



AN ASPEN HOME FAMOUS FOR ITS GET-TOGETHERS HAS A KEY PLAYER AT EVERY GATHERING: its kitchen.

IF THE KITCHEN in Greg Erwin's Aspen home were a vehicle, it would be a cross between a Rolls Royce, a Porsche and a stretch limousine filled with a bachelor and his buddies during his last single night out on the town.

"This is the ultimate party house, and the kitchen is a great gathering place," says Erwin, a retired attorney who bought the West Francis Street home in 1997. "We have a lot of parties—we've had as many as 200 people at our parties."

From the lacquered burled-walnut cabinetry to the polished stainless steel trim, the kitchen's meticulous Art Deco design shows Erwin's appreciation for luxury.

"Burled walnut is very popular in old English cars and I was a collector of old cars. I had Rolls Royces and Jaguars,

Life of the Party

By April E. Clark

PHOTOS BY SHAWN O'CONNOR

After a major remodel, the Erwin kitchen now dominates the entire first floor of the home. Key to the kitchen's presence is the large, arcing granite-topped island, to which Erwin's many visitors naturally gravitate.

but they were very hard to store," says Erwin, an avid art collector and music and movie buff. "Before I had the house extensively remodeled, the kitchen had formica and painted cabinets. I think it's a very masculine design."

CALL IN THE PROFESSIONALS

To bring the kitchen in line with his personality, Erwin enlisted the services of John Wheeler, president of Wheeler

Architecture and Planning, and interior designers Debra Browne and Nancy Snell. Interior changes started with the removal of all the first floor's walls.

"There were walls separating the house, so our main focus was to open up the space by taking them out because entertaining is a big part of Greg's life," says Browne, a principal of Harris and Browne Interior Design. "And for Greg, the kitchen was just number one. Really the whole house revolves around the kitchen, with its wet bar and the stairs going down to the home theatre."

Erwin says he likes the idea of his guests congregating in his kitchen, where red upholstered bar stools hug the sprawling, sparkly granite-topped island and a fully stocked wet bar serves up classic cocktails.

"People like to gather in the kitchen. Here they can flow from the

kitchen to the living room and bar without walls in between," Erwin says. "The bar is really an integral part of the kitchen. It all happens here."

Browne says architectural design elements such as a coffered ceiling, crown molding and lighting effects helped create a more open interior feel. She also says small details in the flooring accented the room's layout.

"We could not move up because there's a second level, so we implemented lighting and uplifted the space with a coffered ceiling and crown molding that I designed," she says.

"We did the Art Deco swirl inset in the stone floor—that repetition of the Art Deco theme ties it all together. I think the most important thing during the Art Deco period is that the spaces and artwork all had that curved, high-lacquered feel. It's all a very cohesive feel throughout the space."

GET A LITTLE ARTSY

Although the sleek Art Deco theme is carried throughout the home—including the basement-level high-definition theater—the elegant styling is especially noticeable in the kitchen and dining areas. At one end of Erwin's custom burled-wood dining table, which comfortably seats 10, is a collection of Roaring '20s-inspired Ete artwork.

"Greg was a very inventive client and was fun to work with. He had a great collection of Art Deco sculptures which we placed in front of cut stone inset in the wall," Browne says. "As a back splash in the kitchen, we used stone hand-cut into bricks with glass tiles that are painted on the back with metallic paint to give reflection and depth. There was tension between the stone and glass tiles, the Black Galaxy granite countertop with gold flecks and the highly lacquered cabinets."

For architect John Wheeler, incorporating his client's appreciation for arts and entertaining into his design made the Erwin project a favorite in his portfolio. He says guests to the home are typically in awe of the remodel, which took a year to complete. > 48

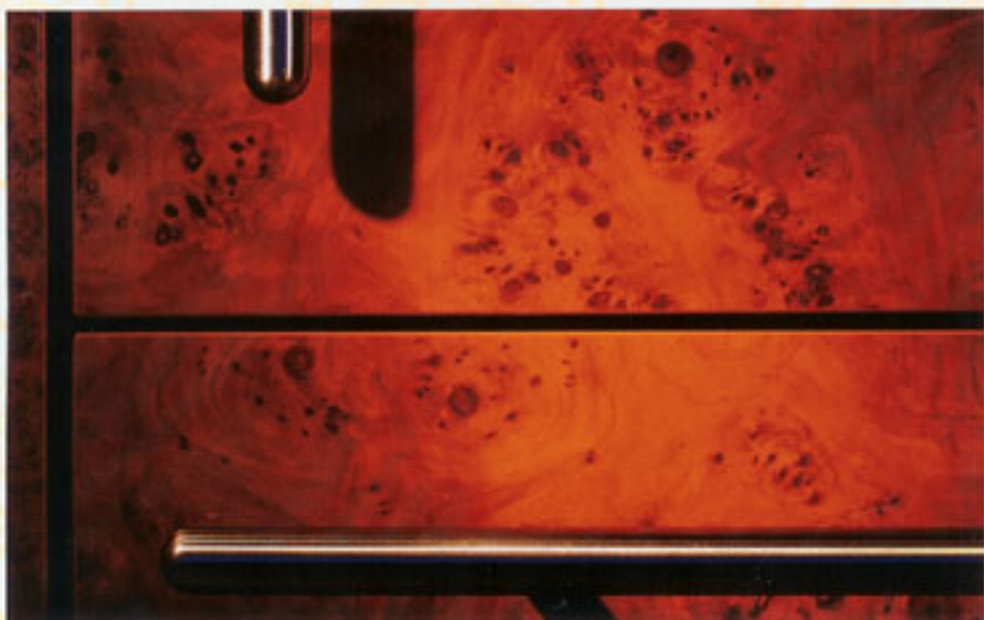
“THE BAR IS REALLY AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE KITCHEN. IT ALL HAPPENS HERE.”



