

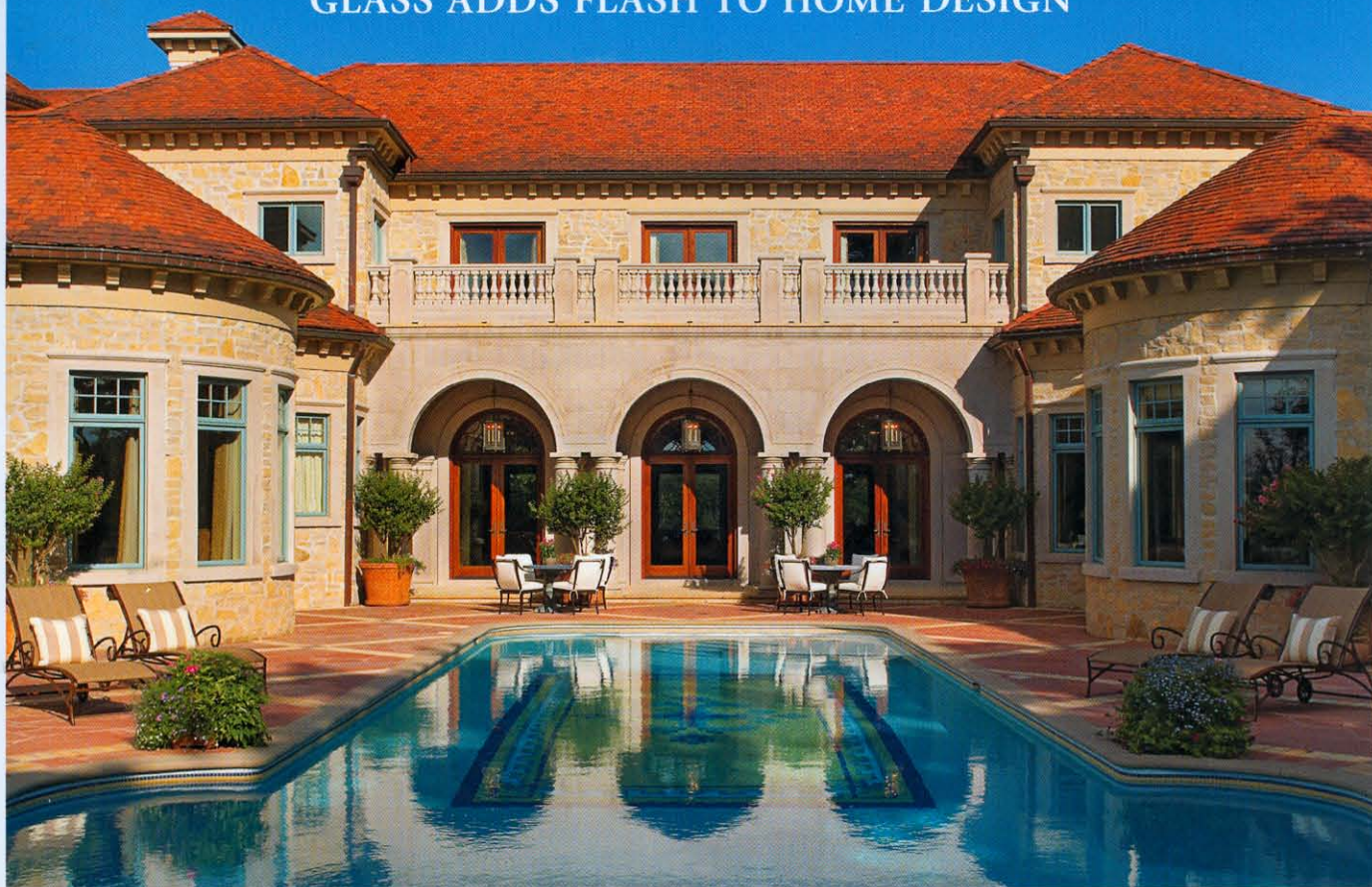
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Published by Robb Report

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GLASS ADDS FLASH TO HOME DESIGN



