

# Designed by L.I.F.E.

Richard Landon, CMKBD

Creating a home that looks great, works well, and feels right



## Richard Landon

Richard Landon developed the Designed by L.I.F.E.™ Process and its main tool, The Room Compass™, during his many years in residential space planning. With this process, he elicits from his clients the results photographed on these pages. Landon is a Certified Master Kitchen & Bath Designer (CMKBD)—one of a select group of designers to have earned that credential. His projects have been recognized in over fifty publications and by his peers in the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA). NKBA has awarded him the “Best Overall Kitchen Winner” nationally and twice accorded him the “Best of the Best” President’s Award for the Puget Sound chapter.

Landon’s approach to residential space planning is influenced by a wide-ranging theoretical and applied background. His tool bag includes an undergraduate degree in chemistry, applied studies in music theory and composition, and many years developing his facility as a woodworker, building specialized cabinetry. He is fascinated by related fields, such as color therapy, environmental psychology (how our environment affects and reflects human behavior), and the role of fractals in music, art, and design.

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**FRONT COVER** Adding a corridor with flanking windows and relites brightens the interior of this classic bedrooms-to-the-rear bungalow and connects the kitchen to the pocket backyard.

[ also shown on p. 8 ]

**THESE PAGES** This home cantilevers off its ridge perch on I-beams, inspiring my “Floating on Air” solution for a bigger kitchen. The National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA) recognized this design as their “Best Overall Kitchen Winner” of that year. The colors in the flamed copper under the hand-cast glass counters and in the beaten copper sink connect these elements to the khaya wood of the cabinets. The original terrazzo floors inspired mother-of-pearl inlaid concrete counters. Caramelized bamboo door panels evoke the home’s mid-century roots. Note the drawers in the toe kick. [ also shown on p. 21, 22 ]



## An Inspiring Home

*When* you set out to reshape your home, the ideal outcome will positively affect and reflect the lives lived there. My expression for this process — “Create a healthy home; inspire healthy lives” — makes it our goal to personalize or ensoul your home in the reshaping process: an excellent goal, yet a challenging task.

To get there, we need an effective framework to manage the design process. Without one, the many choices facing you, as a client, can soon become an unmanageable agglomeration of products and concepts. And for guiding us through each stage of the process, we need tools that keep us aimed toward what really matters. Together, these devices will give us the most assurance that our resulting spatial solution **looks great, works well, and, most important, feels right.**



## The Designed by L.I.F.E. Process

As a framework for managing the design process, I developed **Designed by L.I.F.E.**™ This Process keeps us on track throughout the four stages of design development:

**Aiming** Sorting out objectives, clarifying roles and how you want your home to feel, exploring how to shape your home to inspire you

**Zoning** Creating a floor plan layout that addresses your L.I.F.E. priorities, reshaping how your home looks, works, and feels

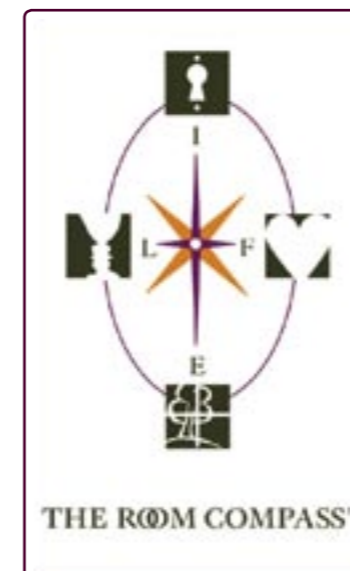
**Composing** Arranging design elements in both elevation and perspective sketches, creating a stage for finishes; verifying functionality

**Detailing** Personalizing the design with taste and flair, with appropriate patterns, textures, colors, and contrast levels

There is nothing mystical or inherently cultural (as in feng shui) about this. Because the Process organizes the complexities of designing personal spaces, we are free to discover “beyond cookie cutter” solutions and truly realize what you want.

**ABOVE** To keep our focus on the view, not the appliances, I designed a walnut armoire to discreetly conceal the refrigerator.

**RIGHT** African ribbon mahogany sets off this “atomic ranch” home, garnering the President’s Award for “Best of the Best,” NKBA: Puget Sound. Note the chef’s sink, left of cooktop.



