

September 2018

# Kitchen & Bath Business



**KBB's 2018 Design Award Winners  
Turning Students into Professionals  
A Conversation with Designers of all Ages**

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF **KBB**





**THIS PAGE** "There's just something about Chicago that speaks to me and awakens my design senses, and this is visible in each space of the showroom," said Laurita. "Like Chicago, the design intent is vibrant and alive; each space is crafted to build lasting memories and invite new experiences."

**LEFT, INSET** Laurita was inspired by the front windows of the iconic department store, Bergdorf Goodman, for the entrance of the showroom, which features bright neon writing and bold colors.



CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND BRAND AMBASSADOR for Middleby Residential, Jaime Laurita was tasked with designing and opening a showroom in Chicago's Merchandise Mart within 12 weeks. Starting with an empty space, he was challenged to think creatively and research how best to draw visitors in from the busy hallways of the commercial building. The new Viking Range and La Cornue showroom, a flagship for Middleby Residential and the home of brands like Aga, Marvel and U-Line, also needed to offer a personalized experience to each potential customer.

"This whole project was done in house," said Laurita. "I was asked to create a 'wow' factor showroom that would invite prospective clients to touch and experience the innovation of the eight Middleby Residential brands."

#### CATERING TO A CROWD

Before he began designing, Laurita wanted to gain a better understanding of the clients who visited the iconic Merchandise Mart.

"Donning disguises like a restaurant critic, I actively observed the array of individuals there and was inspired to design sophisticated kitchen vignettes that would connect with them in a visceral way," he said.

## SOURCES

#### CREATIVE DIRECTOR:

Jaime Laurita

#### DIRECTOR OF

SHOWROOMS: Kiki Bassoul

PHOTOGRAPHER: John Campbell Photography and Marcin Cymmer Photography

#### MIDDLEBY BRANDS

- Aga
- Grange
- Heartland
- La Cornue
- Lynx
- Marvel
- U-Line
- Viking

#### OTHER BRANDS REPRESENTED

- Artistic Tile
- CAI Lighting
- Cosentino
- Maya Romanoff
- Rhode Brothers Flooring
- The Galley Sink
- Woodland Cabinetry

Each of the seven vignettes was designed with a specific client in mind. These range from the Viking 3 series, which is geared toward the entry level, to the Viking 7 series vignette, which boasts top technologies and innovation in larger, stainless steel appliances with a commercial restaurant appeal.

"I combined the ingredients of texture, light, tile, flooring and colors and paired them with the Middleby brands to create the right balance of taste that will please the emotional and aesthetic taste of many clients," said Laurita. "These ingredients create the perfect recipe for showroom success."

Laurita credits his design inspirations to his time spent as a designer and professionally trained chef for different celebrities like Madonna, Sting and Aerosmith. Because of his experience catering to these distinctive personalities, he learned how to give people a sense of home, whether it was a memorable accent in a design or a favorite childhood dish.

"The showroom design embodies the same concept—everything is centered around great design that encourages people to gravitate to the kitchen," he said.

#### CURATED TOUCHES

According to Laurita, innovation is important to the Middleby Residential brands. To illustrate this, the director purposely designed the space for livestream events and social media moments.

"Technology is a key element to the design," he said, explaining that there are cameras throughout that are wired for Facebook Live events in the test kitchen. "There is even a neon light that says 'Innovation' in the CEO's handwriting that is part of the showroom's décor."

To highlight the high-tech nature of the products themselves, Laurita worked with product designers from Viking and asked them to build a piece of art from one of their products. The result is an artistic oven door with working lights on the knobs, which now hangs over the window in the back office.

Potential customers and design professionals are educated frequently on the use of these products within the showroom's test kitchen. Weekly events—like cooking classes or parties—include everyone from influencers, chefs, interior designers, architects, realtors, builders, dealers and consumers.

"We want guests to come in and feel like they are part of our family," said Laurita. "Our goal is to reveal the magic behind the brands and have a genuine dialogue with them to understand their needs in a comfortable, welcoming environment."

According to one of this year's judges, Dan McFadden, the designer did a lot of investigative work prior to building the design and went the extra mile. ●