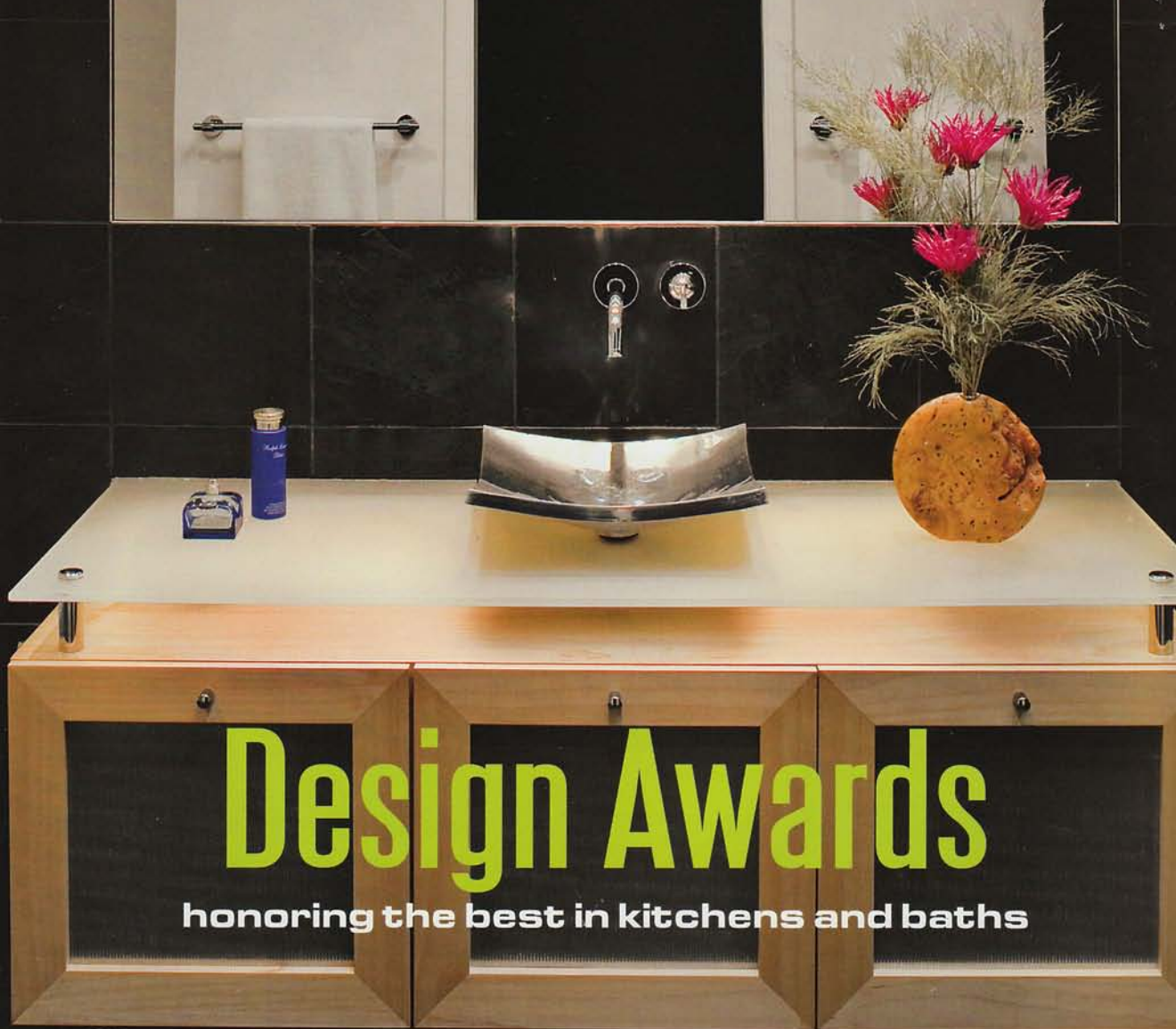


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Paul DiMeo's Top Product Picks



We all know Paul DiMeo. After all, who *hasn't* watched Emmy-award-winning *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*? We admire his can-do spirit, envy his creative genius, applaud his "guy with a big heart" attitude and feel his genuine warmth and compassion when working with families in need. And yes, we've probably cried—both tears of pity and joy—right along with him at hearing the stories of heartbreak and, ultimately, triumph that the *Extreme* team tackles each week. But did you know this family man and carpenter is also an established actor? That's right. A Theater Arts major at Point Park College in Pittsburgh, DiMeo has starred in off-Broadway productions and on television. But his theater days went beyond the stage

and screen. DiMeo also mastered skills behind the scenes: This youngest son of five began the craft of set building for the Pittsburgh Playhouse and, after moving to New York City, honed his skills at the Dance Theater of Harlem, Carnegie Hall and numerous other venues. He also pioneered the *Loft Living* project, working on the renovation of lofts and brownstones, including the landmark brownstone of Aaron Burr, for which he served as master carpenter.

DiMeo's love of renovation is bittersweet though, as it stems from sadder times: When he was just five, his Media, PA, family home burned to the ground, and, as DiMeo noted, "my father and I embarked upon our own extreme makeover to reconstruct it." Hence, the man we watch today: a carpenter with true empathy for hardship. DiMeo brings a grounded approach to his work, eschewing the loftier ideas that often prevail in the design community. He keeps it real, keeps it simple. And his capacity for compassion and depth of concern go beyond families, extending to the environment. He is passionate about the earth and saving its resources. And, harkening back to his dumpster-diving days in New York City, loves anything that is salvaged.

DiMeo is particularly fond of products that make life a bit easier. "Functionality is so important," he said. "If a chair or coffee maker looks cool but doesn't function well, what's the purpose? Simplicity for both the kitchen and bath is paramount." And one of the places to start? Maintenance. Not a huge fan of grout lines—"they hold bacteria"—DiMeo favors smooth countertops, like stone or **DuPont Corian (5)**, as well as undermount sinks, such as the 8 Degree stainless-steel sink from **Kohler (1)**, which is not only a snap to clean, but easier for families with children. "You can take a sponge and run it right from the countertop into the sink," he said. As for Kohler, DiMeo is a huge fan across the board, not only because of its generous support of the *Extreme Makeover* mission, but also because it is "a true American company that is ahead of the game" in water conservation. The company's products "take the guesswork out of saving water," he said, "so I don't have to think about it." And they're stylish, he added, such as **Kohler's** WaterSense-labeled San Raphael toilet (**6**). Speaking of style, DiMeo, true to his time in the Big Apple, loves subway tiles, such as **Glass Reflections** from **Daltile (2)**. "They provide a clean, modern yet classic look," he said.

Raised by Italian parents with many siblings, cooking always played a huge part in the DiMeo family. And Paul and his family love to cook, too. "I like Kenmore," he said. "It's functional, it's reasonable and I know it's good because I'm happy with the Kenmore in my own home." And **Kenmore** has upped its image with the Pro Series (**4**). As for cabinets, "again, anything that looks good but is easy to maintain." With "a ton of styles," **KraftMaid** is a good bet. "My favorite? Something in cherry with a flat front," he said, such as the Venicia Collection (**3**).

Now living in Los Angeles with Hollywood on his resume, evidenced by both his TV career and design portfolio—his client list has included Glenn Close, Anne Archer and George Hamilton—he is still firmly rooted in his upbringing. He finds humor in the little things, keeps smiling and lends a helping hand wherever and whenever needed. ■

—Christina Trauthwein

