

Cooking with Gas

Automotive qualities fuel this Pininfarina-designed kitchen.



IF EVER A KITCHEN HAS EVOKED a supercar, the Venus is it. Made by Snaidero, of Majano, Italy, the kitchen with a goddess' name showcases a vibrant color palette, symmetrical curves, innovative materials, and state-of-the-art technologies—attributes not unlike those of the Ferrari Enzo, Ferrari F50, and Maserati Birdcage. And why not? The automobiles and the kitchen are creations of the same renowned Italian design firm, Pininfarina, which Battista "Pinin" Farina founded more than three-quarters of a century ago as a car design company.

Today Pininfarina pursues a range of design projects—from cars to coffeemakers, from hotels to kitchens—and the Venus, which became available in the United States late last year, is among its most recent. The kitchen features cabinet doors that can be upholstered, so to speak, in a finish that is designed to look and feel like leather. Called Microtouch, the coating is a microfiber that, according to the manufacturer's president and CEO, Dario Snaidero, is "extremely resilient and easy to clean." It comes in coral red or black ink, while other finishes are available in such colors as curry yellow and metallic blue. Each provides a striking contrast to countertops and backsplashes made from stainless steel, Corian, or ebony wood.

For the kitchen's lighting design, Pininfarina adapted automotive technology similar to that which it employed in the Maserati Birdcage 75th anniversary concept car. The system, to which Snaidero holds a patent, features LED spotlights that the company says distribute light evenly, emit less heat, and consume less energy than halogen

bulbs. The LED spotlights are set close together within a sleek aluminum "shelf" that suspends above the kitchen's central island.

The island—a sculptural-looking hub for food preparation, cooking, and dishwashing that is priced from \$75,000—puts the cook squarely in the driver's seat. "The idea was to put the user in the center of the [kitchen], a sort of theatrical approach," says Paolo Pininfarina, the firm's deputy chairman and CEO of its specialty division, Pininfarina Extra. "If you just rotate around a vertical axis during your work, you spend less energy and your experience is more fruitful and comfortable." Compartments in the curve of the countertop keep utensils well within reach.

The entire kitchen can be customized to suit various floor plans, and the cabinets, which contain pullout pantries, shelves that spin, and built-in cutting boards, can be extended into a home's living area.

The Venus is not Pininfarina's first kitchen for Snaidero, but it may prove to be the firm's finest in terms of performance and style. Earlier this year, nearly a year after its European debut at the Eurocucina show in Milan in April 2006, the Venus received a Good Design award from the Chicago Athenaeum Museum of Architecture and Design. The museum's acknowledgment likely did not surprise Paolo Pininfarina, who calls the design a classic, one that is "easy to couple with different environments, historical or contemporary, urban or country." —JANE GIFFORD

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The Venus kitchen features a vibrant color palette and cabinets that can be "upholstered" in a leatherlike finish.