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Design Awards 2025

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The Winners' Circle

The 2025 Kitchen & Bath Design Awards honors designs that showcase bold choices, customization and personal style.

Today's freshest designs are all about the power of the individual according to the entries for the 2025 Kitchen & Bath Design Awards, sponsored by *Kitchen & Bath Design News*. Honored in this year's awards were diverse designs that delivered truly custom luxury via personal flair and specialized practical solutions.

Over 340 projects were judged in 11 categories: Best Kitchen Over \$250,000; Best Kitchen \$175,000-\$250,000; Best Kitchen \$100,000-\$175,000; Best Kitchen Under \$100,000; Best Specialty Kitchen; Best Master Bath Over \$125,000; Best Master Bath \$75,000-\$125,000; Best Master Bath Under \$75,000; Best Powder Room; Best Showroom, and Best Specialty Project.

The prestigious judging panel for the awards included: Rob Klein, Conceptual Kitchens in Carmel, IN; Dan McFadden, PB Kitchen Design in Geneva, IL; Jeannine Price, Redbarn Designworks in Center Moriches, NY; Gabe Sepulveda-Villarini, Jackson Design and Remodeling in San Diego, CA; Sharon Sherman, Thyme and Place Design in Wyckoff, NJ; Karen Swanson, New England Design Works in Manchester-by-the-Sea, MA; Molly Switzer, Molly Switzer Interior Designs in Portland, OR, and Jessica Webber, Webber Coleman Woodworks in Watkinsville, GA.

Each project was evaluated on multiple points, including: aesthetic appeal, functionality of the space, attention to detail, handling of unusual situations, originality, selection of colors and finishes and overall impression. The judges also provided design feedback to all entrants.

TO EACH THEIR OWN

If there was one overarching trend the judges could agree on, it was the absence of trendiness – in other words, homeowners are truly embracing ownership of their homes in all ways.

"I think freedom to express a design vision was really a big theme for me," says Sherman. "I saw things that were really different and really thinking outside the box. And I think that's so important if you're going to keep moving design forward, especially in the home."

Webber agrees: "For the award-winning projects, the priority seemed to be highly personalized spaces – whether it be a really impactful wallpaper or antique pieces. Stepping away from the standard commodity style kitchens and baths won the day."

"The submissions reveal a clear shift: people are prioritizing comfort, functionality and seamless integration with the rest of their home," adds Price. "Kitchens and bathrooms are no longer just task-oriented spaces – they're personal, intentional and often luxurious."

She also says: "In kitchens, there's a strong focus on multifunctionality – spaces that support cooking, entertaining, working and gathering. We're seeing thoughtful storage solutions, dedicated beverage areas, hidden appliances, layered lighting and natural materials that add warmth and character."

"There was a lot of patterned wallpaper, a lot of bold choices, mixing of materials and not being afraid of just being different, you know?" remarks Sepulveda-Villarini. "There were a lot of very edgy designs, especially in the small bathroom categories."

"There were several projects that had more daring use of color and texture combinations within the same space," McFadden notes.

Some trends – or perhaps more accurately, celebrated materials and flourishes – did make themselves evident during the judging process. "The key designs that I saw have more curvature to casework," Switzer indicates. "We're seeing a lot more moldings, a lot more thoughtful details – it was simple, but it just brought so much more depth to the space to have this curvature adding that softness to design that we've been missing for a while."



■ The panel of esteemed judges for the 2025 Kitchen & Bath Design Awards included (from left): Rob Klein, Conceptual Kitchens in Carmel, IN; Gabe Sepulveda-Villarini, Jackson Design and Remodeling in San Diego, CA; Jeannine Price, Redbarn Designworks in Center Moriches, NY; Molly Switzer, Molly Switzer Interior Designs in Portland, OR; Jessica Webber, Webber Coleman Woodworks in Watkinsville, GA; Karen Swanson, New England Design Works in Manchester-by-the-Sea, MA; Sharon Sherman, Thyme and Place Design in Wyckoff, NJ, and Dan McFadden, PB Kitchen Design in Geneva, IL.



Photo: Douglas Friedman



Photo: Aurin Vecchio Photography

Sepulveda-Villarini adds, "A lot of natural materials are coming back. I see a lot of [designers] using less man-made materials and going back to using woods, natural stone, quartzite and marble."

Klein points to the use of metals as an inspiring element. "Metal finishes, metal hardware... There were a lot of metal freestanding shelves, and integration of metal into cabinetry was really on point this year – I think it was for kitchens and for bathrooms, too. The use of the mixed metals is definitely a trend that I think is here to stay."

ANATOMY OF A WINNER

So, what elements of a design award submission really catch a judge's eye? *KBDN* asked the 2025 KBDA judging panel to weigh in on what makes a winning submission.

Photography and photo styling, many agreed, might just be the secret sauce that sets a great submission apart from an amazing submission. "As a small business owner, I am careful about how I spend money on marketing," Swanson explains. "I rarely if ever spend money on advertising. I prioritize professional photography over all else in terms of promoting my design and business."

When asked what makes good photography, Swanson immediately points to lighting. "We saw so many submissions with the overhead recessed can lighting on – it really detracts. A good photographer is opening their aperture to allow light in; they are using blankets and other devices to block light from coming into the room. I have my best photo shoot days in overcast weather."

"Photography, lighting and staging play a critical role, especially in spaces that may lack bold colors or dramatic elements," adds Price. "A strong visual presentation can elevate even the most understated design and make all the difference in how the space is perceived."

