

# 1859

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## Why I Brew

Eight women break through  
the *pint* glass ceiling



## Designer Spotlight



Portland designer  
Jessica Helgerson  
offers her strategies  
for chic and timeless  
kitchen design

interview by Melissa Dalton  
photos by Lincoln Barbour

Twenty-two years ago, Jessica Helgerson started her design career in Santa Barbara, working for a green-building nonprofit called The Sustainability Project. So what's the greenest move you can make in a kitchen? First, she says, "Get the design right for that house so that the kitchen never has to get ripped out again." We asked her to elaborate on her secrets for doing just that.

### 1. Take cues from the existing house.

At Helgerson's firm, designers pore over old photos for inspiration. For instance, in a recent remodel of a Portland home that was once a library, Helgerson referenced the house's past in the kitchen with built-in shelves and a rolling library ladder.

### 2. Build stylish storage and, bonus, hide the fridge.

To balance open shelves with the room's storage needs, Helgerson's firm has recently been installing walls of smart pantry cabinetry and avoiding upper cabinets, if possible. Shallow cupboards mean fewer items get lost and can also provide a prettier context for the fridge. "We often try to incorporate refrigerators so they're not a focal point."

### 3. Add natural wood.

Helgerson always includes a natural wood finish somewhere in the room. "Whether it's on a floor, table or chair, wood is an important element to have," she says. In her 540-square-foot cottage on Saavie Island, reclaimed wood makes for a warm and textural accent wall.

### 4. Get comfortable and play with lighting.

"People really like to live in the kitchen," Helgerson says, "so we tend to include comfy seating." Her designs have integrated a window seat with pillows or upholstered pieces, or eat-in kitchens.

Helgerson complements functional lighting with more decorative fixtures over the sink or island. "Lighting is a great way to introduce an organic shape or sculptural contrast," she says. 