## The Room Compass

To meet the need for guidance and to surface what matters to the client, I developed **The Room Compass**™. Its four ordinals, which keep us heading rationally and intuitively toward our objective, are **L.I.F.E.**, representing:

**Lifestyle Factors** How you want to use your home, in light of the demands of daily, weekly, and seasonal family events

**Interior Flow** How your home’s Pathways – primarily of People, View, and Light – affect the way spaces are experienced

**Feelings Created** How your home embodies and evokes the moods and ideas you cherish and respect

**Exterior Connections** How your home communicates with the outside world through its windows and doors

There is an outside and inside component to every home and also to the inhabitants of that space; that is, their internal/private selves and their outer/public selves. The relationships among these four components influence all residential design. To make sure we reach that “feels right” goal, we must delve into these components and understand their effect on the design and on you, the client.



**LEFT** Two chefs get two cooking stations: one uses magnetic induction, the other, gas. Note the chef's sink plus pot filler. This project also won the President's Award for "Best of the Best," NKBA: Puget Sound.

[ also shown on p. 10 ]

**RIGHT** Relocating both sets of stairs opened up the main floor on this top-to-bottom, inside-and-out remodel. Shojis stay hidden in the wall until needed to screen the opening to the basement steps. [ also shown on back cover ]

# Lifestyle Factors



The Aiming stage starts with understanding the activities that matter to those in your home and how much space is needed to support them. Technology has expanded our world and changed our activities—while simultaneously shrinking the amount of living space we require. Now kitchens are becoming the new living room—or “Kitchen Central,” as Johnny Grey calls it in *Kitchen Culture: Reinventing Kitchen Design*. We are layering more and more activities into and near the heart of the home.

Most houses still reflect past conventions wherein rooms were boxes, each intended to contain a single set of activities. But the layering of multiple activities within a common space has created an ongoing need to remodel and rethink our homes. We start planning, then find that resolving our “wish list” is complicated by the personal or shared aspects of each activity and, soon after, by conflicting notions of the activity’s importance. Finally, just when we think we have all these factors sorted out, Father Time presents his question: “How will your family, friends, and guests and all their activities and their layered interactive mixes change over time?”

We now have the Gordian knot of space planning! Fortunately, with the guidance of The Room Compass and the framework of the Designed by L.I.F.E. Process, we can and will unravel it.

## A Lifestyle Factors Experience

Years ago, during planning, a client of Italian heritage insisted on having a sink right next to his residential-model professional stove. My training in kitchen design compelled me to resist, because “the rules” require a minimum counter space on either side of the stove. As the client, he prevailed. I became his pupil later as I watched him fill a pot with water, wash a spoon after stirring a sauce, use a colander in the sink to drain the water from his pasta by simply tipping the large pot, and easily rinse the pot before the starches stuck to it. I now ask all my clients to consider a “chef’s sink.”

# Interior Flow



**LEFT** Combining painted and cherry cabinets, deftly placing an arch, and maximizing storage enabled me to open up this bungalow, gaining new Pathways throughout.

**BELOW LEFT** Hand-painted Vahallan wallpaper surrounds the tub in this master bath.

**BELOW** By reversing the stairs, I made room for a cozy nook.

In the Aiming and Zoning stages of design, initial concepts take shape as I respond to the client's *expressed* preferences, identified while exploring Lifestyle Factors. Just as important, the way clients react to ideas typically surfaces their *unexpressed* factors, which actually affect the design more. "Unpacking" their reactions reveals either the clients' fear that they aren't going to get what they want or their belief that something is being forced on them. Either way, *reactions are information*.

Generating ideas to elicit reactions involves tuning in to the home's most important pathways—its Interior Flow. This particularly affects the home's layout, because we want to optimize its People, View, and Light Pathways.

**People Pathways.** "Traffic" flows into and through the home. In the Aiming and Zoning stages, we must consider whether each room is a destination or a hub connecting us to other rooms. For instance, a kitchen located at the opposite corner of the home from the garage is a destination to which groceries must travel, instead of an easily accessed, organizing hub.

Traffic flow in the typical home is often less than ideal, because architecture has too often defined spaces by grouping the omnipresent shape of the rectangle, a shape that—as noted by Christopher Day, a British architect and sculptor and the author of *Places of the Soul*—has little reference to the movements of the human being. Day's comment reminds



designers to arrange this shape more harmoniously with the way humans experience space as they move through it. This could mean changing a U-shaped kitchen into a set of offset ells, thereby creating two inside elbows free of traffic. With this layout, people would move diagonally across the room instead of entering and running into a single dead end.

