



## **LuxeHome's GE Monogram Design Center Is A Showroom That Feels Like A Home**

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**LUXEHOME**  
THE WORLD'S LARGEST COLLECTION OF PREMIER BOUTIQUES FOR HOME BUILDING AND RENOVATION.

According to Kate Flaherty, vice president of building products and special projects at MMPI, the opportunity to build LuxeHome's newest addition, the GE Monogram Design Center, seemed like an architect's dream. "There are only two GE Monogram Design Centers in the world including the LuxeHome location," Flaherty said. Speaking enthusiastically about the 30 premier kitchen, bath and building products boutiques at LuxeHome's almost 5-acre space on the first floor of the historic Merchandise Mart in Chicago, she adds, "Every architect loves to design a showroom at LuxeHome, especially of this caliber."

Her supposition is well grounded: With some of the most sought-after kitchen appliances to showcase and a collection of high-quality flooring, cabinetry, and other products provided more or less at the architects' disposal, designing LuxeHome's GE Monogram Design Center seemed more of an indulgent architectural exercise than a challenging one. From the beginning, however, architect Chip von Weise wanted to do things differently.

"Most showrooms have a bunch of very small vignettes showing lots of different products, but you never feel like you're in a place — you feel like you're in a commercial showroom," von Weise, founder of [von Weise Associates](#), explained. "GE was very articulate about wanting to make people understand the quality of their products and how they will interface with their lifestyle. We thought a typical showroom design wasn't the best way to meet that objective."



The concept, then, was to design the showroom as if it were a high-end, single-family home. Von Weise and his firm chose to build an open-plan kitchen that connects to a functioning dining room and a family room with a bar, much like how an actual LuxeHome client might arrange his or her home. They preserved sightlines to the building's industrial-sized windows, incorporating views of Chicago's skyline and maximizing natural light. They incorporated a sleek stairway leading to mezzanine-level offices to give the faint illusion of the space in a multi-story home.

Yet the architects could not simply camouflage the showroom behind the façade of an upscale residence. By virtue of its typology, the GE Monogram Design Center required a number of different settings to appeal to a clientele looking for both traditional and contemporary style kitchens. The plan is thus centered around one traditional-style kitchen and three modern kitchens to cater to different tastes, unified with a color palette of polished gray concrete and gray-stained woods to avoid evoking the fragmentary, vignette-style plan that von Weise termed "Disney architecture."



Moreover, the space of the showroom is unequivocally a commercial space, not a residential one. The 1930 Merchandise Mart building, where LuxeHome and GE Monogram Design Center are located, is not only the second largest building in the

world but also a historically protected structure, making for a unique set of conditions. “We had to get gas from the other corner of the building and run it through offices and loading docks. We had to run the ductwork for the kitchen exhaust underneath the street and all the way out to the river,” explained von Weise. “There were a lot of components that had to be layered on top of a design for a residential home.”

But in the end, a singular sense of place shines through: “We were able to make the space feel like it’s a light-filled house.”

*For more information on the new GE Monogram Design Center, visit [www.luxehome.com](http://www.luxehome.com).*

