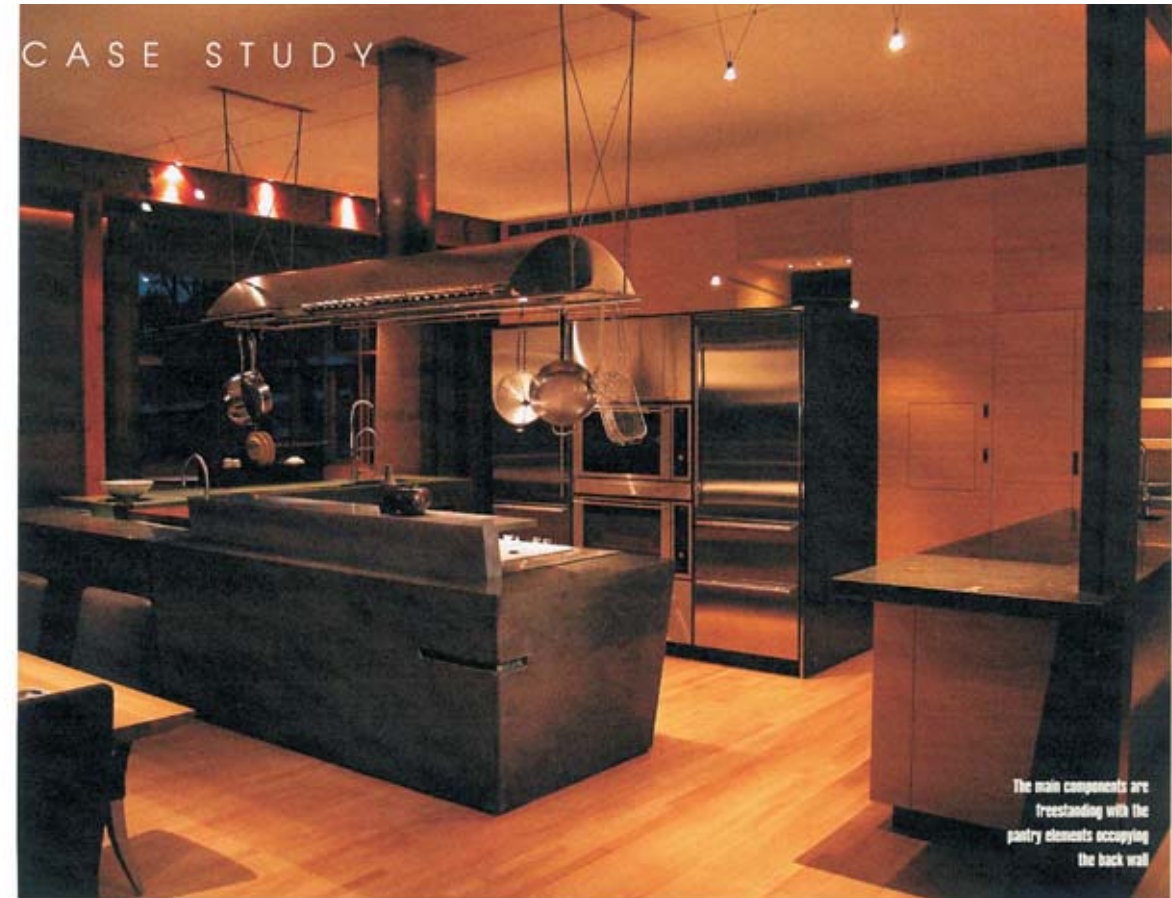
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CIRCLING THE SQUARE • HOW PAOLO PININFARINA REWORKED THE TRIANGLE
TOUR DE FORCE • FU-TUNG CHENG'S CALIFORNIA CONCRETE CROWN JEWEL

AMERICANA DREAM • ITALIAN DESIGNER PAUL MARAZZI THROWS RETRO A CURVE
PASSING THE BATON • GERD BULTHAUP REFLECTS ON TIMELESS DESIGN

CASE STUDY



The main components are freestanding with the pantry elements occupying the back wall.

