

St. Charles OF New York

St. Charles of New York Opens Inspirational New Showroom in the A&D Building

***The boutique design firm showcases ideas for all styles of highly custom kitchens
with a mix of unusual materials, art and fashion***

New York, N.Y., October, 2008---The boutique kitchen design firm St. Charles of New York has opened an inspirational new showroom in the A&D Building here, creating a virtual “art gallery” of kitchen ideas. Highlights include an eclectic mix of unusual materials from underlit onyx to exotic semi-precious stone, and a live kitchen for food and wine events, all topped off with a dash of sculpture and fashion, right down to Manolo Blahnik shoes.

The new 4,000-sq.-ft. showroom is on the 8th floor just down the hall from the smaller space St. Charles of New York outgrew after more than 40 years as one of the original tenants in the Architects & Designers Building at 150 East 58th St.

With its concentration of cabinet and appliance manufacturer showrooms, the A & D Building has long been a magnet for the interior designers and architects who are St. Charles of New York’s primary clients. But because St. Charles of New York is a design firm, not a manufacturer, their challenge was to differentiate themselves and display ideas, not products.

“We do not have an identity based on a style or a manufacturer, unlike most of the companies in the A&D Building,” noted Robert Schwartz, principal. “We specialize in personalized customization.”

“We don’t have one identifiable look,” added Karen Williams, principal. “We are a boutique design firm and we create the right style for our clients based on their needs.”

So the questions the two principals, who have owned the company for 29 years, asked themselves were “How do we stand out?” and “How do we inspire people to enhance their lifestyle with a creative new kitchen?”

The solution was to devise a free-flowing and harmonious potpourri of contemporary, traditional and transitional vignettes...and not all of them kitchens. “We didn’t want people to feel they were having the usual showroom experience of going from the white display to the cherry display to the oak display,” Williams commented.

Instead, a curvaceous upholstered settee in a tiered warm rosewood furniture piece welcomes visitors. It is topped with an exotic French marble, Breccia Vendome, and highlighted by a circular multi-layered crystal chandelier.

“The entrance was done as a surprise. It says our showroom is not about cabinetry, but about creativity,” Schwartz explained.

Adding to the message of creativity at the entrance are dramatic backlit 2’x2’ photos of St. Charles of New York’s work, all professionally photographed and much of it published. They include two highly acclaimed Kips Bay Decorator Show House kitchens. “The photos give clients an immediate overview of our capabilities,” Williams noted.

Another “un-kitchen” display is the Mondrian-inspired corner banquette with lacquered panels in multiple shades of blue forming what looks like a piece of modern art. “The panels are doors that we offer. But we didn’t want to suggest doors per se, just colors and shapes and then leave the rest up to the designers’ and clients’ imaginations. It’s much more creative than putting up six lacquer cabinets or door samples,” Schwartz maintained.

But real life has not been forgotten, either. Adding a live kitchen for food and wine events was a top priority for the new showroom since both partners are food and wine enthusiasts and so are many of their upscale clientele. Cabinetry in the demonstration kitchen is a mix of stainless steel

doors and quarter sawn oak in a cappuccino stain. The stainless doors include an unusual five-piece style with recessed center panel, as well as a flat panel door with integral handle. The countertop and backsplash are white crystallized glass. The island top is an aggregate of an exotic blue semi-precious stone, Dumorterite, rarely seen in the U.S.

“The island is work of art,” Williams noted. “We make it a point to look for unusual and superior materials. We believe a variety of materials is just as important as a variety of styles.”

They searched three months to find the perfect onyx for the butler’s pantry, where the countertop is underlit with LEDs that have a 20-year-life span. “At any marble yard you can see beautiful stone, but we wanted something really special,” Williams explained.

Cabinetry in the butler’s pantry is also out of the ordinary, crafted from bird’s eye maple, cherry, tiger maple, and mahogany with bowed front drawer heads. An unexpected touch are the wooden saw tooth library shelf supports in lieu of standard metal pins. The pantry wall is finished with a dramatic bronze antiqued mirror accented by gold and pewter P.E. Guerin rosettes.

With the exception of the butler’s pantry and a small New York galley kitchen, all the displays in the showroom flow into each other in an open floor plan. “That was important because we wanted to capitalize on the light and the view of the adjacent Bloomberg building,” Schwartz said.

Michael Pierce of Pierce Allen Architects, a colleague of St. Charles of New York for more than 20 years, was the architect for the interior space. “They were very creative with infrastructure solutions and lighting,” Schwartz said.

“We didn’t want the space to be compartmentalized. We wanted the vignettes to relate to each other,” Williams explained. That is why they used one common floor, limestone, throughout except in the butler’s pantry and galley kitchen. And they also selected one universal wall covering, Venetian plaster.

“People often forget about walls, but we didn’t want something ordinary like painted walls,” Schwartz said. “Venetian plaster reflects light and is maintenance free for the common space. My inspiration came from the Musée d’Orsay in Paris.”

Ceilings in various heights define areas and different islands break up the space rather than walls. One of the most striking is the custom 100th anniversary edition la Cornue island of stainless steel and polished nickel, created to celebrate the third-generation heritage of the

French firm. Another is a custom island of walnut cabinets with horizontal mullions and sliding doors, and a zero-maintenance quartz top.

Across from it is a display that takes customization to the next level with a specially designed cooking appliance. A range top, sink and deep fryer are fabricated into one custom piece. Another custom feature is the electric-powered glass backsplash that rises to reveal storage.

This is just one of a variety of interesting glass applications that also knit together the showroom. “We used a polished glass tile backsplash with metal cabinetry, a massive translucent glass hood over the La Cornue and crystallized glass on counters. We like the different versions of glass because it is a contemporary material and relates to the glass Bloomberg building outside our windows,” Schwartz said. Glass doors on special backless cabinets in one display provide a view through to the marble walls behind.

Glass predominates too in the artwork selected for the showroom. St. Charles of New York transformed a yellow and clear glass cube sculpture into a light fixture over the exotic stone island of the live kitchen. Another piece of abstract metal sculpture is featured near the Mondrian-inspired wall.

“We brought art and fashion into the showroom because that’s how people live today,” Schwartz observed. “Kitchens are not just a room with one function. And artwork is a further expression of the owner’s personality.”

Fashion also expresses personality today, hence the Manolo Blahnik shoes and Bernardaud jewelry that accessorize the glass and quarter-sawn cherry cabinet with Swarovski crystal knobs and leather countertop.

“This piece might be a wardrobe cabinet in a master bedroom closet. It is filled with items our clients would actually live with,” added Williams.

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