



# *in* THE *Mix*

Hot kitchen designer Sally Ross cooks up luxurious, yet practical, spaces with a mix of mediums

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEORGE ROSS





Sally Ross likes to stir things up. She's not mischievous. She's a magazine editor turned kitchen designer with a fresh take on creating the most lived-in room in the house.

As an editor she saw many a kitchen submission whose only "Wow!" was the price tag. "Just because you spent \$200,000 on a kitchen doesn't mean it is interesting," she notes. Her knack is stirring up antique with custom, combining wood with limestone, and employing color duos that are visual treats. She creates looks that are far beyond what the Joneses have.

While at *Country Living*, *Redbook*, *House Beautiful Specials*, and *Home Mechanics*, Ross decided which kitchens were magazine material. She and her team would also create kitchens for high-end trade shows using the latest wares. In 1991 when she started a family, she began consulting on kitchen design for New Jersey residents. Now she is one of the most sought-after designers in the state for creating a room that is camera-ready and carefully planned, down to the last drawer and historically correct window.

Based in Montclair, she takes on varied projects there and in Glen Ridge, Summit, Short Hills, and Franklin Lakes.

"There are architects who do design and kitchen designers who sell you kitchen cabinets," she says. "I come from an editorial background, and I say, 'How interesting can this be?'"

Ross knows kitchens are a social area of the house, so she makes them practical as well as pretty. The working mother of two says she thinks like a mom. "I ask clients, 'Where do the kids put the backpacks when they come in the door? Where do you come in with your groceries? Where is the homework done? How often do you cook and shop for food?' It all affects the design." Here are some of Ross's ideas for a beautiful, functional kitchen. - K.W.

## Must-haves

- 1 Mix it up.** Have unfitted areas with free-standing pieces, as opposed to matching cabinets and acres of granite.
- 2 Have architectural sympathy.** The kitchen design should complement the rest of the home. "I hate seeing a Tuscan kitchen in a colonial house," Ross says.
- 3 Do a sound check.** "I don't like miles of granite and tile floors," she says. Use materials that are pleasing to the ear as well as the eye, like soft mahogany, Ross' favorite. "It is better to put a cereal bowl or coffee cup down on wood than stone."
- 4 Islands shouldn't require their own ZIP codes.** "More than three stools and it starts to look like a diner," Ross says.
- 5 Have three zones in the kitchen**—one for food preparation, one for cooking, and one for cleanup. That way you can have more people in the room at once.
- 6 Split colors to keep things interesting.** Ross often uses colors like cream and soft green for cabinets in a traditional kitchen. For a contemporary space she's placed a dark teal island next to a painted red wall.
- 7 Use what you have first.** "I hate to see people buy a big house and then add on to it and not use the house they bought," Ross says. She often opens up the dining room so it is used. She chooses paint and flooring that make the adjoining rooms flow. "The whole first floor should make sense," she says.
- 8 To keep a country kitchen from looking too cutesy, select a more contemporary element that gives it an edge.** In the Glen Ridge kitchen pictured, the cool celadon glazed Barbara Barry tile provided punch.

*Because kitchens are such a hub of beat and activity, Ross often opts for a cool, soothing color scheme such as sage green, robin's egg blue, and cream. Black and Ivory (never dead white) are always a classic, as seen in the checkerboard floor, previous page. Finish is also important. Choose satin and matte finishes over glossy ones for a kitchen that ages gracefully, showing less scratches and nicks than polished surfaces do. The green slate, above left, is easy to work on, and doesn't show stains easily. To protect honed granite, right, use mineral oil.*

