

Ellene Newman Talks Kosher Kitchens and a Love of Good Design

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You might say [Ellene Newman](#) has always had a passion for well-designed, beautiful things. A musical prodigy who was signed to a major recording label as a composer/songwriter at the age of 13, she moved towards a career in art and computer graphics. Teaching at the college level for more than 15 years, she then brought her passion for comfortable, beautiful living spaces to

her home design business. Working with clients primarily in Baltimore and the DC suburbs in Maryland, she's carved out a niche in designing Kosher kitchens and full house remodels with an emphasis on making sure her finished designs not only are beautiful, but improve her clients' lives because they have a home that works for them. We spoke with Ellene about how she brings her passion for good design to life in her niche market.

Q: What drew you to home design?

A: I've always been passionate about understanding how things work. My musical background is where it began, and then moved into art and graphic design. I've always felt it's much more fun to work in three dimensions instead of just two—I'd say this is something special that I bring to my design business—not everyone can think three dimensionally. The interesting thing about my career is it started somewhat organically. In college I began redesigning my friends' dorm rooms—helping them with space planning using graph paper—this was before 3D CAD. As time passed, others asked me to help too, and eventually I was doing a lot of home design work for free—concentrating on building my portfolio—all while caring for my family and mother who lived with us. Finally, one day my husband

said, “You know, people would pay you to do this.” So, I hung up my shingle so to speak and off I went.

Q: What’s your approach to working with clients?

A: I’ve always felt if you put your clients first, the rest will come. I am very client focused, with the ultimate goal of understanding not just what my clients want, but what they need to make their home work best for them. It’s never just been about making money, but about finding the right solution. Once we are working together, I provide 3D CAD drawings so they can view and walk through the design on their smartphone, tablet, or computer and offer feedback. I think partnering with my clients and offering solutions is one of the most rewarding parts of the process. Everyone has different needs, and it’s very gratifying because I feel like I’m doing something bigger by helping them improve their lives.

Q. Can you explain the basics of a Kosher kitchen?

A. I’ve been able to carve out a unique niche with [Kosher kitchen designs](#). As an active member of the Orthodox Jewish community in my area, I bring a unique perspective and knowledge to the project. Some frequent requests include two sinks, two dishwashers, sometimes even two stoves—to ensure a physical separation between dairy and meat cooking. You also need a workspace that can accommodate two distinct areas for meal prep. As you can imagine, the need for strong space planning abilities is critical in a Kosher kitchen design. Another thing to consider is that these are typically large families—some having 5 or more children, or older couples with many grandchildren. My work often includes more than just a kitchen remodel, but an overhaul of the entire floor so a large dining area can also be included and the home will flow well. Overall with Kosher kitchens you have to understand how to group everything since the space requires more equipment, storage, and work space than a typical kitchen.

Q. Many of your projects are in older homes—how do you prepare clients for the unexpected surprises that come with these projects?

A. Well I always tell them (jokingly of course...sort of) everything’s going to cost twice as much and take twice as long. The majority of the older homes I work on were built from 1920-1960, but I’m working with one now that was built in 1905. The biggest challenge is basically that the older the home is, the more surprises you find. You really need to make sure you have a strong plan before starting, have all the proper measurements, and understand and communicate major expenses such as moving plumbing, windows, or walls. I like to be able to run over and work directly on site with the contractor if problems come up. It’s a collaborative process with everyone involved.

Q. You use standard cabinets in very creative ways. For instance, using the end angle cabinet in the “Kosher Wow in Baltimore” project. What is your thought process around solving those design issues?

A. I’m very solutions oriented when it comes to home design, and if I can make sure a client’s kitchen has the most useful space possible, I will. I always look for cabinet solutions that are functional as well as beautiful so I can ensure the kitchen remodel adds value to their lifestyle.

Q. How about multigenerational homes? Tell us a bit about how those requests are unique.

A. My personal experience caring for my mother in our home for the last six years of her life gives me a real-life perspective on designing multigenerational homes. A major goal is to ensure privacy and give everyone the space they need. I do a lot of “grandma suites” where basically my clients are looking to create a house within a house. One of my current projects is interesting in that a young family is looking to expand their home in a way that can accommodate their parents who live in Israel. They want their parents to be able to come for extended visits or even move in. This is a two-phase remodel. We’re making sure to include long term planning and vision with a second kitchen, accessibility, living areas, etc.

Q. What are the main attributes of Canyon Creek that help you provide solutions for your clients?

A. Canyon Creek is my go-to for unique situations because they offer everything—fully-custom, semi-custom, and a stock line. Canyon Creek’s semi-custom product is great because there is much more variety in sizes and options than any stock line can offer, plus, they can build custom cabinets for pieces that don’t exist. Overall, I know with Canyon Creek I will get excellent quality with options that help me fit my clients’ budgets, special requests, and space challenges—solutions that aren’t even necessarily a special order. Being able to customize each situation is a really big deal for me, and Canyon Creek helps me do that.

