

Known for her warm, contemporary style, Ami McKay shares how she creates kitchens with heart.

TEXT KARL LOHNES



Designer Ami McKay is the owner and creative director of Pure Design Inc., an interior design and build firm in Vancouver, as well as the owner of Pure Design Shoppe, a home decor store in North Vancouver. Ami is all about bringing happiness home and to her community. A recent project included donating her time to design kitchenettes for a women's shelter. She believes that the design of a home starts with the kitchen, so who better to ask for insight on how to create the heart of the home?

KL: You believe spaces should bring us joy. Kitchens are such hardworking rooms. How do you achieve joy and harmony in such a space?

AM: Our homes should reflect our passions, and when I design, I always start with the kitchen and move out from there. I believe that the kitchen is the most important room in the house. Instead of drawing inspiration from kitchen trends directly, I always find out what is unique to each client and that guides me in designing a space for them that brings happiness to their day-to-day life in the space. If a client tells me their favourite place in the world is Paris, for example, I take inspiration



Intense White quartz Zellige
BACKSPLASH TILE in
Weathered White, Clé Tile.
COUNTERTOP, Caesarstone.
COOKTOP, Bosch. Custom
Lineal wood **CABINETRY**
PULLS, Auburn Woodturning.

from that city, and it gives me a way to have fun while designing the space. In my own home, my partner, Don, is such a foodie and he loves a clean and minimal look, while I crave a warm and interesting vibe. We've blended our styles and we adore what we've created.

KL: When designing a kitchen, what comes first for you in your process: the overall style, the layout or the function?

AM: I create the layout at the same time as I pull the inspiration images, as they strongly impact each other and the process goes hand

in hand. For example, if I come across an inspiration image of an arch that I would like to use, I'll find the natural place to add it that transitions to the next room, and then that will be added to the floor plan. The inspiration phase is so important. I love watching the clients' faces when we present the initial floor plan and curated collection of images to inspire the possibilities. Once we get all of their feedback, the next design meeting is our biggie. We present all the elevations and our favourite materials and take the clients through a highly visual tour of their newly designed space.

“When designing a kitchen, the visual math is so important. There's a balance between where to add striking visual impact and where to pull back and add subtlety.”



Mass Light **ISLAND PENDANTS** in Nero Marquina Marble, & Tradition. Ginger **DINING PENDANT**, Marset. Silestone's Camden **COUNTERTOPS** in suede finish, Cosentino. **BAR BACKSPLASH**, Terrazzo Renata field tile in Grigio Camico, Ann Sacks.

KL: Do you have a number 1 design element that you implement in many of the kitchens you design?

AM: Our kitchens tend to feature remarkable, custom-made hood fans. We add texture, depth and colour with interesting material choices, and use exaggerated proportions. This creates a beautiful focal point in each kitchen. And regardless of the style of kitchen – whether it be a cabin, a contemporary new home or a traditional renovation – I always add organic material and warmth. For instance, adding wood pulls to a painted kitchen adds an unexpected natural twist. The golden thread tying all of our project styles together is warm contemporary design.

KL: Is there an emerging trend that you anticipate using in future kitchen projects?

AM: I've been seeing beautiful natural coloured stone. It makes my heart happy to see something from the earth that has a high visual impact and is one of a kind being celebrated. Natural stone is timeless, and it's



Teddy **PITCHER**,
Artisan **PLANTER**
with saucer, Pure
Design Shoppe.

wonderful to create a kitchen with that element as inspiration.

In my own home, I have a poured concrete island that is very sculptural and there are no stools. Instead of the predictable combination of a square or rectangular island with stools, I am more focused on making the island into art, while featuring interesting shapes with curved ends, half-circles or cantilevered ends. We can have fun with islands and make them exquisite – when you walk into the room, you'll see it more as art or a sculptural piece. I also look forward to playing with a lot more colour in the kitchen and using coloured grout.

KL: What are some ways to integrate the kitchen into an open-concept floor plan, or to make it a more multifunctional space?

AM: Booths are a great way to make a kitchen more fun while also adding colour and texture to the room. They create a nice intimate area to dine in and can also function well as a cozy homework space for kids, or as a home office or family gathering space. In one kitchen we

created, we installed a floor-to-ceiling glass wall directly adjacent to the kitchen and at the front of a playroom. That way, Mom could be in the kitchen, yet watch her children while they were playing. The plan was that in future years, it could be transitioned into a home office.

KL: What are some ways to give big-time style and personality to a plain or visually boring kitchen?

AM: Use layers of textural materials to give personality and character. I start with the tile and countertop colours, then build the colour story from there. If the tile is patterned and eye catching, balance it by using the right hues and textures in other elements to ensure the look of the space is cohesive. I've started using colour fearlessly – it has a remarkable impact on mood and adds a lot to a neutral or plain room. Every kitchen I design has a mix of contemporary and natural accessories, including handmade and artisan pieces. The finishing touch is nature – using oversized branches, plants and flowers.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JANIS NICOLAY