

# 'Mother of green' finds almost-green kitchen just beautiful

By Merlisa Lawrence Corbett  
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

It's not easy being green. That is the mantra of Kermit the Frog and a lesson learned by Penny Bonda as she remodeled the kitchen in her Foggy Bottom condo.

In her quest for the ultimate in sustainable style and substance, Bonda wound up with a gorgeous, modern, harmonious and mostly green kitchen.

"Not as green as I would have liked," she added.

It probably is more "green" than 95 percent of kitchens in the Washington area but not enough for a woman sometimes called the "mother of green interiors."

At issue is a mosaic marble tile backsplash, the focal point of the kitchen and it's the least green component. Duped by a clever salesman who assured her the mosaic tile was made from recycled marble scraps, Bonda placed an order only to find later the tile wasn't green at all.

"It's virgin marble, imported from Spain," she said. "So there's a whole bunch of stuff not green about it. When I saw it, I just fell in love. I bought it before I checked. That is a no-no. But it would be hard for me to picture this kitchen without it."

The backsplash represents how difficult it is to strike the proper balance between aesthetics and green intentions, even for someone as informed as Bonda, who has devoted her career to sustainable building and design.

Founding chairwoman of the U.S. Green Building Council committee for LEED Commercial Interiors, Bonda is a principal developer of REGREEN, the USGBC/ASID green residential renovation and interior remodeling program. She is a partner with Ecoimpact Consulting and blogs about eco-friendly design for



PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

This tile backsplash — virgin marble, imported from Spain — represents how difficult it is to strike a balance between aesthetics and green intentions, even for informed homeowner Penny Bonda, who has devoted her career to sustainable building and design.

Interior Design magazine.

When she decided to renovate her 20-year-old kitchen, she called on a friend and colleague, Jill Salisbury, founder of el: Environmental Language LLC, an eco-friendly furniture company based in Illinois. The two met in 2004 at GreenBuild,

a sustainable design conference in Portland, Ore.

"I knew from the very beginning that I was going to use Jill's cabinets," Bonda said. "I love the simplicity of her designs and how green they are. They are the greenest kitchen cabinets I think you can

possibly buy."

"Penny was the dream client," said Salisbury. "First and foremost, she is the 'Mother of Green.' Talk about a client who appreciates the benefits of sustainability!"

They kept the kitchen's original layout and emphasized horizontal

## Resources:

- » **Environmental Language LLC:**  
el-furniture.com
- » **deniseSiegelbronze:**  
denisesiegelbronze.com
- » **Eco Timber Flooring:**  
ecotimber.com
- » **Eco by Cosentino:**  
ecobyconsentino.com

elements. "This building, like all buildings built in the 1970s, does not have high ceilings," Bonda explained. "You can't do soaring vertical."

So cabinets, shelves, hardware and even the mosaic marble backsplash all evoke horizontal movement.

Salisbury designed bronze handles that blend seamlessly into the lines on the cabinets. The decorative hardware/inlay was fabricated by Denise Siegel Bronze and is made from 100 percent recycled materials. Salisbury said all other components of the cabinetry are made of 100 percent natural, non-toxic and low-emitting material. The cabinets contain no added urea formaldehyde. The finish is a natural lacquer derived from tree sap.

The sparkling white countertops, Eco by Cosentino, are made from 75 percent recycled content and bound by environmentally friendly resin derived from corn oil. The engineered wood flooring is from EcoTimber. With the exception of the ovens, all the appliances are Energy Star rated.

"No ovens are Energy Star rated," Bonda said.

When the project was complete, Bonda announced on her blog: "I have survived the insanity and am the proud owner of a simply fabulous, almost green kitchen."

# Plan now for starting heirloom seeds indoors

By Joe Lamp'1  
Scripps *Howard News Service*

The beginning of the year is the perfect time to think about spring's garden. I've resolved to grow a lot more heirloom plants from seeds this year. Although the definition varies slightly, the general rule is that heirloom seeds are passed down from generation to generation for more than 50 years. And with so many mass-produced hybrid varieties these days, heirlooms are getting lost in the crowd.

First, of course, you have to get your hands on some heirloom seeds. There are plenty of catalogs and Web sites for folks who grow, sell and share these old-fashioned favorites.

Timing is everything when you're starting seeds indoors. Too soon and the plants outgrow their containers. Too late, and you'll have small seedlings that have to be fussed over to survive. The key is the last frost date — the last spring date that frost could form in your area. Your county extension service can tell you this date. Classic summer plants can (usually) safely be set out after that.

Find the number of days the seed takes to be ready to set out; seed packets usually include this transplanting information. Then back-time planting from there. For example, summer squash takes four weeks, tomatoes about eight weeks. If your last frost date is April 15, start the squash mid-March and

tomatoes mid-February.

Start seeds in most any well-drained container. A common and easy choice: 2-1/4-inch-square peat pots. Delicate seedlings don't need to be transplanted and the whole pot can be set directly into the garden without disturbing the plants.

When starting your seeds indoors, fill each planting area with soil-less seed starting mix. Don't use ordinary garden soil, which is full of disease-causing organisms and too dense to let young roots develop properly. Moist the medium sufficiently with water so that it is damp like a wet sponge.

Heirloom seeds may not sprout as well as hybridized seeds, so plant three or four and thin out the weak-



SHNS PHOTO COURTESY JOE LAMP'1

With a little warmth, the right moisture and light, you'll be able to raise a crop of healthy, garden-ready heirlooms that can't wait to get out and start growing.

est later, leaving one plant per pot. Cover lightly with the medium and then cover the entire tray with a clear lid or plastic covering. This allows light in and holds in moisture so the soil doesn't dry out. Refer to the seed packet for the proper planting depth, but a general rule

of thumb is four times the seed's thickness. Seeds germinate best in soil that's a little above room temperature. The top of the refrigerator supplies good bottom heat, but a commercial heating mat gives a more consistent temperature. It can help, but is not always necessary.

As soon as the seedlings emerge, remove the cover and place them in good light. An ordinary fluorescent shop light works just fine. Suspend about 2 inches above the leaves. Set a timer to give the plants 16 hours of light each day. Raise the lights as the plants grow, keeping the distance above the leaves the same.

Once the true leaves develop you can begin using a very diluted mix of soluble fertilizer in warm water. But don't set them in full sun right away. Gradually expose them to more sunlight each day for 10 days.