**View Pathways.** View pathways involve much more than what you see out your windows. For example, as you first enter your kitchen, what images flow into sight? Do you see the refrigerator—in most cases, the least attractive appliance? Or do you see the cooktop under a beautiful custom hood—the major kitchen appliance most easily made into an artistic expression of the owner's aesthetic sense?

Our brains are hard-wired to trigger positive associations with certain environments; the "hearth" of the home is one of those. Within its embrace, we stir up life. A refrigerator, on the other hand, is a big cold box where we store "dying" things. Good reason to place the cooktop and hood in a prime view pathway and place the refrigerator "in the wings"!

**Light Pathways.** Natural light, in particular, is critical to our sense of well-being. Two windows in two walls bring two kinds of light into the room, which naturally evokes a positive response. In the Pacific Northwest, with the absence of adequate natural light in winter, some of us even need special light boxes to elevate our moods.

On the flip side, too much light can blind a client in a west-facing kitchen. The glare off polished granite countertops can force people to put on sunglasses. (This is the kind of issue we tackle in the Detailing stage of the Process.)

We can further illustrate all three of the Pathways in the design of an eating bar. A bar that positions its users in the middle of a People Pathway is not particularly relaxing. One that seats guests with their backs to the home's best View Pathway or faces them toward a view of a bathroom does not say, "You are welcome here." And positioning the bar in a Light Pathway where a flood of sunlight "cooks" those sitting there will not feel right.

## An Interior Flow Experience

A prospective client once began a phone call despairing, "I don't think you can help me. I've talked to five other designers, and they've all come up with the same solution." When I first walked into her kitchen I froze, "caught" between the refrigerator and the wall of a pantry closet. "That's my tunnel," she lamented. "I can't change that. I need the storage." Her fear was locking in her perceptions.

I assured her that the Designed by L.I.F.E. Process would lead us to solutions with more than enough storage—and no tunnel. (In fact, in all my years of design, only one client has filled up her kitchen storage on completion, and she owned a cooking school!) We removed the pantry and changed her U-shaped kitchen into two ells offset to one another, so the People Pathways could flow diagonally into and through the room. Inspiring!

# Feelings Created



**TOP LEFT & RIGHT** Removing the wall between the dining room and kitchen opened up the Light and View Pathways. Note the many ways that glass affects the composition. Moving the window headers up into the second-floor rim joists made these windows 8" taller, filling the room with daylight! The chef's sink also serves an adjacent prep counter.

[ also shown on p. 13, 18 ]

**FAR LEFT** This playful bathroom delights my wife. Note the faucet balanced on the edge of a glass partition. The ceiling vault defines grooming and bathing areas.

[ also shown on p. 20 ctr ]

**LEFT** Note how lighted cabinets draw you along the View Pathways into this kitchen. [ also shown on p. 6 ]



Each of us has our own unique tastes—for desirable shapes; for the patterns, textures, and colors that dress those shapes; for the contrast levels that make them appealing—and our own set of words for describing them. Eliciting these tastes and understanding how to satisfy them is the most important part of “feels right” design. When we describe how we would like our home to look, we are actually describing, in an oblique way, how we want it to feel.

Therein lies the challenge in Aiming a design toward a certain feeling. Though we share a common sense of what the word *cozy* means, we each have our own distinct images attached to it. For one person, *cozy* may conjure up a farm cottage; for others, it may take them to a beach house or a mountain cabin. Through my Designed by L.I.F.E. Process, we identify your visual language and then tune in to your associated shapes, patterns, textures, colors, and contrast levels. With a shared knowledge of what feels right to you, and using portfolio photographs or your own picture collection, we clarify and refine the vision for your home.

## A Feelings Created Experience

This ordinal is, for me, the most critical. A client once became teary-eyed recalling a kitchen with a “cranny” from her childhood. This aimed the kitchen in a direction completely different from my initial concept. I began our planning by removing her sink from its centered position on her only window and replaced it with a cranny. “Where will you put my sink?” she plaintively asked. At the time, I didn’t know. We ended up with a unique island configuration: the double sink sits across the island, the bowl on one side serving the chef, the bowl on the other serving the cleanup crew.



