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# Comfort Zone

A masterful mix of materials and finishes brings old-world allure to a once-dreary Arizona kitchen.

BY JODY GARLOCK | PHOTOS WERNER SEGARRA FIELD  
EDITOR JESSICA BRINKERT HOLTAM

Painted and glazed cabinetry and a mix of stone, wood, and porcelain transformed a mostly brown kitchen into this European delight.

Some spec homes are turnkey treasures; others, like this one in Paradise Valley, Arizona, require more vision. "It was so incredibly dark and depressing," says interior designer Jennifer Dyer of the kitchen, which had been haphazardly finished with builder-basic fixtures and materials. Every direction she turned—toward the range hood in the cooking area or the shuttered windows in the breakfast nook—she saw wood, wood, and more wood. "When everything is the same, nothing stands out," she says.

But all it took was a few simple—and liberating—words from the homeowner to fire up Dyer's imagination. "He told me to treat the kitchen like it was mine—to do what I would do if I were going to live in the house," she says.

What the Los Angeles-based Dyer envisioned was a light and bright room that radiated personality and comfort—a space as much for lounging with a laptop or friends as for cooking or eating a meal. "Kitchens these days are hangout spaces," Dyer says. "You have to make them really warm and inviting."

Painting and glazing the stained knotty alder cabinets was a big step toward both lightening the room and adding personality to it. "In all my designs, I try to incorporate painted cabinetry," Dyer says. "It's a more custom look and much more interesting to me than brown tones." The blue-gray cabinets, coupled with a striking new cast-stone range hood and the existing stone flooring, also went a long way in imbuing the room with casually elegant style that's part country French, part Mediterranean.

As for comfort, Dyer addressed that with an upholstered banquette that snuggles below the room's only windows—a corner that formerly

**Above left:** The metal bread box—a flea market find—is a small detail that gives the kitchen a collected look and takes the modern edge off the existing granite countertops. **Left:** Glazed porcelain subway tile enhances the room's old-world feel. **Opposite:** "It just changed the whole kitchen," interior designer Jennifer Dyer says of the cast-stone range hood that offers a textural break from all the cabinetry. "It changed the design of the original kitchen to something more French Mediterranean."

