

[INTERIOR DESIGN]

What Makes a Perfect Kitchen? Ask Barbara Sallick



The Waterworks cofounder offers inspiration for creating your ideal space and emphasizes the importance of balancing functional elements with the emotional ones.

BY



[JUNE 7, 2020] In her new book, *The Perfect Kitchen* (Rizzoli), Barbara Sallick — the senior vice president of design and cofounder, with her husband, Robert, of the luxury bath and kitchen company Waterworks — begins with a story about an architect who designed a large, lavish house for a client on Long Island. When asked which room the client liked best, the architect said, “Mostly the guy hangs out in the kitchen, like the rest of us.”

In some ways, according to Sallick, we’ve come full circle from the Stone Age, when people gathered around a fire to cook their food. “Despite many millennia of progress,” she writes, “like latter-day Flintstones, we’ve gravitated back to that essential space — and to the idea of as home.” Long before the pandemic had us all deployed in our kitchens three meals a day seven days a week, this process had been gathering strength as our interest in food and cooking skyrocketed and our approach to dining became more informal, with guests gathered around the now-

ubiquitous kitchen island as the host or hostess prepared dinner. She also points to the fact that technology has erased the functional distinctions between the rooms of a house. "If whatever you want to do can follow you wherever you want to go," she notes, "the last obstacle standing between you and the kitchen has been removed for good."



Waterworks cofounder Barbara Sallick says her new book, *The Perfect Kitchen* (Rizzoli), is meant not as a how-to but as "informed inspiration" — you intensify the experiences you want to create through design." Photo by Lorin Klaris. Top: Sallick writes of this Joseph Polar kitchen, "Open shelves and ample counter space permit the display of three collections in this generously scaled mudroom: earthenware pitchers, brass watering cans, and wicker baskets." Photo by William Abranowicz



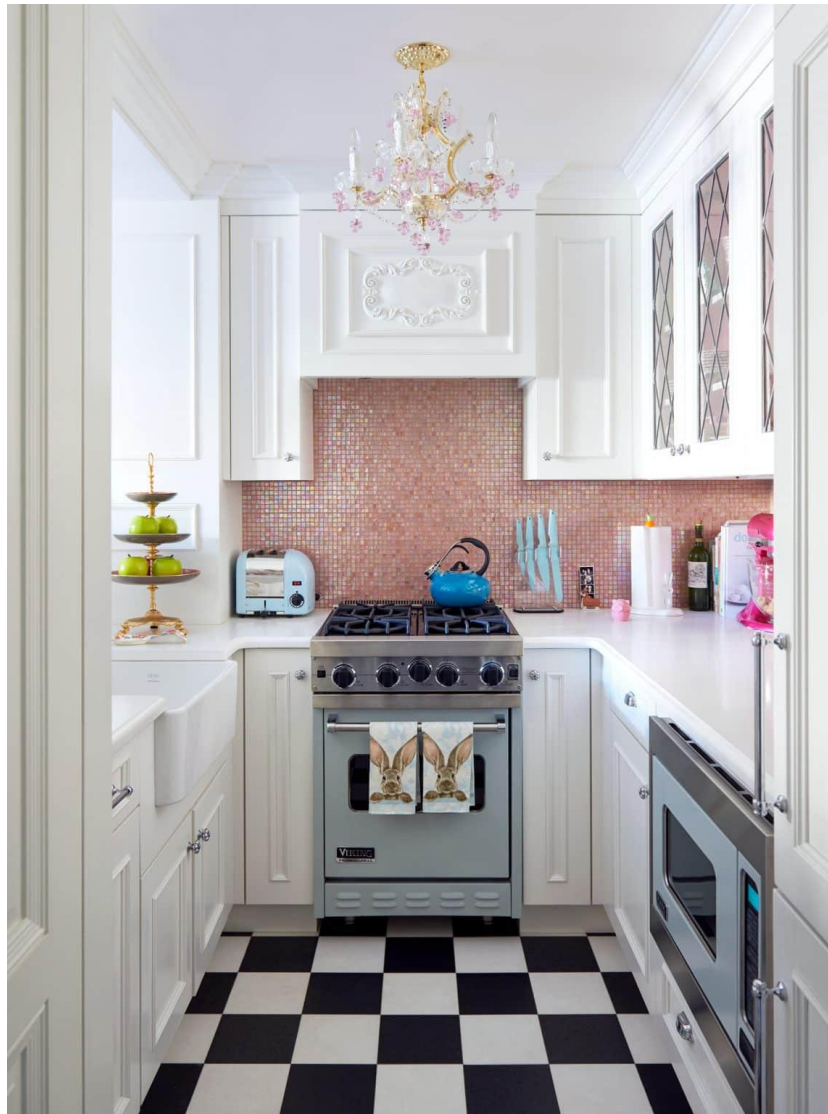
"This kitchen's design evinces a North African influence, evident in the lanterns, backsplash tiles, and perforated cabinet fronts, reminiscent of moucharaby windows," Sallick writes of this space by Martyn Lawrence Bullard, "but it's also an illustration of the value of repetition, in both pattern and color." Photo by Victoria Pearson

