

# Good Natured

In Orinda, CA, a contemporary kitchen opens up with warm, earthy finishes and an aesthetic as pure in heart as it is in line

By Alice Liao

*Contemporary and streamlined, the kitchen relies on a confluence of natural finishes to create an environment ideal for family time and entertaining.*







*A grid of wooden beams, Venetian plaster and small square-shaped downlights (left) add interest to a large, white ceiling, while below, an island, comprised of multiple components and levels, functions as the workhorse in the kitchen. In addition to a sink and faucet for cleanup, it includes a prep station with a butcher-block countertop, a seating area topped with honed and sandblasted gray granite and a custom walnut cabinet (right) for storing dishes and utensils. According to Tran, the unit was requested by the homeowners and is located at the end of the island to provide easy access from the dining room. For contrast, some of the perimeter cabinets, the refrigerator and a pizza oven (bottom right) are clad in blackened steel.*

Our homes often reflect who we are as people. So it seems rather fitting that this contemporary kitchen in Orinda, CA, should belong to a pair of husband and wife landscape designers. With its strong horizontal emphasis and wide, open spaces, the kitchen, which was designed by Gioi Tran, of Applegate Tran Interiors, possesses a sense of expansiveness inherent in the natural world yet has been sufficiently "tamed" to be both elegant and inviting.

In tackling this 1,200-sq.-ft. space, which encompasses the kitchen, a walk-in pantry, a fireplace and an area for sitting and relaxing, Tran worked closely with the homeowners, who were more intimately involved in the project than most. Not only did they take time off from their business to oversee every detail, they also engaged Tran in conversations of a different tenor. "The language we started with wasn't 'Oh, come in and design a kitchen that's pretty,'" he said. Instead, "They talked about the kitchen being contemporary and clean and about it showing off the quality of the materials used. They didn't want something that looked mass-manufactured."

Tran's solution does not disappoint, but the project wasn't all smooth sailing. When he recommended installing two islands, instead of the architect's one, the couple had a full-scale mockup built out of drywall and plywood to determine if they could be comfortable with the floor plan (they were). Adding to his challenge was the insistence on clean lines and a lack of ornamentation, which meant little room for error. "Everything is streamlined and accounted for, so there's nothing extraneous," Tran said. "Even the doors and windows don't have trim."

To warm up the space and give it the earthiness requested by the couple, Tran employed a palette of natural wood, stone and blackened steel. On one of the islands—a multilevel unit that serves as the workhorse of the kitchen—all three are used to articulate its different components. These include a cantilevered steel-clad prep station with an espresso-colored butcher-block top, a walnut cabinet containing dinnerware and utensils for easy access from the nearby dining room and a cleanup zone and seating area, both of which are topped with honed and sandblasted gray granite.

Tran ties the islands to the perimeter of the kitchen by keeping the finishes similar, if not completely the same. Base cabinets, specified in horizontal-grain eucalyptus, are contrasted with gray quartz composite countertops, which Tran selected for their minimal patterning. Blackened steel cladding on an oversized ventilation hood, a pizza oven, a refrigerator and a set of cabinets





The majority of the cabinetry in the kitchen and the adjoining walk-in pantry (right) was specified in horizontal-grain eucalyptus to enhance the kitchen's contemporary yet earthy aesthetic. Of course, because clutter is less tolerated when the emphasis is on clean lines, storage compartments abound. Tran's solution also encompassed a casual dining/sitting area (below) with a view of the outdoors. With landscape designers as clients, he made sure that his design brings the "outside in."

provides visual balance. Underfoot, stone floor tiles boast a suede-like texture for an extra dose of luxury, while above, to prevent all from being eclipsed by a large, white ceiling, rustic wooden beams were added to create a gridded effect that better complements the design. Although the mix of materials is evocative, it's subtle enough to allow a limestone backsplash and its rich veining to supply much of the kitchen's drama.

Nothing, however, is over the top—which is why the project counts among Tran's favorite designs. "I love the subtlety of all the components," he said. Majestic in footprint, yet intimate in its finishes and its feel, the kitchen bears the imprint of its owners' dedication, Tran's vision and nature itself. ■



**SOURCES**  
**Designer:** Gioi Tran—Applegate Tran Interiors, San Francisco; [www.applegatetran.com](http://www.applegatetran.com) **Contractor:** James Rogers  
**Manufacturers:** Cabinets: Mueller Nichols; Hardware: Rocky Mountain Hardware; Refrigeration: Sub-Zero; Pizza oven: Mugnaini; Double oven, speedcook oven, warming drawer, dishwashers and coffee system: Miele; Faucets: Dornbracht; Sinks: Blanco; Countertops: ASN Natural Stone, CaesarStone, Spekva (butcher block); Backsplash: ASN Natural Stone; Flooring: Ann Sacks; Pendant lights: Sloan Miyasato **Photography:** xxxxxxxx

## products



Long, cylindrical lighting fixtures custom made by **Gulassa & Co., Inc.** complete Tran's design. The pendants are equipped with blackened steel shades and blackened cast iron stems and hardware. Each is lit with a 20W MR11 lamp and measures 1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. in diameter and 8<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. in height. **Circle No. 231**



Clean-lined custom cabinetry in a natural finish helps give the kitchen its warm contemporary look. Made by Oakland, CA-based **Mueller Nichols**, the units feature a European-style solid maple construction with full overlay doors, quartered eucalyptus veneers and dovetailed drawers. One of the islands includes a quartered American black walnut cabinet for storing dinnerware. **Circle No. 233**

To complement the granite countertops on the two islands, the perimeter cabinets are topped with **CaesarStone** quartz surfacing in rosemary. The countertop material was chosen not only for its durability but also for its discreet patterning. Rosemary is available in <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-in. and 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-in. thicknesses in a polished or honed finish. **Circle No. 230**



A wood-fired oven from **Mugnaini** anchors one corner of the kitchen. Formed of naturally quarried *cotto refrattario*—or Tuscan refractory terra-cotta clay—the oven has a fire-brick floor and is dome-shaped to create a balanced cooking chamber and achieve optimal results. It is offered in five sizes to accommodate a variety of cookware and can be specified in an array of enclosure designs. **Circle No. 232**



Imparting a rustic quality while maintaining the kitchen's contemporary vibe, **Rocky Mountain Hardware's** Square Cabinet Knobs (Model CK225) were selected for the cabinetry. Measuring <sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. x <sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in., it is offered in 12 metal/patina options. A larger <sup>15</sup>/<sub>8</sub>-in. x <sup>15</sup>/<sub>8</sub>-in. version is also available. **Circle No. 234**