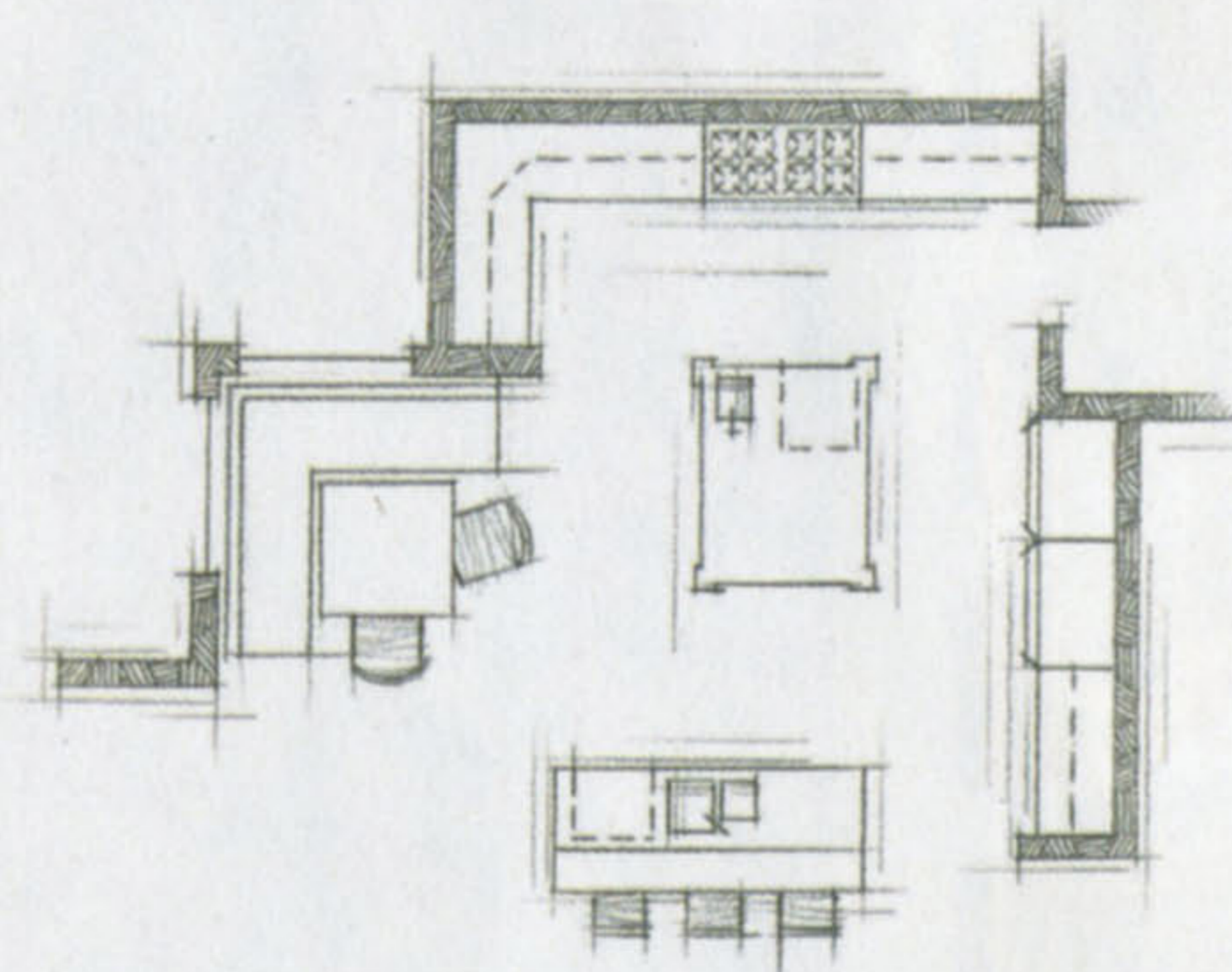




"I'm a big believer in mixing different elements. A house then looks more collected as opposed to looking designed."

Jennifer Dyer  
interior designer

**Opposite:** "This room really needed some softness," Dyer says. She achieved that with Roman shades and a settee-inspired banquette that invites lounging. **Below left:** A decorative chandelier alludes to the past while offering ambient light. **Below:** Oil-rubbed-bronze fixtures and pewter knobs and pulls reflect Dyer's penchant for mixing finishes. **Bottom:** Painted pottery and casual blooms are the perfect complement to this Mediterranean-style space.



**Below:** A hammered-bronze sink brings rustic flair to the walnut-topped island—a far cry from the basic porcelain sink that was there originally. **Bottom:** Blue-green paint layered with a smoky-gray glaze—darker around edges and trimwork—lifted the mood of the cabinets. “They have a bit of a distressed look up close,” Dyer says. **Opposite:** Beyond the island, the refrigerator and freezer integrate into cabinetry that resembles a giant armoire.



housed an odd elevated sitting area with two desks. “I love using actual, real furniture in a kitchen,” Dyer says. “You need to have something that’s a little more comfortable and inviting than hard kitchen chairs.”

She’s also a fan of mixing in a few “something olds” from secondhand stores or flea markets with all the new. “I like to find unusual, one-of-a-kind pieces,” she says. She snapped up the vintage turquoise armchairs, for example, after seeing them sitting outside a junk store. “I hit the brakes when I was driving by,” she says. “I knew immediately those were the perfect chairs for this kitchen.”

Those touches that lend a collected look—right down to a chippy metal bread box—also struck a chord with the homeowner. “He said he loved that everything wasn’t perfect—then he added that it actually is perfect, it’s just not new,” Dyer says. “This kitchen has personality now.”

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#### DESIGNER INSIGHTS

### Material Matters

Contrasting surfaces—smooth with rough, hard with soft—keep this kitchen from looking one-note. Here’s interior designer Jennifer Dyer’s take on adding interest.

- **Coordinate, don’t match.** Too much of the same thing—all stained wood, for example—means that nothing stands out. “A common mistake is that people pick a style or look and go overboard with it,” Dyer says.
- **Go easy on metal.** Although Dyer mixes finishes—silvers with golds are fair game to her—she uses metal sparingly. “It’s too cold for my taste,” she says. “If you have stainless-steel appliances, that may be all the metal you need.”
- **Remember texture.** “Texture is one of the most important aspects in design,” says Dyer, who mixed wood, porcelain, and stone in this kitchen. Fabric—on chair cushions or window treatments—is always an easy way to vary the texture.
- **Find a visual break.** An island is a great opportunity to mix things up, Dyer says. “Use a different color on the island base than the cabinetry and a different countertop than perimeter countertops,” she says.