CASE STUDY

Design: Cheng Design
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Fabricators: Eric Joost, Robert Andrews and Hans Rau of Cheng Design

Steel: Alan Sklansky

Appliances: Gaggenau, Sub-Zero, Kupperbusch, Miele, Cheng Products

Cabinetry: Plyboo

Faucets: Duravit

Report: Wanda Jankowski

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Fu-Tung Cheng

Tour De Force

Fu-Tung Cheng shares insights into the creative details that make this Northern California kitchen his crown jewel

The client said to me, "I've given you the heart of my house," recalls Fu-Tung Cheng, Principal of Cheng Design, Berkeley, California. "It was the heart of a massive beast. I was under a lot of pressure."

"It took five years to produce this Northern California home," says Fu-Tung. "There's the 10,000 square foot main house, cottages for guests, a six-car basement garage, and a huge wine cellar. It was a long process for the owners and we came onto the project at the tail-end—so there was a challenging sprint to merge our design

and concepts to the design of the architect (Cutler-Anderson) in a relatively compressed time line." The Cheng-designed and fabricated kitchen/dining and pantry/powder room area took five months to complete from bare room to finished space.

Anyone who has followed the kitchen and bath industry in the past decade has heard of Fu-Tung's astonishing work with concrete. Far from the usual images of unappealing cold, rough-to-the-touch cement is Fu-Tung's concrete, which is subtly colored, warm to the touch and silky smooth.

CASE STUDY

Concrete is used in conjunction with cold rolled steel, bamboo, stainless steel and wood in this kitchen. "Countertops become sinks, that become walls that in turn become countertops in an orchestration of material and detail that ultimately become a coherent vision of art and utility," says Fu-Tung. "The island and peninsula walls and countertops were cast on site. The main sink counter was poured in the shop."

There are three sinks: one in the island, one next to the cooktop and a third in the adjacent connecting countertop. The cooking area sink is lined at the bottom with cracked glazed, white tiles that were set simultaneously with and into the concrete. The multi-step process for producing the countertops and sink walls began with full scale foam mock ups created in the 'positive' followed by molds created in the 'negative' to insure a perfect fit when the two were put together. Concrete was then poured into the molds. For added convenience, a custom perforated steel drainboard slides back and forth over the top of the sink and beneath the custom cutting board.

A combination of Cheng's NeoMix™ and GeoCrete™ products are used to create the massive countertops, as well as the vertical panels that clad the islands and the sinks. Cheng's Neo Mix™ is a lightly ground mixture and shows more aggregate and variations in the surface. GeoCrete™ produces a smoother, more solid looking surface.

The inlaying of unique materials as accents, another Cheng trademark, is done after the concrete is poured and just as it is starting to set. "I have a whole collection of objects I can inlay and I think about what I'll do in general beforehand. But there is no other way to get the arrangement the way I want it than to do it myself on site," says Fu-Tung. "I love to compose on site"



Above: The custom-designed dishrack is backed by steel plate

Right: The island is topped with black granite and includes a small sink

Left: A wood cutting board and metal drain board are paired with a second sink



CASE STUDY



spontaneously. I guess it comes from my painter/artist background."

Fashioning the molds/forms for the sink, countertops and other components took three weeks. The casting took a single day and after the concrete set for a week, it was ground for another two days to achieve the smooth finishes.

"Nature takes eons of time and it takes huge amounts of pressure from the earth to produce granite and marble. Concrete is a quick, man-made version of the same kind of rock-hard material. Working with concrete is like forming your own quarry and harvesting your results," says Cheng. "It's working with an idea from nature – not taking nature's ideas literally."

The concrete elements were not the only details in this tour de force project that required so much thought and skill to execute.