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22

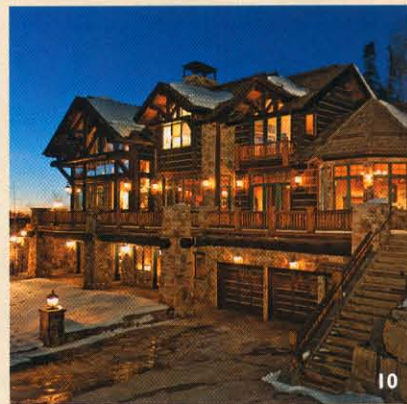
FEATURES

- 22 COMMUNITIES**
Kukui'ula shines as Kauai's newest place to call home.
- 34 DESTINATION**
Idyllic Indian Ocean living in the Seychelles.
- 42 ARCHITECTURE**
Top designers of classic great estates.
- 50 LIFESTYLES**
The allure of university towns: Boulder, Charlottesville, and Austin.
- 60 BY DESIGN**
Canada's ThinkGlass creates bold features for home interiors.

ON THE COVER: Tuscan-style villa in Pittsburgh by Scholz Design. Photography by Beth Singer.




50




10

DEPARTMENTS

- 6 HOMEFRONT**
Add pizzazz to the landscape with outdoor lighting.
- 10 SELLING POINT**
Ski homes on the market from around the world.
- 19 REASONS TO HAVE A HOME IN ...**
Sanibel Island, Florida.
- 70 SHARED OWNERSHIP**
A Tuscan retreat at Castello di Casole.
- 96 CLOSING PAGE**
Recent sales in notable markets.



LIGHT
IMPRESSIONS
GLASS
OBSESSIONS



GLASS MAKES A LEAP FROM THE CUPBOARD TO THE COUNTERTOP— AND BEYOND.

BY Nanci Theoret

Take this advice from Bertrand Charest: your countertops need not be ho-hum.

Instead of granite, marble, or other solid surfaces, glass countertops give your kitchen light and life.

“Glass is very noble and rich, and it isn’t trendy like some resins and stones,” says Charest, president and cofounder of the Montreal glass design and manufacturing studio ThinkGlass (www.thinkglass.com). “There’s something special about the luminosity of thick glass, which is totally unique in the market. It’s artistic and adds a sparkling effect that has no comparison. It has life in it.”

The glass option may be a tad more expensive than many natural stones, but this is one material that adds attitude wherever it appears. It sparkles and glows even at 4- to 6-inch thicknesses. And it isn’t fragile. A thermoforming process created by Charest’s

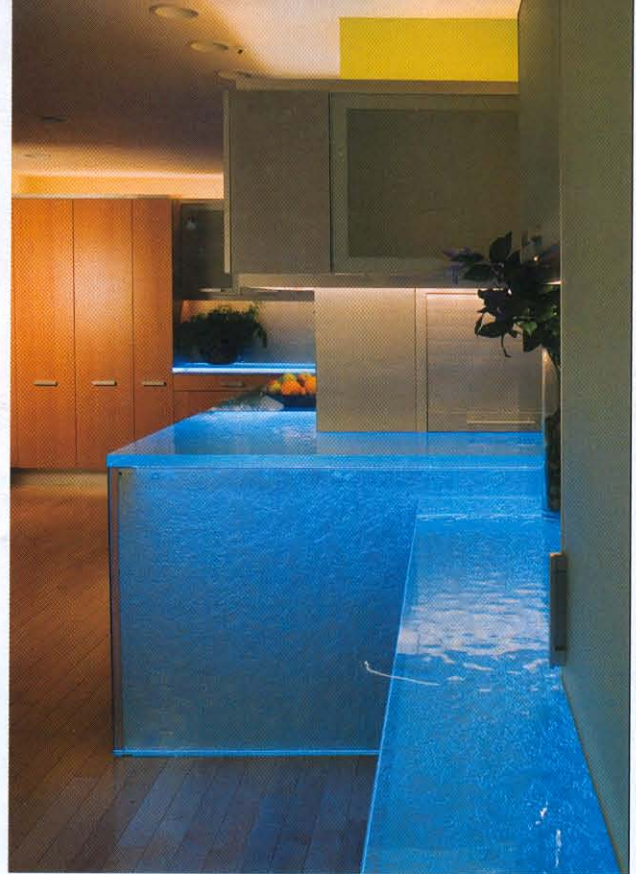
Thick glass countertops can add a sense of luminosity and dimension to a kitchen.

business partner Michel Mailhot, a master glass artist, creates a strong, durable countertop that will outlast marble or stone while adding a dose of drama to the kitchen, bathroom, or wet bar.

But not everyone is on the glass bandwagon.

