

No detail is too small

FOR THE RENOVATORS AT TRUE NORTH CABINETS

by Jeannette Ross

Ken and Louise Pascal know what it is like to spend a lot of money and get little for it. In building their gracious New Canaan home in 2001, they paid a lot of money for goods and services that did not always meet their expectations. As professional people they were disappointed.

A short time later, they were looking at second careers. Remembering the building process as a positive experience overall, they decided to go into renovations, specializing in kitchen design, specifically cabinetry, stone products, and tile.

They formed True North Cabinets and SMC Stone. They consider themselves a boutique firm, working mostly by referral of friends and past clients. "We are busier than we've been in the past two years," Ken said, although he acknowledged projects are smaller than they've used to be. Whereas most of the projects used to be in the \$80,000 to \$100,000 range for a cabinet order, they are now also working in a lower price range – \$30,000 to \$40,000 – and remaining competitive.

With the help of a professional designer, Ken and Louise work with their clients on layout, construction, aesthetics, and a seemingly endless list of details, staying with the project from beginning to end and beyond, for as long as their client owns the kitchen. "If there's a problem with a shelf five years down the road, I'm there," Ken said.

"A lot of people think (when they are renovating a kitchen) they are shopping for cabinets," Ken said. "What they eventually realize is they are shopping for an outcome. Our focus is on the outcome. How does the client feel about the space?" he said. "We spend a lot of time talking about that."

A beautiful and functional kitchen is more than just the sum of its parts. It is how those parts are chosen and put together. Probably the most distinctive aspect of the business is Ken's encyclope-



Brian Urso

The cabinets on the left house an electrical dumb waiter that connects to the garage below.

dic knowledge of his product line and his attention to detail, from the positioning of switchplates and task lighting to the suitability of hardware.

As an example he explained, "Some refrigerators need an outlet on the top right, but most electricians will just put it near the floor." If you don't alert them beforehand, they will have to come back and do it over, which costs time and money. Think hardware is a minor issue? You won't if you choose a floppy handle and over time it mars the surface of your cabinet. Use a bar handle that doesn't fit your hand properly, and the oils from

your skin will eventually wear away at the finish.

Given the chance, Ken can wax philosophical at length about such things: as how much room a cabinet door has so that in humid weather if it swells it will still close properly, the comparative cost and durability of hinges, the best way to hide a seam between cabinets, and the accuracy of the edges on a granite countertop.

"We deliver a high-end quality product at an attractive price with good service," said Ken. Working only with a high-end cabinet line manufactured in Pennsylvania, Ken is able to keep prices

reasonable by operating at a lower profit margin. He does this by working out of his home, which doubles as a show home. Instead of a showroom, clients may see a variety of styles of cabinetry and stone work in the home's bathrooms, library, butler's pantry, and other rooms. This not only gives people a better idea of how finished pieces will look, it also allows them to see the size and scope of what they are buying.

While Ken handles the cabinetry – including installation – and detail work, Louise specializes in the stone work. With a Parisian background and having studied art and design, she works with clients on the finishing touches.

Anyone who has shopped for stone knows the choices in terms of type, color and finish can be overwhelming. “My duty is to educate my client,” she said, especially since some people may opt for appearance over function. In addition to having nearly 1,000 samples of tile at home, Louise will also accompany a client to a stone yard to look at slabs. She can also advise on manmade stone products, and stainless, glass, ceramic, and porcelain tiles and mosaics.

Creative Storage Solutions

A kitchen that looks good is one thing, but a kitchen that functions well is what puts the “dream” in dream kitchen. Part of that is squeezing as much storage as possible out of a defined space, and today's kitchen products offer so many



Ken Pascal

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more options than even 10 years ago. Drawers, for example, are much more useful than cabinet roll-outs. As such, pot drawers are popular under range tops and in islands. The newer microwave/convection ovens can be stacked over a conventional oven to move more cooking power into one space.

The lazy-Susan corner cabinet has been around for a while, but an improvement sends the cabinet doors to the back

when the lazy susan is turned. Another corner solution, though it does waste some space, is pie-shaped drawers. On an upper line of cabinets, a corner can have open shelves that function as a niche, offering an attractive display space.

The old work triangle, the basis for many a kitchen design, has morphed into work zones as kitchens have expanded in size. There are now food prep zones, cooking zones, even a beverage zone, as people add things like refrigerator drawers or second sinks to their islands or wall space. Small refrigerators dedicated to wines or other beverages – away from the cooking area – are popular.

Desks are becoming standard in kitchens, sometimes big enough for two, so a parent can help a child with homework. Here again those all-important details come into play. Where will the keys go? The mail? A purse? The phone? A message center? A calendar? Will there be a laptop? How about a charging station? A bulletin board? Where will the TV go?

The homeowner who doesn't have the time or inclination to sweat the details can leave it up to Ken and Louise, who have found their corporate background has been much to their advantage. “We are really very much like our clients,” Ken said. “People value our professionalism.”

For information, visit truenorthcabinets.com or call 203-972-3921. ■



Ken Pascal

A creative storage pullout places seasonings at your fingertips.