# Exterior Connections



**LEFT** The forest setting inspired me to wrap windows around this kitchen expansion and use a blend of knotty cherry, walnut, and fir, with hand-oiled, wide-plank hickory floors. The angled, J-shaped eating bar better positions the island in the room.

**ABOVE** Relocating French doors created seating in front of a new expanse of windows. Glass floor tiles are “skylights” for the basement.

[ also shown on p. 10, 11, 18 ]

Our experience of the world outside is affected by where windows and doors (openings) are positioned—and where we ourselves are positioned in the home. Let’s say that whenever you stand at your kitchen sink you look at a hefty structural steel column imposed on your water view. When changing your home, you may have a design requirement: “Get rid of that column!” An intuitive designer will realize that what most matters to you is seeing the view without obstructions. Instead of removing the column, that designer may move the kitchen, changing the position of the residents and their relationship to the View Pathways. In this case, Aiming and Zoning involve connecting Pathways with Openings and Positions, creating a space with—so to speak—“POP!”

Shaping the space around exterior View Pathways, creating or modifying openings and positions, will also affect Light Pathways into the home. During the Composing stage, in particular, we refine and settle this.

For me, there is no better term than *composing* to describe the third stage of design development. There is a certain musicality to space that invites us to arrange the elements in pleasing combinations. Shapes, like musical notes, cluster in motifs and variations that engage and please us.

In *The Architecture of Happiness*, British writer Alain de Botton describes beauty as “the child of the coherent relationship between parts.” However, as it is in music, so also in our homes: there is a wide spectrum of what is considered beautiful or pleasing. Some music unfolds so predictably that we quickly tire of listening to it; other compositions offer fresh interest on each hearing. Spaces can unfold in the same ways. The Composing stage is our opportunity to shape a home of enduring pleasure and inspiration for you, the client.

## An Exterior Connections Experience

My prospective clients called from the Netherlands. They wanted recommendations for remodeling their stateside kitchen and master suite before resuming their lives here. Upon visiting, I noted that although the home had a spectacular view, the stairs to the basement were right in front of the living room window, so you couldn’t sit or stand there. The kitchen was in a corridor through which you entered the home from the garage, and the stools at the eating bar had their backs to the view. The only place you could take in the scene was sitting in the formal dining room! I proposed a complete change in the layout: I moved the stairs and captured a corner of the deck to create a new sitting room. By moving those stairs, I could also move the stairs up to the master bedroom, which allowed us to change both the front door and the garage entries. The final plan created five distinct View Pathways on the main floor and also connected the master bath to the view, even though it is still positioned on the street side, not the view side of the home.





# Breaking Free

The Room Compass gives us the confidence to break free of convention and thus create spaces that look great, work well, and, most important, feel right—to us. Where is it written that sinks must be centered on a window, fireplaces centered on the wall?

Too often, the person standing at such a sink will have the mullion between two windows (or window sections) in their line of sight. A centered fireplace may completely confound our desired furniture placement.