"The casual dishrack near the sink in the green concrete countertop took nearly as long to do as the entire kitchen. It was difficult to design something simple that worked. The dishrack we fashioned is understated but works beautifully" says Fu-Tung. The 3/8-inch plate steel is adhered flush with the back wall of the work counter. Slipped over the steel dish-prongs are plastic sleeves to dampen the contact of metal against ceramic dishware. There is a ribbed rubber mat covering the lower steel shelf that directs the water down from the dishes onto the sloped countertop and into the sink.

Unightly electrical outlets had no place in this kitchen, so Fu-Tung's solution was to create concealed outlet boxes. Hollows were cut out from a black granite countertop in the island and the outlets installed in stainless steel

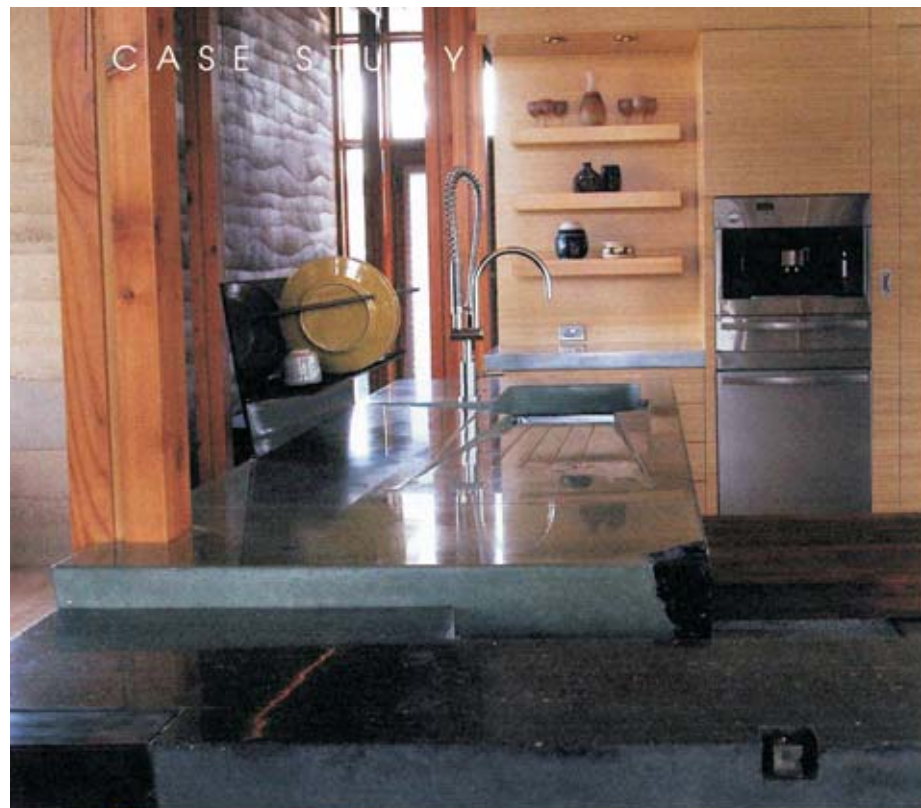
Above: White crackled tile in the sink bottom is integrated with concrete

Right: The cooking area includes four burners, a Wuk, a deep fryer and a steamer

Left: The third sink is inset beneath a thick concrete counter with integral drainboard



CASE STUDY



a grill, a steamer and a deep fat fryer with an accompanying pop-up downdraft ventilation unit—all Gaggenau. Overhead is a 10-foot long Cheng Titan stainless steel hood. Three Miele dishwashers also are integrated into the kitchen and pantry.

Perhaps the most striking display of appliances is the freestanding block of Sub-Zero refrigerators and Kuppersbusch wall ovens that are contained within a box made of 3/8-inch thick stainless steel plate.

"The client enjoys cooking for his wife and children, and wanted the refrigerator close by the food prep area. I wanted a refrigerator and wall ovens on the back wall with an undercounter refrigerator by the cooking and food prep areas, but the client insisted on having it all closer together. So we grouped them into a block," says Fu-Tung.

