

THE RESTAURANT ISSUE

NORTHSHORE

Look Who's Moving In

Rick Tramonto and Gale Gand's new culinary empire starts here



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builders' own kitchens

PLUS
Chef moguls
tell all



the weekend kitchen

Orren Pickell, Lake Geneva, Wis.

E

lectic. Write it down. It's Orren Pickell's new kitchen buzzword, and he won't be letting go of it anytime soon.

"The most important trend hasn't changed, and that's that the kitchen needs to be functional. Probably the most significant change I've seen is the eclecticism," Pickell says, adding: "Twenty years ago, everything had to match. It was kind of boring, to be honest."

Today, Pickell encourages his clients to be different, to take risks, to create a look so unique it can't be easily copied or patented.

That may seem a strange concept for a man who built a small empire building, designing and remodeling multimillion-dollar homes, but Pickell's always been a custom guy. Wants everything to be the same in that nothing is exactly alike.

The Lake Geneva kitchen he designed for the family's South Shore Club "summer home" is a veritable exercise in eclectic. It's a new space. Brand new. But it looks old, and that's what he intended. A farmhouse, added to and expanded over time, filled with more than a dozen species of wood, the latest, greatest and inherited treasures, piled, one atop the other, creating a one-of-a-kind, Aga-fueled vintage kitchen masterpiece.

"Although it's very elaborate, it's not that big," he says. "The whole concept was to have the kitchen be a part of the heart — the family room and the dining room."

Not so new, this concept. For some early American families, the one room, living-around-the-kitchen-heart-and-hearth was quite the norm. And while this trend began to catch on again a few years ago, what may be new now is how designers and homeowners enhance and interpret it.

"People will take this to whatever level they're comfortable with," explains Pickell, who recently expanded the retail end of his Lincolnshire-based Orren Pickell Designers and Builders (888/PICKELL) with the Imagine Your Home "concept center" in Northfield (www.imaginebypickell.com).

"It starts with maybe having two different types of cabinets, but usually you will see at least two different materials in the kitchen. Different colors and textures are very typical today."

What sets Pickell's custom weekend kitchen apart from every other custom weekend kitchen at the tony South Shore Club enclave? He started with the French white oak planks on the floors; butcher block, soapstone and copper on the counters; and then worked his way to the ceiling with hand-hewn, mortis-and-tendon fir beams.

On the walls, "we used plate racks or rails, very similar to what you'd see in England, and open cupboards," he says, adding, "The only thing you can see that makes it look like a kitchen is the sink and the Aga stove." There is a Sub-Zero refrigerator/freezer, but it's built in with custom hinges and doors to look like an ice chest. The Bosch dishwasher is



The Sub-Zero refrigerator in Orren Pickell's Lake Geneva kitchen was encased in wood and fashioned to resemble a vintage "ice chest."

hidden, but the antique bronze fixtures are not. There is an appliance garage to house the unmentionables, a hidden microwave drawer, and around the corner lurks yet another Sub-Zero fridge and a Miele washer and dryer, cleverly concealed not by cabinets but by drapes.

The trend of kitchen cabinetry as heirloom furniture was also taken to eclectic extremes, with four different, patina-laden cabinet materials evoking a sense of age and Old World grandeur. (It helps that Pickell also owns CabinetWerks, a high-end purveyor of this very thing.)

Granted, this is all Pickell's personal taste. But he says there's also something very practical about the "Old World" look, something he's constantly reminding his North Shore clients.

"The contemporary, high-end stuff — the problem with that is, every time a contemporary kitchen gets a scratch, you feel really bad about it," he explains. "As far as I'm concerned this look makes so much sense for family living."

The advantages are two-pronged: "A lot of it is distressed and antiqued, so the more you use it, the better it looks." And, he continues, "If you have a decent kitchen now, you can use part of it as your starter. Most kitchens from 15-20 years ago were done in oak or cherry; chances are you could refinish those a little bit, add a few accent pieces to finish it off."

Upgrade the appliances. Accessorize. And voila!

As the man himself says, "What could possibly make more sense than this?"