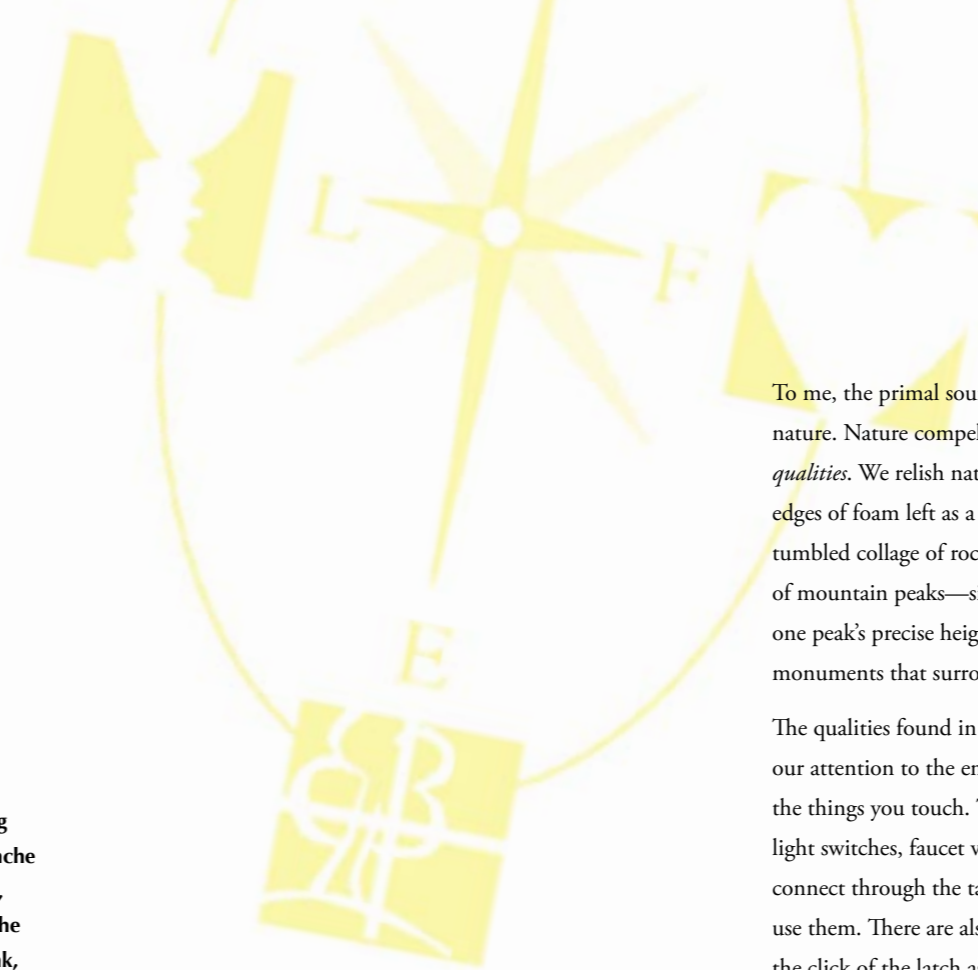
Many of us have trouble visualizing how a space will feel once it's constructed; this is one reason why designers rely on such "tried and true" solutions as centering. Drawings, although intended to be helpful, typically flatten a space's three-dimensional aspects, confusing viewers by placing elements into unreal relationships, particularly in elevation views. For example, because kitchen wall cabinets drawn above the base cabinets appear to be in the same plane, directly above each other, clients may want their widths to align. But the upper cabinets are actually much shallower and stepped back from the lower ones, with three changes in plane between them: countertop, backsplash, and the upper cabinet's underside. Therefore, aligning upper cabinet widths with the base cabinets can often feel forced and unnatural.

Although rectilinear forms dominate our homes, relying on geometric preciseness is rarely the most effective way to create a space that feels right to live in. The famously rectilinear artist Piet Mondrian left faint wavers in his straight lines to remind us that a human being was present; Michelangelo used the grain in his blocks of marble to guide his sculpting. We too must find a more organic way to respond to the information that The Room Compass points us toward, to shape designs that inspire us.

**PRECEDING PAGES** After visiting France, my client wanted a Lacanche range. For a more elegant setting, I concealed the refrigerator (on the left). A chef's sink, plus a prep sink, supports two cooks.

**BELOW LEFT** A mother's office and craft room is also a child's play space; the movable table can be positioned where most needed.