The book, written with Marc Kristal, was conceived immediately upon the completion of Sallick's earlier volume, *The Perfect Bath*, in 2016. "I had barely put down my pen," she recalls, when Peter Sallick, her son and Waterworks' CEO, "came into my office and said, 'OK, now how about a book on the perfect kitchen?'" The resulting pages offer tantalizing photographs of kitchens both vast and compact, ornate and spare. The text, meanwhile, conveys the importance of hiring design professionals and discusses the various tangible elements that go into a kitchen, like faucets, hardware, cabinets and countertop materials, as well as lighting, from pendants to sconces to chandeliers, and accessories like pot racks. Sallick even cites the occasional piece of furniture, like an antique table deployed for clothes folding in a laundry room designed by Thomas O'Brien, of Aero Studios. The book also covers ancillary spaces, like pantries, flower rooms and laundry areas, and includes brief texts by noted figures in the food and design worlds, among them the cookbook writer Julia Turshen, the *New York Times* food writer Melissa Clark, the renowned chef Alfred Portale and the designers [BRIAN J. MCCARTHY](#) and [ELLIE CULLMAN](#).



"While this kitchen might appear to be a random cornucopia at a glance, certain elements suggest a distinct narrative character: the [EMECO](#) stools, the [LABORATORY PENDANT LIGHT](#), the schoolroom [CLOCK](#), and, not least, the chunky vintage TV," Sallick writes of this kitchen by Thomas O'Brien/Aero Studios. "I see a cafeteria in a scientific research facility, circa 1980. Not everyone would, but that invitation to interpret gives this kitchen character." Photo by Laura Resen

This, however, is "not a how-to book," Sallick insists. "It's about much more than the cabinets. I call this book 'informed inspiration' — you intensify the experiences you want to create through design. There are lots of different ideas, and you can draw from them and create your own statement." She is speaking with me from her home in Connecticut, where she is currently sheltering in place with Robert, now retired. In spite of being at home all day, she maintains a routine: After exercising first thing in the morning, she says, "I get dressed, and I put on lipstick," before heading to the kitchen to make a cup of tea.



"The phrase 'everything but the kitchen sink' comes to mind for this delightfully decorated tiny zone, with its pink tile, checkerboard floor, chandelier, diamond-patterned glass cabinet doors, and twin bunny-rabbit dish towels," Sallick writes of this kitchen by Heidi James-Fisher of Studio LXIV, Ltd. "And there's a kitchen sink." Photo by Kyle Knodell

In her text, Sallick emphasizes the importance of balancing the functional aspects of the kitchen with the emotional ones, like feeling at home there and enjoying certain materials and colors on a daily basis. One of her favorite kitchens in the book is a small one, designed by Heidi James-Fisher, of the New York-based Studio LXIV, Ltd. Its white cabinets are offset by a checkerboard floor, a pink mosaic-tile backsplash, a pale blue oven, a crystal chandelier and dish towels printed with big-eared rabbits. "It's about layering materials," Sallick notes. But she also loves a sleek, white modern kitchen accented with glossy red cabinets that was designed, surprisingly, by . "I absolutely love color in the kitchen," Sallick says. "It gives personality and energy to a space."

One of the most startling uses of color cited in the book is in a galley kitchen designed by with the architect John B. Murray. The cabinets are lacquered an intense green, and Sallick's caption reads: "This kitchen might make you feel as if you've been wrapped in a grape leaf. But to me, the bold color statement in a small galley space gives the room a jolt of urbane glamour." On a more neutral note, Sallick singles out a kitchen by the Seattle designer Katie Hackworth that has elegant hanging glass shelves above the sink and a combination of wood and gray-painted cabinets.



"In this simple, unpretentious country kitchen...glass-fronted cabinets, white tile and a lightly figured marble contribute to the calm and welcoming environment," Sallick writes of this kitchen by architect Philip Logan, of [PRESERVATION GREEN](#), and interior designer Lauren Barber, of Blue Hill Farm. Swedish wooden bowls from [DIENST+DOTTER ANTIKVITETER](#). Photo by William Abranowicz



"My husband, Robert, and I recently moved into a new home after nearly half a century in the previous one, and this afforded us the opportunity to create a kitchen that drew on cherished memories and formative experiences,

embraced ideas we'd always wanted to try, corrected functional glitches that had plagued us in our old place, and brought our family's aesthetic into the twenty-first century," Sallick writes of this space that she designed with her husband. Photo by William Abranowicz

Aesthetics aside, Sallick is emphatic that careful planning is key to kitchen design. "Though most of us don't think it as such, the kitchen is by far the most complex room in the home," she writes. "Most people don't understand space all that well. Unless you're really skilled, if you don't hire a professional, you won't maximize your opportunities." A new kitchen, she points out, "is a very expensive proposition, even if you buy your kitchen from Ikea. In the end, a professional can save you money." And when budget is a consideration, she notes, color and good-quality hardware can go a long way toward transforming the space.



"We replaced the single solid door between the kitchen and laundry room with double doors lightened by frosted-glass inserts," Sallick says, describing their renovation. "The informal dining area adjoins the kitchen and shares its floor-to-ceiling tiles." Photo by William Abranowicz

Sallick's own kitchen is in the book; it's a calm, welcoming space, with cabinets painted navy blue and pale gray, marble countertops, white tile walls, elegant brass hardware and walnut-lined drawers. It has a table and chairs, like so many of today's kitchens, which are geared to more casual dining and entertaining. "That's certainly where my husband and I are in our lives," she says. "We love this informal way of living."