At the wet bar adjacent to the granite island, Erwin can concoct any libation his guests might desire.



Open to the kitchen, the dining room features a burled-wood table that can seat 10.



The extensive use of burled walnut was inspired by Erwin's love of classic cars.

"He was intent on doing a house and home for entertaining," Wheeler says. "The whole house is geared for entertaining and it works so well. His artwork is fabulous, and I know everybody loves his parties."

Wheeler says Erwin's willingness to try something unique made a big difference in the success of the project. Wheeler fondly recalled how concerned Erwin was that the project would be complete in time for his highly revered Academy Awards affair. The party didn't happen the first year of the remodel, but the catered black tie event was back on the next year, Wheeler says.

"It was just a fun experience, and Greg is just great," says Wheeler, whose architecture firm is located in Snowmass. "He was very receptive. He wanted the biggest and the best and overall it really came out that way. I think he's pretty happy with the final product."

Erwin's kitchen is not only attractive to the eye, but it is also fit for a chef. The space is professionally equipped with refrigerator drawers that pull out from underneath the large island, a built-in temperature-controlled wine cellar and a Thermador stainless steel convection range. Appliances hide behind cabinet doors and electrical outlets are concealed under the island's granite countertop.

"At first it looks like it doesn't have a lot of refrigerator space, but it has four drawers. I like the refrigerator, dishwasher and microwave not being visible," said Erwin. "The Black Galaxy granite (countertop), I think it's great. It has a lot of depth. The island is so big that it attracts people to it. You can walk around all sides and you can sit at it."

WHIP UP SOMETHING TASTY

Erwin may enjoy hanging out in his kitchen, but he's the first to admit he rarely utilizes its professional cooking features. His fiancée, Billi Pierce, a realtor in Aspen, makes the most of the space. She says she recently spent a lot of time in the kitchen making lasagna after returning from Italy with noodles, instead of clothes.

"I love the kitchen—it's a great entertaining kitchen," says Pierce, as she spoke by phone at the home she owns in Sarasota, Florida. "Most kitchens are removed from the living room area but with ours, you can talk to everyone. It's conducive to a lot of people."

Not only does Pierce enjoy the layout of the open space that encompasses the sexy kitchen, living room and dining area, but she also appreciates the interior design elements.

"I think the burled wood is just fabulous. We can't tell you how many people comment on the cabinets," Pierce says. "And I love the kitchen table. It's huge and it matches the cabinets. It's sort of Art Deco and it brings out Greg's personality and the craziness."

Along with Erwin's Academy Awards party, Pierce said many people flock to the home after après-ski on the mountain and the outdoor summer film showings in Aspen.

"We definitely have a party house," she says. "We do parties for 30, 40 or 50 people. In the summertime we open the doors and spread out onto the patio. I try to do buffet-type food. And I just cook everything."

LOVE THE FINAL PRODUCT

Ending the tour of his home on the expansive stone-covered back patio just off the home's dining area, Erwin speaks of his satisfaction about the remodel. He describes the modern, brightly painted kitchen in his second home in Omaha, Nebraska, where he owns businesses, as "completely different" and "pretty conventional."

"This house is so different from the outside than it is on the inside. It looks like a traditional Victorian that has a separated room plan," says Erwin. "I knew the kitchen would control the decorating of the whole house. The architect and interior designers did a masterful job with detail. I don't know if it has been imitated. It turned out beautiful."

Erwin, who is an investor in movies, says he plans to live out his years in his Aspen home with the timeless style inspired by the vivacious Art Deco era.

"I love Aspen. I moved in this house and never moved out," says Erwin, whose eclectic art appreciation includes the likes of Andy Warhol and Stanislas Kotka. "It would have been easier to buy a new house, but I liked the location and the openness of the house."

Like a vintage convertible with the top down and wind blowing through its driver's hair, there are some things that are better served in open spaces.