"It's been a little hard to convince architects and designers to think of glass as a commodity beyond the typical residential uses, mainly windows and shower doors," says Charest. "When glass is crafted to 1.5 inches, it becomes as hard as stone."

Think Glass' repertoire offers limitless combinations of thickness, textures, edge treatments, shapes, and nine hues—mostly variations of crystal, blue, bronze, green, and gray—for customization. Crystal and aqua, available in varying intensities, are the most popular colors. Mailhot also can "paint" the glass with vibrant color splashes and strokes or embed it with 24-karat gold leaf that appears to float in midair. Handmade textured finishes emulate bamboo, glacier and seeded glass, crocodile, waves, raindrops, and wind patterns.



Crafted into a thick, finished product, glass can be as durable as stone.



Advanced LED technology provides a beautiful bonus. Strategically placed lights, available in a prismatic collection, and remote-controlled special effects create an enchanting inner glow. "Our glass lights up really nicely and creates a new atmosphere or mood in the room in seconds," says Charest. "Since we introduced LEDs, almost 70 percent of our clients want them in their glass."

The company's past projects include the 2004 installation of the famous chocolate fountain at the Bellagio hotel in Las Vegas and the 2010 Olympic flame structure in Vancouver. It also has completed large-scale commercial projects for restaurants, nightclubs, and offices, and its growing residential clientele includes an Arabian sheikh who has commissioned a 4-inch-thick glass bar in the middle of a swimming pool.

ThinkGlass' residential customers often tend to be homeowners who favor modern or contemporary design, or urban loft dwellers, or those who want



Whether as a stairway (above) or a kitchen countertop, GlassThink creations combine artful color and playfulness with function.

their waterfront views emulated in an oceanic pattern on their kitchen counter. But surprisingly, many have traditional homes. “Our glass has a nice organic feeling to it,” Charest says. “The texture doesn’t look mechanical, so it lends itself to a number of applications. We sold a 16-foot-long countertop for a home that was very traditional.”

With walls of cabinetry and appliances, the kitchen often doesn’t lend itself to art, a challenge remedied by sparkling glass countertops. “By installing one of our countertops on an island or the cooktop, our clients add art,” says Charest. “It introduces color into the kitchen, yet it’s 100 percent functional.”

Despite the notion that glass is too easily breakable, the single-slab cast glass is stronger and more durable than stone. Its nonporous solid surface cleans up with soap and water; doesn’t harbor bacteria, mold, or mildew; and needs no adhesives or sealants, which can affect a home’s indoor air quality by off-gassing potentially harmful volatile organic compounds.

“Glass is the toughest countertop material on the market at the moment,” says Charest. “It is a bit more expensive, but it outperforms stone.”

The company’s raw glass contains 30 percent recycled glass, and the finished product is completely recyclable, says Charest. The business, he says, “is as green



A ThinkGlass stairway brings an airy spaciousness to a home.

Used as a vanity top (right) or as a bathroom counter (below) glass is textured to hide fingerprints and smudges.



as green can get. We recycle water here. We use shipping wood from dead or sick trees.”

The applications for ThinkGlass’ 1.5- to 6-inch glass are almost endless—as long as there’s a strong support system. It is heavy. The decorative wine cellar doors the company produced for one Quebec home weighed 400 pounds each but readily solved the homeowners’ dilemma. “They didn’t want the cellar on view for everyone, like a restaurant,” Charest says. “We suggested 1.5-inch glass so it’s like opening a beautiful treasure.”

Despite its heft, the glass, even at 4 and 6 inches, looks light and airy. It’s always textured to hide fingerprints and smudges.

ThinkGlass has made a natural transition to crafting bathroom vanity tops and wet bars, and glass has become a popular choice for kitchen backsplashes, tub and fireplace surrounds, and artistic wall partitions, which Maillhot can customize with splashes and painted swirls. The material has made the alfresco leap to summer kitchens, says Charest. “Outside, it will last longer than any stone. It cannot be attacked by anything.”

Slab steps also are of the moment, creating a floating effect when combined with LEDs, as in a current installation in Arizona. ThinkGlass produces interior and outdoor flooring tile, balustrades, and Chihuly-esque aerial sculptures, as well. The company will introduce a glass furniture collection later this year.

Charest sees a bright future for glass. “Michel is one of the best and most creative glass masters in the world right now. He’ll take an idea and run with it. He brings out the beauty of glass in everything he does.” **EP**