**BELOW** A trunk invites guests to use our powder room and feel like—guests!

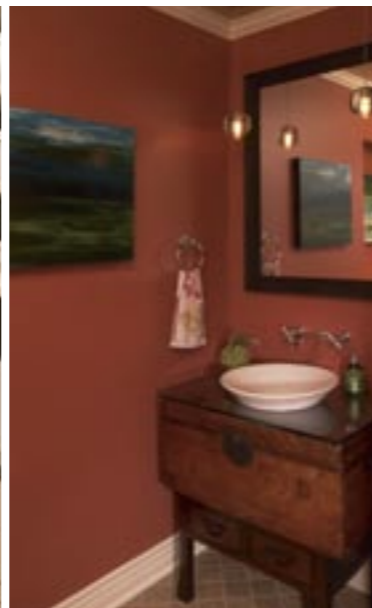
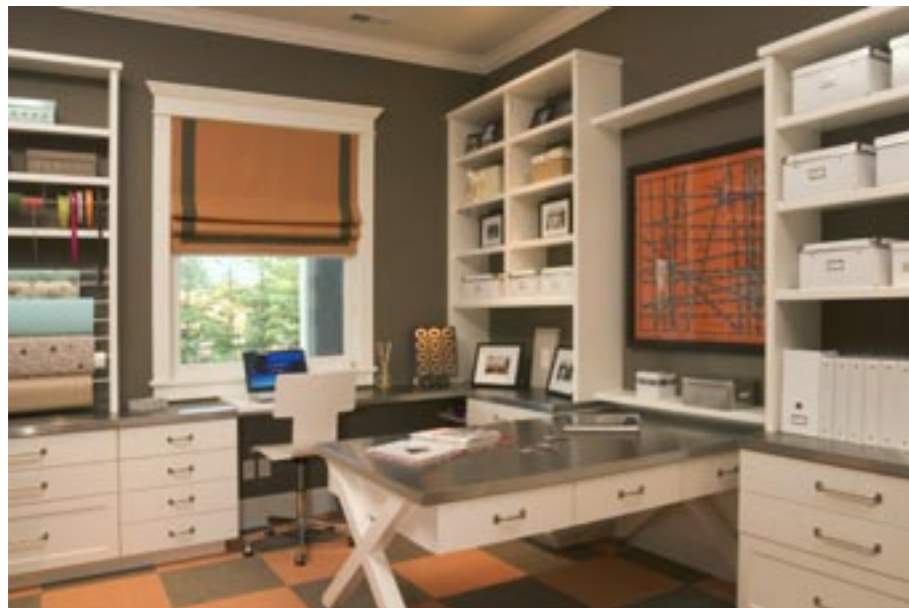


To me, the primal source for "feels right" design development is what we experience in nature. Nature compels us to move away from *quantifying* objects to embracing their *qualities*. We relish nature's textures, complexities, and patternings—the random, ragged edges of foam left as a wave withdraws from the beach, the varying barks of trees, the tumbled collage of rocks at the foot of a cliff. We soak in the awe-inspiring complexity of mountain peaks—similar, yet each unique—scarcely noting or even caring about any one peak's precise height as our eyes ascend up the differently scaled ridges and smaller monuments that surround the majestic summit.

The qualities found in nature are ensouling—and so, during the Detailing stage, we turn our attention to the ensouling properties of materials. One rule to follow: put quality in the things you touch. The main way we interact with our home is through door locksets, light switches, faucet valves, cabinet pulls, window cranks, and appliance handles. We connect through the tactile pleasures of their surfaces, as we run our hands across them or use them. There are also sounds that connote quality: the solid sound of a door shutting, the click of the latch as it engages the jamb, the efficient fan that quietly extracts odors.

When we engage the Designed by L.I.F.E. Process and navigate through it with the aid of The Room Compass, we guide how various conditions play off each other and affect you. We note how a small change in Lifestyle Factors or the placement of a window in Exterior Connections can precipitate unexpected outcomes affecting Interior Flow and your experience of your home. As a result, engaging in the Process can be a little like predicting the weather. Just stay with the Process, and you can be sure inspiration will come and your home will feel right.

**RIGHT** An edible flower garden called for a kitchen "potting bench"; angling makes room for a marble-topped baking counter. The Aga stove shows off; the Sub-Zero is completely hidden, even at center stage. Reversing the stairs brought dormer light into the center of the home.



# Coda

## Create a healthy home; inspire healthy lives.

We can reach our “feels right” goal when we let go of the standard design process—moving objects and walls around to see how to fit everything we want into our homes—and instead begin to shape our spaces using the more open-ended, “breathed out by the process” approach that nature uses. With The Room Compass to constantly orient us, we find our way to L.I.F.E.—rich with shapes, patterns, textures, and colors playing off each other, connecting us to our home, its site, the lives we live there, and our most ensouling memories.

### Showing How Your Space Will Feel

- ✦ When composing interior spaces, have sketches made that elevate you above and angled a bit to the side of the space. From this viewpoint you will more accurately perceive how the space will feel; for example, those upper kitchen cabinets will actually appear as set back from the base cabinets below the counters.
- ✦ Use sketches to edit out elements that interfere with understanding the relationships we are exploring. We can “ghost” walls in or omit sections of cabinets to see what is beyond them.
- ✦ Avoid computer-generated pictures of rooms. Their rigid, sometimes photo-realistic depictions of reality actually distort your ability to perceive how it affects you.



