

One of Curley's prerequisites for his home kitchen was an island bench where daughters Cooper, 3, and Cassidy, 1, could sit and watch their father cook. "I want them to understand food. Everything is going back towards knowing where food comes from. I like being able to take the girls outside and pick fresh herbs from the garden." The island bench is made from a solid piece of granite, cemented into the ground; all the old tiles had to be ripped up and a new floor of flagstone tiles laid around it.

"In an ideal kitchen you want everything where it's supposed to be and bench space big enough to use as many chopping boards as you like," says Curley. When he needs to go into "battle mode", cooking for a function or entertaining on a large scale, he wheels out a commercial grade stainless-steel bench top, extending the existing work area.

"When you're in my industry, you see kitchens all day, and you know all the latest technology," says Curley. "At home I'm not going to have a circulator bath or a sous vide machine. But I want it to be professional enough that I can cook whatever I want to, and if I have chef friends over it's good enough for them, too."

PROFESSIONAL POLISH

- **KITCHEN COMPLETED, 2010**
- **FAVOURITE THING:** "It's semi-professional. If I want to make a master stock and deep-fry something at the same time, everything I need is here. I'm only limited by my own imagination."
- **ONE THING I'D CHANGE IF I HAD MY TIME AGAIN:** "The colour of the cupboards. They were here when we bought the house and we've worked around them."

THE INTERIOR DESIGNER: SARAH DOWLING

IN HER 25-YEAR CAREER, SARAH DOWLING HAS created close to 100 kitchens and seen plenty of trends come and go. Currently, she's noticing a preference for natural products, timber and stone, although she says reconstituted stone is still popular and "Caesarstone will always have its place". The butler's pantry, once a feature of many homes, is on the current must-have list for several of her clients, providing a separate room off the kitchen with an extra sink, dishwasher and storage, where the cook or entertainer can leave everything out of the way.

In her own kitchen in the Toorak home she shares with her husband and two children, simplicity was the key. "I wanted clean surfaces and a minimal look. We overcomplicate our lives with big houses, too much stuff," she says. "I've got a small oven and a steam oven, I got rid of the microwave, I put in a large fridge with a small pantry. My only additional appliance is the Thermomix."

For Dowling, the kitchen had to be a living space – as a mother of young children you do spend so much time in it, she says – but she wanted to move away from it being right in the middle of the family room. "It was a bit of an experiment and a point of difference from so many kitchens I'd seen." She worked with architect friends Chris and Genevieve de Campo to design a space that is partially separated from the main living area by a descending flight of stairs and a large "box" that houses one side of the kitchen, including the fridge, pantry, cooktop and oven. The other side of the open kitchen space, housing the sink, dishwasher and banks of metre-wide drawers, is built into a window that

“ I WANTED CLEAN SURFACES AND A MINIMAL LOOK. WE OVERCOMPLICATE OUR LIVES WITH BIG HOUSES, TOO MUCH STUFF... I GOT RID OF THE MICROWAVE. ”

SARAH DOWLING



protrudes beyond the walls and "hangs" outside the building, maximising space inside and flooding the work surfaces with natural light. The milk-tea vinyl wrap drawers appear seamless thanks to continuous drawer pulls (designer-speak for no handles), which Dowling says is a popular device in many of her clients' kitchens. The drawers are topped with a Carrara marble slab; Dowling loves the fact that it weathers, scratches and stains: "It tells a story."

The layout of the kitchen was governed principally by her architect's vision. "As someone who designs for a living, it was nice to hand the responsibility over to somebody else, and I wanted Chris de Campo to have a big say in the aesthetics of the space." But practicality was also important. Dowling stressed she didn't want to have to walk too far when she was cooking or preparing food, and her choice of an induction cooktop was influenced by the fact that it is easy to control and very safe. Another practical choice, albeit one made with aesthetics in mind, was Marmoleum lino on the floor. "Lino has made a huge comeback. I'd had a concrete floor before and it is so unforgiving if you drop anything. I also wanted something practical that would clean well."

PRACTICAL MAGIC

- **KITCHEN COMPLETED, 2008**
- **FAVOURITE THING:** "The solid, 1500-millimetre-square island bench topped with American oak. My daughter Beatrix likes to tap dance on it and has been known to use it as a stage for plays. Nothing in this kitchen is too precious."
- **ONE THING I'D CHANGE IF I HAD MY TIME AGAIN:** "The sinks. We've got a sink and a draining board the same size next to it. A double sink would be a lot handier. And while I love the glass behind the sink, it does get messy."

THE ECO-FRIEND: BARBARA HASTINGS COX

WHEN SHE DECIDED TO RENOVATE HER HOME IN Sydney's West Pennant Hills, actor, singer and voice-over artist Barbara Hastings Cox made a conscious decision to do so in the most sustainable way possible. "The kitchen uses so much energy, I wanted to minimise my footprint but create something durable."

But she didn't want to sacrifice aesthetics, either. "I wanted to make an eco-kitchen that was beautiful, functional and responsible."

She'd read about the work of architect Caroline Pidcock, who incorporates sustainability into all her design work, and engaged her company to do the renovation. One of the requirements was that the kitchen had to be really hard-wearing. Hastings Cox and her husband, Phil, have two daughters, Azura, 10, and Xanthe, 5, who are home-schooled, so the kids are around all the time. "For the benchtop it was a choice between concrete or stainless steel. Those were the most hard-wearing. We went with an environmentally friendly polished concrete. It will last a lifetime and I'll only have to polish and seal it [with a water-based sealant] every five or so years." The floorboards are made from bamboo, and the cabinetry from Canadian rock maple, a plantation timber that's a blondish hue with a wonderful veined pattern.

