

KITCHENS OF THE YEAR
GRAND PRIZE WINNER

Interior design: Lisa Wilson-Wirth, Arlinea San Diego
Architecture/design: Christian Rice, Christian Rice Architects



ON THE BUBBLE

A curved-wall condo becomes a circular sensation

BY RON DONOHO • IMAGES BY BRENT HAYWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

The kitchen counter often acts as "command central" in this downtown condo unit that features alluring views of the skyline.



This retractable bar and wine refrigerator is integrated into the wall, offering an additional entertainment function.

IN DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO'S HARBOR CLUB condominium, some towers include what are called "bubble" units. These condos are named for their circular-shaped design. The challenge in the kitchen remodel of the seventh-floor residence of Bill Burns and Meredith Brown: Working with that curvature and utilizing the floor-to-ceiling window walls to accentuate the unit's amazing urban views.

The homeowners hired architect Christian Rice, of Christian Rice Architects Inc., who called in Arclinea San Diego's Lisa Wilson-Wirth to focus on the kitchen.

Rice's first goal was to open up the 1,474-square-foot condo to maximize the sense of space. He created a great room that includes the dining room, living area and kitchen. The kitchen was relocated to a space that had been occupied by the second bedroom.

This clever reconfiguration made the living room and kitchen adjacent to one another within the bubble, situating both areas to be able to take advantage of downtown's bay views and entertainment zone panoramas.

In focusing on the kitchen, Wilson-Wirth was working with limited full-height wall space, and a small footprint (160 square feet). Since Burns is an executive specializing in custom boat design and fabrication, a space-and-finish plan that references yachts was implemented.

A 15-foot-long peninsula bar counter separates the galley kitchen from the living room. And walnut "deck" flooring is installed throughout the living spaces.

There are four bar stools at the counter, which Wilson-Wirth says, "often acts as command central for the couple." Indeed, the counter can be used for eating meals, or for setting up laptops — perhaps to research the couple's next marathon or gain tips on carbing up for other big runs.

Wilson-Wirth believes the whole kitchen is extremely efficient. "The refrigerator and pantry are inserted into the only full-height wall of the kitchen," she says. "Transparent upper cabinets are glass and stainless steel. Matte lacquer cabinets create a perception of 'lightness' and handles are purposefully recessed to minimize obstruction."

The Kitchens of the Year judges unanimously praised this condo remodel.

"Typically, full walls of windows and columns create roadblocks to effective use of space," says Kitchens of the Year judge Robin Wilson-Carrier, design principal at Robin Wilson Interior Design. "The designers were able to use these elements to enhance the design of this true hub of the living area of this condo. There is an elegant use of angles; and under-counter storage and glass upper cabinets are both functional and beautiful." ♦

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White matte lacquer cabinets create lightness in the space, and handles are purposefully recessed to minimize obstruction