

Keeping it Clean

By Julie Catalano Photography by John Bishop

For a husband who travels extensively and a wife expecting their second child, the young couple's new home in Austin meant designing a kitchen and bath that could withstand the rigors of a busy life with no time for high maintenance.

“**T**he homeowners were adamant about durability, especially where traffic would be especially heavy,” says Stephanie Villavicencio, owner and head designer of Bella Villa Design Studio in Austin. In keeping with her overall minimal maintenance philosophy, “the wife did not want wood floors in the kitchen.”

That request prompted one of the most pleasant surprises in the house, starting with the entry where guests are greeted with what looks like a rich, hand-scraped wood floor. “It’s actually Marazzi® tile in American Heritage Spice,” says Villavicencio. Instead of using running bond (brick) style, “we laid it in thirds so it would look more like wood.” The long-wearing tile flows throughout most of the first floor.

Carrara marble is a favorite of the wife, but that too was quickly ruled out for widespread use, for practical reasons. “She actually uses her kitchen,” says Villavicencio, “and didn’t want the upkeep involved with marble, but wanted something that looked good.” Villavicencio had just the ticket: large scale thin format porcelain by Concept Surfaces in Titan Bianco Venato Extra Polished for the impressively oversized kitchen



island. Fired at a very high temp, “it doesn’t chip as easily as ceramic tile, is super durable and stain resistant.”

Often used in commercial applications like lobby walls in hotels and office buildings, the thin format porcelain comes in 60 x 120-inch slabs — this one was trimmed and adhered to a plywood base — making the island “one of the biggest we’d ever worked with.” A built-in sink, dishwasher and lots of storage adds to the island’s functionality and is a popular landing place for family and friends. Overhead lighting pendants are Murray Feiss in polished nickel, a versatile material “we love using,” says Villavicencio. “It seems to adapt to whatever is around it.”

The backsplash consists of 6 x 24-inch linear tile punctuated by lines of decorative mosaic that combines glass and stone.





Custom drawers and cabinetry, including glass-front display cabinets, are atop more counters made of the same thin format porcelain, and counters down the hall that are used for extra buffet space when entertaining. A gracefully arched front-facing window provides lovely views when prepping on the long stretch of yet more counter space underneath. High-end Thermador® appliances like the double wall oven, stainless refrigerator/freezer and gas range complete the luxurious and high functioning kitchen.

Upstairs, the master bath is a study in simplicity — the better to clean it. Here, too, says Villavicencio, “the homeowners really loved the look of pristine white marble without the maintenance, and we accomplished that by using

porcelain tile in the walk-in shower.” Called Deluxe, in White Polish, the 12 x 24-inch tiles sourced from American Tile were laid in a herringbone pattern in the spacious shower. Outside the shower are separate toilet facilities on either side. Neither of the couple takes baths, but the children’s room down the hall has a nearby Jack and Jill bathroom with tub and matching vanities, and there is a full size sauna near the downstairs game room.

The coveted Carrara marble makes an appearance in the hexagon backsplash on the vanity. The fine Italian marble from the Bianco Carrara Gioia collection highlights the popular look of white stone with signature grey veining; it gave the homeowners the sophistication they wanted without the

hassle. Yes, it has to be sealed, says Villavicencio, “but it’s not like you’re setting things on it like a countertop.” Some clients, she explains, “love marble and the way it wears, and don’t care if it has some ‘character.’ It’s more of what works for your family and the way you live.” For this family, a backsplash gave them the best of both worlds — elegant and easy to preserve.

Practicality reigns in the Silestone® vanity countertop in Yukon Blanco by Cosentino®, described as “super easy to clean” by Villavicencio. The nonporous quartz surface is highly resistant to staining by oil, makeup, coffee, wine and other everyday substances. “Again, we wanted to deliver the look without the maintenance,” says Villavicencio. Overhead illumination is provided by a Murray Feiss three-light vanity fixture in Brushed Steel from the Sullivan Collection. The floor is a porcelain tile in dark charcoal with a hint of metallic.

The kitchen and bath project made full use of timeless trends, says Villavicencio, much to the satisfaction of clients who knew exactly what they wanted from the start. “The all-white look is still hot, so that is the look we went for in both spaces. It’s a minimalist, clean looking aesthetic that remains popular for many homeowners.” ♦

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