

# BELOW *the* SURFACE

BY KATIE HAYDEN • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE CHAJECKI



A family kitchen by designer Sarah St. Amand and why thoughtful interior design is so much more than skin deep.

**T**here's no question this Oakville-area kitchen by designer Sarah St. Amand is impeccably designed. From the twinkling pendants and luxe walnut and marble, to the crisp black window frames and navy cabinetry that quietly nod to kitchens of yore, the refined transitional aesthetic ticks all the boxes style-wise. But what's more important to Sarah is that the 500-square-foot space is supremely functional – carefully calibrated around the busy lifestyle of the professional couple, and their teenagers and dogs, who live here.

Black frames on the new back doors and window bring a modern industrial note to the elegant transitional kitchen. (The window was enlarged to improve the sight line through the room.) Adequate clearances around the island and all the appliances enhance flow, making the kitchen much more functional. A bold, articulated sconce provides task lighting at the sink.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

The best kitchens, she explains, work like sophisticated machinery – both within the living space, and inside the cabinetry and behind the walls. And the guidance of a designer can be crucial in planning that. “I refer to myself as the director of the show,” she says. “Renovations are like a stage production: we go through everything with all the characters, and plan out absolutely everything that’s going to happen.”

This renovation meant bringing a dated kitchen into the 21st century and making it suitable for both family living and entertaining. “It was an ‘80s kitchen with terrible function,” Sarah says. “Shiny-white pressboard cabinetry and a huge vent that came down over the island stove chopped up the space.” (The transformation is part of a phased-in approach to redesigning various parts of the three-bedroom home.)

## DESIGN DETAILS UNCOVERED

The design process starts long before demolition begins. Sarah and her assistant, Sarah Rodriguez (their social media handle is #teamsarah), walk clients through an exhaustive checklist focused on how they use the kitchen, and what they want in the new space. “Design professionals have the skill set and knowledge to consider so many things,” she says. “In kitchens, for example, flow and clearances are really important. You shouldn’t have your oven or dishwasher where you can’t get around them when they’re being used.” They tailor storage to house everything from china and foodstuffs, to stand mixers, vacuums and pods for

single-serve coffeemakers. Want to add open shelving? Sarah will explain the realities of keeping it tidy, and of giving up valuable closed storage. “Like to entertain? Have pets? We look at anything that helps clients function best in the space – and offer an esthetic in line with the house, and the style that we want to create,” she says. They also consider safety and building codes, addressing details like where new wiring is installed to accommodate pendants or sconces, where to integrate USB ports for charging and home office needs. Then, once operational elements are settled, plans can be drawn, decorative pieces can be chosen, and construction can get underway.



*Set in a chevron pattern, the marble mosaic backsplash behind the chef-worthy 48” Wolf gas range injects texture and guides the eye upward to the thoroughly unique walnut-panelled vent hood. “A 48” range really makes a kitchen!” says Sarah.*



**ABOVE** Layers of colour and detailing – from a herringbone-patterned marble mosaic backsplash to a cluster of jewelry-inspired pendant lights to an X-shaped motif on the island and upper cabinets – establish the light-filled family kitchen’s warm, sophisticated transitional esthetic.

**LEFT** Specially ordered extra-wide, commercial-grade grasscloth wallpaper behind the bar sink can handle anything host or guest bartenders can throw at it. This is the sort of change that is important to address right from the start of a project because plumbing alterations can add several thousand dollars to a reno’s budget.

Hale Navy  
HC-154



**IMPECCABLE QUALITY & SPECIALTY SERVICE**

Interior design is a service that can make our time-starved lives easier. But it's a luxury service, Sarah explains, and top-notch design like this is expensive. Appliances can quickly eat up \$20,000 of a budget. Custom-made of solid walnut, and chic and comfortable enough for dinner party guests, the stools here cost \$2,000 each. Then there's the hundreds of hours the design team puts into overseeing the project. "When you go to a lawyer for your legal issues, you pay for that – or a massage therapist or auto mechanic, they're specialists. Unfortunately, the design industry doesn't always get seen as specialists."

"All in, this kitchen was easily \$120,000. A design like this – especially a kitchen – is a major investment," Sarah says. "But you really want to get it right the first time. You don't want to have it all done and then think, 'I wish I asked for a built-in espressomaker!'" ♦



*Like a pair of glittery diamond earrings, a cluster of crystal bulb pendant lights hung at staggered heights adds a layer of interest over the island and helps make the space refined enough for entertaining. All lighting in the room is set on dimmers to boost ambience when needed.*



*The refined walnut panelling inside the island nook – where the custom-made tailored walnut and leather-look vinyl counter stools tuck away – give the kitchen a polished, carefully considered look.*



**ABOVE RIGHT** The rich graining of the walnut panelling on the end of the island is a textural and organic balance to the kitchen's long stretches of white-and-navy cabinetry. Kitchen flooring is always carefully chosen, says Sarah, "these are high-traffic areas, so it has to be slip-resistant, but also comfortable, and sometimes it has heating in place as well."

**SOURCES** **KITCHEN DESIGN:** Sarah St. Amand Interior Design **COUNTERTOP:** Quartz **FRIDGE:** Sub-Zero **STOVE:** Wolf **DISHWASHER, ARTICULATED LIGHT OVER SINK AND PENDANT LIGHTS OVER ISLAND:** Universal Lamp **BLUE CABINET PAINT:** Hale Navy Benjamin Moore **WHITE CABINET PAINT:** Swiss Coffee Benjamin Moore **FAUCET AT MAIN SINK, SMALLER SINK:** Brizo **DOOR INTO LAUNDRY ROOM:** Door crafted by SSID Contracting Team **SLIDING DOOR MOUNTING BAR AND SLIDERS:** 1925 Workbench **FLUSHMOUNT LIGHT:** (by wood door) Universal Lamp **MUDROOM NOOK BLUE BEADBOARD PAINT COLOUR:** Hale Navy, Benjamin Moore **HOOKS:** Richelieu **BENCH CONSTRUCTION:** SSID Contracting Team **RUG:** Dash & Albert **BENCH CUSHION FABRIC:** Avant Garde Fabrics **THROW PILLOWS:** Custom-made with Robert Allen fabric



*An X-patterned banding on the seat cushion is an ornate and intricate contrast to the simple style of the bench in the entry hall; it echoes X detailing on the island, range hood and upper cabinets.*

**ABOVE** A clean-lined walnut bench nook is an eye-catching vignette when the homeowners enter the kitchen area from the garage; durable materials like a washable indoor-outdoor rug and wipeable painted bead board panelling mean dirt and splashes won't hamper the crisp look.

**RIGHT** Sleek brushed-brass hardware and a striking flat-panel walnut door put an elegant twist on the sliding barn door. Wide-plank, wood-look porcelain flooring flows from the kitchen right into the adjoining laundry room.



*Award-winning designer Sarah St. Amand, principal/owner of GTA-based Sarah St. Amand Interior Design, specializes in residential and commercial design. CDECA member, Sarah's work is nationally recognized and won the Best of HOUZZ 2016 award. For more information, visit [stamanddesign.com](http://stamanddesign.com). [sarah@stamanddesign.com](mailto:sarah@stamanddesign.com), Instagram @sarahst.amandinteriordesign. Portfolio & featured articles on [houzz.com](http://houzz.com) 519.802.6328*