Sherman looks for "a true mastery of the aesthetic and the functional. I believe you cannot have one without the other," which translates into "an understanding of good design as it relates to human-centered design. Things can be beautiful, but how will people function within the spaces? Human scale



Photo: Phil Johnson of Phil Photo

■ Projects displaying distinctive, personalized touches took home the gold at this year's KBDA Awards. Among the honorees are: (opposite page, top and bottom, respectively): Gold winner, Best Kitchen Over \$250,000 – Daniel Joseph Chenin, FAIA of Daniel Joseph Chenin Ltd., and Gold winner, Best Kitchen \$175,000-\$250,000 – Lauren Tolles and Tori Olijar of Maison Birmingham; (this page) Gold winner Best Master Bath \$75,000-\$125,000 – Amy Klosterman and Michelle Jefferson of AB Design Elements.

is very important to the metal aspect of living in a space. You don't want to feel overwhelmed or underwhelmed."

On a final administrative note, Swanson adds, "Follow the rules!" When filling out the applications, she says, "Curate your narrative to be as on point and descriptive as possible. Having a short but really meaningful description is better than a multi-paragraph brief." ■

HONORABLE
MENTION



Photos: Tom Scharf, Scharf Photography

The Multipurpose Space

Laura O'Brien
O'Brien Harris, Chicago, IL

Laura O'Brien's clients use their kitchen space for a multitude of activities and requested a multi-functional layout that integrated a family kitchen, breakfast room, homework area, mudroom and wet bar. While the 390-sq.-ft. room provided ample space, one of the challenges was to keep it from feeling cavernous, instead making it warm and inviting.

Storage was a priority for the clients, and the design team also wanted to avoid visual clutter. Clean-lined custom base cabinetry in light quarter-sawn London Oak sets the tone for a streamlined aesthetic, with upper cabinets minimized to allow the architecture to breathe. Beneath the window, a specially designed double workstation sink is paired with a Brizo faucet. A countertop and backsplash of Calia Stone's Calacutta Lincoln quartz continues down the run of cabinets, which also includes a Cove dishwasher as well as a Sub-Zero refrigerator drawer and undercounter wine unit.

Included on the adjacent wall is a Wolf professional range, topped with a custom blackened steel hood with Wolf insert. Opposite, a paneled Sub-Zero refrigerator and freezer continue the streamlined aesthetic.

Rather than incorporating two islands, the designers opted to extend a table-height surface from the main island. The main portion of the island is a dark stained walnut, with a Wolf microwave, topped with a Dove Grey leathered quartz surface from Corian. The eating portion of the island includes the Calia Stone Calacutta Lincoln quartz used on the perimeter, showcasing a waterfall edge. The entire space also incorporates hardware from Sun Valley Bronze and Nest Studio. Above the island, custom metal brackets were designed to extend from the exposed beams, allowing pendant lights to be suspended gracefully over the space without interrupting sightlines.

GOLD



Photos: Staffer Photography

Hub and Heart

ANN STOCKARD & KARA MANN
O'Brien Harris, Chicago, IL

A young family of five was making the transition from Chicago city living to a larger suburban home, and Ann Stockard and Kara Mann of O'Brien Harris were tasked with creating the perfect butler's pantry off of the main kitchen. The butler's pantry, or scullery, was envisioned as a space that would serve both functionally and aesthetically as an extension of the kitchen, which was the hub of family activity.

Abundant storage was one of the main focuses of the design and needed to account for the needs of both the parents and the children. The design team created stainless steel lined open vegetable bins, enabling the kids to fetch snacks for themselves

while encouraging healthy eating habits. Also incorporated were pull-outs for dry goods and panels for hiding small appliances. Because the scullery would be an important space for meal prep as well, pull-out countertops were cleverly hidden beneath the steam oven and microwave.

The pantry also managed to harmonize the parents' different aesthetic preferences - he liked a modern look, while she had softer tastes. Buster + Punch hardware, a black-framed cabinetry with Bendheim glass focal point and light-hued London Oak cabinetry create a quiet sense of hard-working luxury, according to the design firm.

GOLD



Multi-Functional Mudroom

JULIE NOVY

JWN Designs, Crystal Lake, IL

ANN STOCKARD

O'Brien Harris, Chicago, IL

This elegant home, located on Crystal Lake in Illinois, needed a mud room with laundry area that could serve family and frequent guests in style. Designer Ann Stockard worked with Julie Novy of JWN Designs to create this highly functional and sophisticated space, which features custom details and curated finishes that meet the design sensibility carried throughout the home.

Careful space planning divided the small, 110-sq.-ft. room into two highly efficient zones: a mudroom on the left with generous storage for coats, shoes and sports gear, and a laundry area on the right featuring hamper pullouts, sorting bins, and durable Pure White quartz countertop from Caesarstone for folding and prep. In addition to the quartz surfacing, the team selected other resilient, high-end materials such as custom cabinetry and a striped penny round floor tile from Ann Sacks in a custom pattern – all chosen to withstand daily wear while maintaining visual appeal.

Completing the space is Katonah polished nickel hardware, washer and dryer from LG Electronics, and Visual Comfort Boston Functional Single Arm Library Light in polished nickel with Presidio Classics shades. Positioned under the window is a sink from Mr. Sink and faucet from Delta Faucet to aid with laundry and cleanup.

One of the key challenges was ensuring the space could be closed off during gatherings without sacrificing beauty or disrupting the home's flow. Elegant custom barn doors from O'Brien Harris with polished nickel grill inserts from Armac Martin were designed to hide the room when needed.

Photos: Tony Soluri, Soluri Photography