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Note to Editors: This is the first in a series of brief stories on the “art and science” of kitchen design, as shared by members of the Jenn-Air Design Advisory Council.

CREATING KITCHENS AROUND MEMORIES AND RITUALS

When kitchen designer Roberta Kravette of Nieuw Amsterdam Kitchens met with a client in New York’s Westchester County several years ago, she was somewhat surprised by the answer to a critical question she asks every homeowner: “How do you envision your new kitchen?”

In sharp contrast to the rest of the home, and to the trend towards sleek kitchens with as much hidden as possible, the client said she wanted a kitchen with open shelving and “lots of places to put special things.”

It was only after digging more deeply that Kravette discovered her client’s underlying motivation. She shared with Kravette that her fondest memories in the kitchen revolved around cooking with her sister, who had recently died of breast cancer. A photograph of them cooking together was actually the one “special thing” the client wanted on display. Rather than a kitchen with open shelving, the result was a less cluttered kitchen that evoked those memories of cooking together, and that showcased the treasured photograph as a key focal point.

For a client on Manhattan’s Central Park West, the vision was clear from the outset. “She had little passion for cooking, but one of her great joys in life was a morning ritual of squeezing fresh orange juice for her husband and sons,” notes Kravette. The result was a special nook in the kitchen built around an old, not particularly fancy juicer the client had used for many years.

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“Here was someone with a \$6 million apartment, who could have virtually any kitchen imaginable, and what she wanted most of all was a place to perform a loving family ritual,” she notes. “And the juicer she’d been using for years was at the center of that ritual.”

Kravette cites both projects as prime examples of how designers need to “listen with the third ear” when consulting with clients, and how clients need to share more than just tangible considerations.

“As a kitchen designer I’m charged with bringing the vision of the homeowner, and often an architect, to life,” says Kravette. “That means getting inside their heads so that I can see what they see.”

For those thinking about remodeling a kitchen, she offers two pieces of advice. First, think about how you want to feel and function in the kitchen. Second, meet with more than one kitchen design professional and choose the one who “gets inside your head,” understands your vision, and finds ways to improve upon it.

Roberta Kravette is the principal of Nieuw Amsterdam Kitchens in New York, an Associate Kitchen & Bath Designer (AKBD) and a member of the Jenn-Air Design Advisory Council.