**LEFT** Higher counters for a taller client surround the tactile pleasures of French enameled lava stone, stainless steel, and zebrawood counters with limestone floors and back-glazed, wide-reed glass walls. 27"- and 30"-deep drawers provide extra storage, as do drawers in the toe kick.

[ also shown on p. 10, 11, 13 ]

**BELOW** Painted cabinets and an alder-wood island, both softened by glazing, welcome you to linger over coffee. A double crown effect sets off lighted display cabinets.

### Kudos

“Thanks for worrying about the details. In our world of instant gratification, most professionals are on to the next thing. We will live with this kitchen for a long time, and I will smile every time I think about the little things that were done right.” — *Husband & father, Seattle, WA, Madison Park neighborhood*

“Richard’s value far exceeds what we paid. His eye for detail and on site presence made all the difference, especially when it comes to cabinets. It is the rare designer that is so hands-on involved in their installation. He personally reinstalled our wine refrigerator when he noted the doors were askew. Our kitchen looks ‘just right’ because of him.” — *Mother & partner, Seattle, WA, Inverness neighborhood*



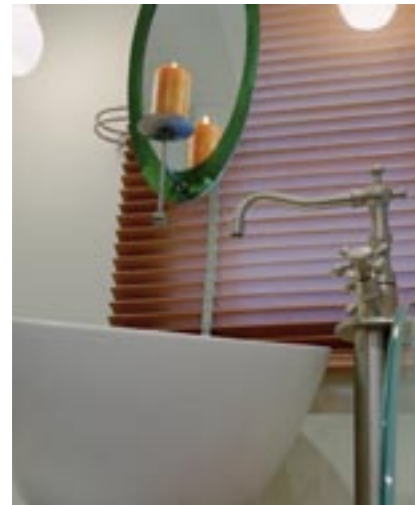
An environment that unfolds slowly to the participant as part of a discovery process, versus seeing it in an instant, touches us, at a deeper level with value and meaning. The use of physical contrasts, such as up and down, in and out, front and back, near and far, create a dynamic experience that involves mystery and a sense of exploration . . . encouraging one to return time and time again.

— **Barbara Crisp, AIA**  
*Human Spaces: Life-Enhancing  
 Designs for Healing, Working, and Living*



We don't generally experience chronic pain when the fine-grained features of a design have been ignored; we are simply forced to work harder to overcome confusion and eddies of unease.

— **Alain de Botton**  
**Philosophy Research Fellow**  
**London University**  
*The Architecture of Happiness*



Contrast the various materials of construction, clarify the connections among them, and celebrate the innate qualities of each rather than covering them up.

— **Max Jacobson, AIA, et al.**  
*Patterns of Home:  
 The Ten Essentials of Enduring Design*

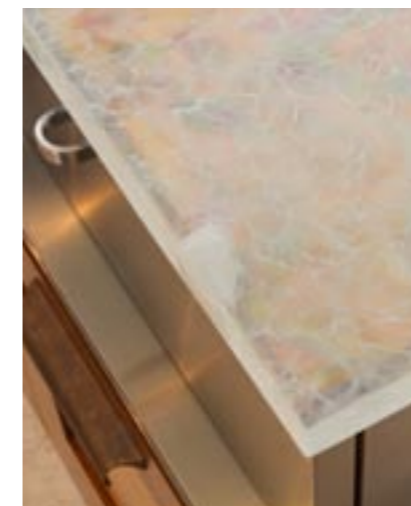
[Three key glands] are stimulated by light. Not any light, but gentle rhythmical living light, endlessly changing throughout the day. That is why light from two windows in two walls from two sky colours is always more pleasant and healthy than one . . . Mono-directional light from a single source, be it window or window-wall, does not have this life.

— **Christopher Day**  
**British architect and sculptor**  
*Places of the Soul*



[B]eauty is the child of the coherent relationship between parts.

— **Alain de Botton**  
**Philosophy Research Fellow**  
**London University**  
*The Architecture of Happiness*



We all bring to our places a rich, deep reservoir of past place-memories . . . there will surely be aspects of privacy, enclosure, view, form, materials, sounds, textures, and so on, that were imprinted on you at that time.

— **Clare Cooper Marcus, M.A., M.C.P.**  
**Professor Emerita, UC Berkeley**  
*House as a Mirror of Self*



*Trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle.*

— Michelangelo



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