



GO AHEAD,  
indulge your wildest dreams.

When you remodel in this kitchen-crazy region, it pays to ask for what you really want.

by Anne V. Nelson

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**CLOSE, FOR COMFORT:** This large, professional-grade kitchen (also shown on pages 74-75) manages to feel homey, with tools and garden produce within reach.



# REAL-LIFE FANTASY KITCHENS

"Everything's right  
where I need it," says

Gale Bailey, enthusiastic owner of the converted Emeryville loft (shown on pages 78–79) that's home to one of our three dream kitchens. She notes that an earlier project didn't turn out nearly as well. "I had a kitchen designer do it for me," she says. "It looked gorgeous but was just weird to use." She adds, "There was no personality to it."

Blame scary swings in the stock market, deliriously high home prices, or even the water. But the Bay Area has gone a little nuts about kitchens, and investing in remodeling—or dreaming of it—has become an obsession. We spend entire Saturdays wandering through the maze of Home Depot kitchen dioramas, and evenings at parties gossiping about new dishwasher technology and who's adding a cold-water pot-filler faucet over the range. And that's before conversation turns to the Great Freezer Debate. Bottom, top, or side? Door or drawer?

With all the fretting over prices and styles, a key ingredient that's easy to overlook is personality: yours. The local homeowners you'll meet here discovered that working hard to get exactly what they wanted paid off—and not one would think of selling now. They're too busy living in their own dream kitchens.

#### THE GOOD MONEY NEWS

is that a new kitchen is a sound investment. Paul Deffenbaugh, editor-in-chief of *Remodeling* magazine, says that in the Bay Area right now, you'll get back any dough you spend on a major kitchen project (average cost: \$37,600, though it varies widely) if you sell within a year, and can actually earn money from a minor job. If you're not going to sell soon, he says, "you can do almost anything you want" and still profit.





**THE FAMILY THAT COOKS TOGETHER:** Linda-Marie Bauer at her antique butcher block, and son Richie pulling down peppers (INSET); noisy machinery that powers the hood is out of earshot on the roof, while the refrigerator's motor chugs away in the basement (SPREAD).

## fully loaded FARMHOUSE

About a year into her remodeling project, Linda-Marie Bauer learned an important lesson. "It's actually easier to build a skyscraper than to renovate an old house carefully," she says, now calm after a long storm. Not to mention adding a custom commercial kitchen filled with unique pieces, including an antique butcher block that takes four men to lift. (Bauer bought it at a Paris flea market, shipped it home, and then stored it in her barn for 18 months. She has lots of stories like that.)

Bauer and her two preteen sons, Richie and Johnny Løeb, moved to their Victorian home in the Napa countryside in 1993. Their working farm, Lazy Susan Ranch, grows and sells about a hundred types of herbs to area restaurants and spas; they needed a new kitchen to expand the business, and started planning in 1999.

"I wanted a big, open kitchen we could teach and entertain in," says Bauer, who got that and more—a bathroom, a bedroom, a husband—from the nearly two-year-long project. (She ended up marrying her interior designer's brother, Rod Bauer.) In their new kitchen—with its gas and electric burners, two refrigerators, three ovens, commercial ice maker, three sinks, and iron cooking cauldron that fits in the fireplace—she and her family even enjoy washing the dishes.

**WHERE:** Just west of Calistoga  
**SQUARE FEET:** 860 (kitchen only)  
**PROJECT COST:** "I don't even want to go down that road."  
**PROJECT TIME:** Six months designing, 15 months building (entire house)

**TRENDIEST FEATURE:** "The most awesome dishwasher in the world," a two-drawer Fisher & Paykel. (Coincidentally, all of the kitchens in this story have the same model.)

**DREAM TEAM:** Lou Ann Bauer (designer), Charles Carlson (project manager)