"I wanted something minimal in appearance, but structurally able to match the visual impact of concrete and rammed earth, so I thought about thick,



Above: Puzzle-box storage

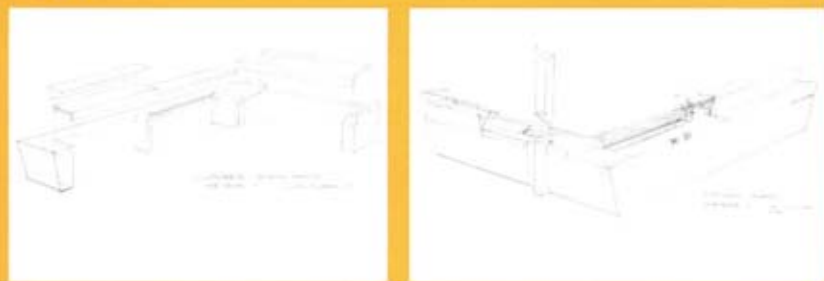


Above: The concrete countertops are massive yet smooth and warm to the touch

Above: Two kinds of concrete mix are used to offer variations in look and texture



Right: The floor plan and construction sketches reveal the scope and detail required



Left: Bamboo cabinetry components are installed to fit together perfectly flush

receptacles within them. The lids to the receptacles are finished off with rectangular brushed stainless steel plates that are inset flush with the granite.

"These complications, ironically, are done to achieve ultimate simplicity. It is just a modern version of what craftspeople have done for hundreds of years," says Fu-Tung.

Appliances abound in this cook's kitchen. There are four burners, a Wok,

plate-steel," says Fu-Tung. The back of the unit includes storage and display space. Full-length steel framed translucent doors that conceal shelves open 270 degrees and fold out of the way when items need to be accessed. Placed centrally between the two doors are open display shelves and a bamboo-clad cabinet of drawers.

Opposite these storage elements is a pantry/powder room/coat closet enclave,

CASE STUDY



Left: Fu-Tung's trademark is inserting objects into the concrete; (below) electrical outlets are concealed in a hollow beneath a steel plate.

Below: The kitchen is at the core of a 10,000 sq. ft. home



which like the cabinetry in the kitchen, is clad with bamboo. "The whole idea of the pantry enclave is that it opens up like a puzzle box," says Fu-Tung. The pantry combines pieces of plate-steel trims inset flush with the smooth bamboo panels.

"This kitchen is my tour de force kitchen to date. The client came to me for an abstraction, for a vision of a space that was detailed to express emotion as well as utility. Working with a precise program for this gourmand



chef, we reached a rarefied goal together. All the ideas that I started 20 years ago in my own house, all the details sweated out of thin air and worked through in countless projects have culminated in this one," says Fu-Tung. He sees this project as the jumping off point for his future aspirations. "This project went so well because Cheng Design already architecturally designs whole houses.

We offer full architectural services and have licensed architects on staff. The kitchen complimented the architecture seamlessly because we know and understand the entire process. I would like to continue to work on designing complete homes to creatively fuse with our kitchens." (Their house in Del Mar won a *Architectural Record* House of the Year Award in 1998.)

"I love the kitchen and bath



industry," he adds. "I cut my design teeth building kitchens and baths. I have enjoyed applying our mission statement – to create timeless, contemporary design – to my product line of Cheng hoods and Geocrete countertops. There is so much to explore. Soon we will be working with some larger companies, offering exciting, new, complete looks with cabinets and a great new line of competitively priced kitchen hoods."

Meantime, Fu-Tung is sharing his expertise on working with concrete in his second book on the subject, called *Concrete at Home*, due to be published in Fall 2004 by Taunton Press. This Northern Calif. kitchen construction will be explored in detail in the book. ■ **K&B**