

# It was the room that nobody wanted -- just look at it now

Susan Fornoff, Chronicle Staff Writer  
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It was last winter's Bay to Breakers for designers: The city's top talents would inspect the tired kitchen and Butler Pantry of the house selected for the 2007 San Francisco Decorator Showcase, then take off running, fast.

"No one submitted a proposal for the kitchen," said showcase design coordinator Delanie Borden. "Then we asked a couple of designers to look at it, and still no one was interested."

These were old rooms that felt cool and dingy, despite orange laminate counters and white subway tile in the kitchen, a concrete counter in the pantry and once-white cabinetry throughout. What's more, the rules decreed that the footprint for the big appliances and fixtures couldn't change -- the range would stay in one corner, the sink across the way and the refrigerator out in the hall.

So for designers submitting bids, it was on your mark, get set, go away, to the point, living room designer Suzanne Tucker said, "I thought they were just going to close off the space." Finally, Borden sighed and said, "I just don't know what we're going to do with these rooms."

Her listener that day was Tish Key -- whose design business was booming, helped in part by her work on four previous showcases. She's got her two kids here,

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two parents in hospice care in Arkansas and she'd already won her bid for the designers' favorite, most-sought-after spot: the Tea Room, a square corner next to the Butler Pantry.

She hardly needed the headache of the kitchen and pantry. But, there she was, wandering around with her eight-woman team and conjuring a vision that had eluded so many others -- a vision that today, when the mansion opens to the public for the first time in 80 years, may make the once shunned, now gleaming kitchen the most beloved of the showcase's 27 creatively adorned spaces.

"We always had a good feeling about the space -- we just thought it would be a huge undertaking," Key said. "But we came up with a plan that would be a combination of using old things and new, but still making it better. I wanted it to look fresh and new, yet keep the look of the house."

And so the team set out, said Leslie Bamburg, one of Key's assistants, "to update this kitchen while keeping the charm of its past."

First, Laurie Arnold got the kitchen tiles sparkling (Mr. Clean Magic Eraser sponge and bleach pen), and revitalized the concrete counter in the Butler Pantry (sandpaper and an application of tung oil). Lower cabinets, countertops, sink, range and fridge came out and a new walnut floor from Tree Lovers was installed. Above the tile went Imperial Trellis wallpaper, repeating the citrine and ivory pattern in the Tea Room drapes.

Next, the team went to work on Key's simple black-and-white palette, inspired by the vintage tile floor in her elegant, linen-walled Tea Room. Of course, that gets most of us thinking of black granite countertops and white cabinetry. But think again. Key's counter is honed Calcutta Ora marble (from True Stone), and the old once-white cabinets and new Omega cabinets (from Timeless Kitchens) are painted high gloss Safety Black (from Benjamin Moore).

"You would think they would be white," Key said. "But now that they're black, they feel brighter. It shows flaws more, but I like that kind of vintage look. I painted my own interior doors black, but to convince a client to do it is a challenge."

There's no client, no convincing and no-holds-barred at the showcase. In the narrow Butler Pantry, Key set mirrors into the original-but-now-black cabinet faces; she liked the look so much that she added mirrors to the original-but-now-black upper cabinets in the kitchen, to reflect in the light from the door and windows opposite.

"You see how beautiful they are, yet they almost disappear," noted Williams-Sonoma marketing

representative Damon McFadden.

Williams-Sonoma has a stake in the show-house kitchen, too. Although Key made a point of preserving some of the old, her team enlisted vendors happy to display state-of-the-art appliances and accessories. Purcell Murray supplied one of the new smart dishwashers from Thermador, and showed off Thermador's modular, customizable and flexible Freedom columns in place of the old hallway fridge.

Yes, the fridge is still in the hallway, breaking the modern kitchen rule of keeping sink-fridge-stove in a compact triangle, but Purcell Murray marketing director Kevin Murray says he thinks the triangle "is becoming a trend of the past and consumers are becoming more point-of-use in the kitchen." That would explain the advent of small wine coolers and, he said, even "under-counter freezers so the kids have a place to get their Popsicles."

At the showcase, Purcell Murray also installed a recessed custom ventilation system (retail, about \$2,000) from Best by Broan that contains halogen lighting and fills the gap under the tile fascia that tops the range.

As for the range, it is quite the eye-catcher -- the new yet vintage-looking CornuFé from Williams-Sonoma, an \$8,000 version of the original La Cornue stoves that run from \$17,000 to \$30,000, Key estimates. The 43-inch-wide range has four big burners and an even bigger one in the center, as well as two electric convection ovens, and comes in a variety of finishes, including red, green and blue porcelain enamel.

Here it is brass and stainless. Key likes to mix metals, so there are the copper Normandy Farmhouse sink; polished nickel switchplates, pulls, knobs and latches; and lots of copper on and around the range.

Other accessories include a utensil rack from La Cornue, the impressive Elektra coffee and espresso maker, and a Hobart mixer.

In the center of all this new and vintage elegance are two islands from Williams-Sonoma neatly connected with a knife rack between them and Droog's 85-lamps chandelier of lightbulbs above.

It's a poetic touch in what used to be more of a single-lightbulb kitchen. Then one designer's lightbulb came on and illuminated a space that left so many others cold. Key hopes, she says, that visitors find the result "livable, pretty, functional and appropriate."

"She did such a great job," Tucker said. "It goes to show that you can do such simple things and give a room a whole new look."

If you go

The 2007 San Francisco Decorator Showcase is open today through May 28.

Where: 2901 Broadway (at Baker Street) in San Francisco, with shuttle-stop parking at the Presidio Main Post.

Hours: 10 a.m.-3 p.m. (final entry) Tues.-Sat.; extended hours until 7 p.m. on Thursdays, and 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sundays and Memorial Day.

Tickets: \$30, \$25 for seniors; admission includes an audio tour and, on Thursday evenings, a design lecture.

Note: Wear comfortable shoes. Reaching the front door requires a climb up a steep walkway and 30 to 40 steps, and the house has four stories.

For more information: Visit [www.decoratorshowcase.org](http://www.decoratorshowcase.org) or call (415) 447-5830.

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<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/04/28/HOGDNPFCVV1.DTL>

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