Hastings Cox chose her appliances with sustainability foremost in mind. The Highland cooktop is made in Australia. The Miele fridge, which has two separate refrigerated sections plus

“ THE OVENS COST MORE THAN MY CAR, BUT WILL PROBABLY LAST LONGER. WE OFFSET THEM BY HAVING SOLAR POWER AND WE'RE ON A GREEN ENERGY PLAN. ”

BARBARA HASTINGS COX



a freezer, has a six-star energy-efficiency rating. Three Gaggenau ovens (a steam oven, a huge convection oven and a warming drawer) are mounted one above the other into the wall. "I'm totally in love with my ovens. I did a Cordon Bleu cooking course when I lived in London and I love cooking. It was an investment. They cost more than my car, but will probably last longer. And while they're possibly not the most efficient ovens you can buy, we offset it by having solar power and we're on a green energy plan."

Lighting was one of the trickiest things to get right. "Most of what we have in here is LED, which is the most efficient," says Hastings Cox. "The technology is improving and I am happy with what we've got, but it was our fourth try. They are beautiful, functional, they swivel and they cast the warmest glow." The pendant lights hanging over the concrete bench are halogen; Hastings Cox searched extensively but couldn't find any LED pendant lights.

Living sustainably is a family activity. "We have three vegetable gardens outside, and the children have their own plot. We have a worm farm, a compost bin. We incorporate gardening and cooking into the home-schooling program," says Hastings Cox. "My parents gardened and we ate our own vegetables, and I thought, 'What's the best gift I can give my children? I can give them a sustainable kitchen in every way. They'll save money, they'll know where their food comes from, they'll know how to grow it, they'll know how to eat it and how to pass that on to their kids.'"

GREEN AND GUILT-FREE

- **KITCHEN COMPLETED, 2010**
- **FAVOURITE THING:** "I love the whole package. I like it because it's cohesive. It just works. I don't have to think. It's durable, and as guilt-free as I could make it."
- **ONE THING I'D CHANGE IF I HAD MY TIME AGAIN:** "I'd have more storage. When is there ever enough? And the cooktop would be ideal if it had five burners rather than six."

“ EVERYTHING IS QUITE ABSTRACTED INTENTIONALLY. THERE'S FUNCTIONALITY BUT EVERYTHING PARKS AND CONCEALS, LIKE A SERIES OF JOINERY PIECES WITHIN A SPACE. ”

DOMENIC ALVARO

THE ARCHITECT: DOMENIC ALVARO

DOMENIC ALVARO'S HOME IN THE INNER-SYDNEY suburb of Surry Hills is known as "Small House". But while it might be small in name, it's big on ideas. The footprint of the building is a tiny 46 square metres, but Alvaro's design has received critical acclaim and recently won awards in two categories of the 2011 NSW Architecture Awards, including Residential Architecture (Houses).

For such a small space, there was only one way to go: up. The cleverly designed dwelling is divided into zones on five levels, from a garage and utility area, to a sleeping and bathing zone, a sitting area, a kitchen and dining space, and a study and roof garden.

The kitchen is the social hub of the house, central to the other living zones. And while it's been designed with the utmost attention to detail, Alvaro's intention was to create a space that didn't feel anything like a traditional kitchen. "Everything is quite abstracted intentionally and that's to make the most of the size of the space. It very much follows the contemporary Italian model. There's functionality but everything parks and conceals, looks nice, like a series of joinery pieces within a space."

Alvaro's kitchen is essentially three pieces of furniture: a long bank of vertical cupboards, with finger pull details, incorporating the oven, an integrated fridge, an appliance "centre" and pantry; a central island bench, topped with a slab of Italian



marble, housing cooktop, sink, dishwasher and storage; and a superbly crafted American oak table custom-made by Elan. Alvaro and his partner, Sue, love "unfolding" their kitchen as they use it.

One of the most eye-catching elements of the kitchen is the dark stone rangehood, which is an engineering feat in itself. To keep the palette simple, Alvaro took the floor stone and arranged blocks of it around the rangehood, hanging it from the ceiling. "Each slab of stone weighs about 200 kilos, so there's a steel subframe bolted to the concrete, and it's been beautifully detailed by the stonemason," says Alvaro. "It's not exactly a cheap detail, but it's something that, through my contacts, I've been able to achieve. I like the dramatic element that a rangehood can create in a kitchen. They can really make a gorgeous statement."

As a principal of global design firm Woods Bagot, Alvaro spends much of his time working on high-profile commercial projects such as Ivy and the Qantas Club Lounge in Sydney, and the Hilton South Wharf, Melbourne. But he loves kitchen design. "There's so much evolving technology to think about."

However, he adds that he hates over-designed things. "You've always got to understand a kitchen in the context of the balance of its space. One of the nice things about contemporary kitchens is how you deal with overhanging items and storage and you can bring library ideas or study ideas into the kitchen for cooking and entertaining. The kitchen is a very engaging part of a modern family home. It's the hub."

THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL

- **KITCHEN COMPLETED, 2010**
- **FAVOURITE PART:** "I like the boldness of the kitchen; it has a strong impact as you enter. And I love the basalt cladding to the rangehood. It looks very clean, very pure."
- **ONE THING I'D CHANGE IF I HAD MY TIME AGAIN:** "A wine fridge would have been sensational, even if I had to lose other storage. It's the only missing component." CW