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Page 22

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SUMMER 2018
Display until Sept. 10
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Playing to the home’s existing architecture, Rita and Michael Purcell’s new kitchen—formerly the dining room—is a blend of modern and Mediterranean influences.
Chef's Special

A smart renovation gives a California chef and cooking instructor her own personal test kitchen.

WRITER Cathy Still McGowan
PHOTOS Edmund Barr
FIELD EDITOR Karen Reimucke
IN MOST RESTAURANTS, the kitchen is hidden from view. But when chefs entertain at home, everything, even the kitchen design, can become part of the culinary experience. So when Rita Purcell, a trained chef and cooking school instructor, and her husband, Michael, set out to renovate their Newport Beach, California, home, a smartly designed kitchen was a top priority. Rita wanted a true chef’s kitchen with all the amenities so she could sharpen her teaching skills, but she also wanted the space to be pretty enough for entertaining. “I have a group of eight girlfriends that come to my house and play like they are my students,” she says. “Each person gets their own cutting board and knife, and we try out a new menu. It’s fun to enjoy a glass of wine and cook with them at the island.”

Rita relied on architect Steve Stand and designers Wendy and Gregg Blackband of Blackband Design to bring her vision to life. Stand started by relocating the kitchen to the space that formerly housed the dining room. That opened it up to the living room and a new dining space. The original kitchen became a butler’s pantry that doubles as a second kitchen when Rita and Michael entertain. The designers then crafted a welcoming modern Mediterranean aesthetic that plays off the home’s coastal location and original architecture. “From the beginning, the couple said they didn’t want white cabinets,” Wendy Blackband says. “So, we gravitated toward stained cabinetry. Plus, stained cabinetry in a kitchen adds warmth and durability.” The cabinets are finished in a custom weathered chestnut stain for a soft look with minimal

...the plan...

A large-scale renovation converted the original dining room into the kitchen, added a new dining space, and turned the existing kitchen into a well-equipped butler’s pantry. A pocket door separates the pantry from the kitchen without taking up floor space, and can be closed as needed to keep messes out of view.

OPPOSITE: Durable stainless steel behind the range is flanked by honed Calacatta marble, which repeats on the perimeter and island countertops. The custom range hood includes a utensil and pot rail, just one of many chef-friendly amenities in the kitchen. ABOVE: Custom panels conceal the refrigerator so it blends into the background. The Purcells wanted to hide hardworking elements to place the focus on guests and fun.
THIS PHOTO: Golden retrievers Abbey and Annie are right at home in the kitchen thanks to a built-in watering station with a pot filler. The butler's pantry includes a large pullout for dog food storage.

OPPOSITE TOP: Luxurious yet understated, the Purcells' renovated kitchen is clean, polished, and worthy of the prominent spot it now holds in the open floor plan. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT: Sleek stainless-steel fixtures and finishes bring a modern edge to the Mediterranean-inspired design. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT: The Purcells liked the glass mosaic tile on the range hood so much that they repeated it on the island kick wall.
THIS PHOTO: The butler’s pantry serves as a secondary kitchen when the Purcells entertain. It includes a second sink, a second refrigerator, an ice maker, a large freezer, and wine storage, as well as additional counter space. “The pantry is great for prepping ahead of time, and I can close it off if I need to,” Rita says. “I also have three dishwashers. I’m pretty good at hiding the mess.”
The best ingredients in
my kitchen are my friends.
They bring the spice!
—RITA PURCELL, HOMEOWNER

sheen. Reclaimed barn beams add rusticity overhead, while
double-smoked white oak floors give the appearance of age.

Blue and white glass mosaic tile in a Mediterranean-inspired
pattern is a refreshing counterpoint to all the wood. "With the
extensive use of stained cabinetry and the simplicity of the
Calacatta marble counters and backsplash, we knew we wanted
a pop somewhere," Wendy Blackband says. The eye-catching tile
dresses up the range hood and the entertaining side of the island.

Carrying the color scheme into the butler's pantry, the
Blackbands painted the cabinets there a rich navy blue and laid
blue, gray, and white hexagonal terra-cotta tile in a random
pattern underfoot. The pantry provides out-of-sight storage
for wine, dry goods, dishware, and cookbooks and also houses
additional appliances. A stainless-steel apron-front sink and ample
counter space make it easy for Rita to prep for meals and classes
without cluttering up the main kitchen. "I like to do things ahead
of time, and I really don't want my guests to help clean up," Rita
says. "I want people to relax and have fun when they are here.
They have enough to do at home."

Designer Insights: Uncluttered View
It is possible to have plenty of amenities and a
streamlined kitchen. Here's how the design team
hid hardworking elements in plain sight.

• Disguise appliances. Custom panels help
refrigerators and other large appliances recede
into the cabinetry. Appliance garages and nooks
are ideal for smaller items, such as mixers and
coffeemakers.

• Make utilitarian elements beautiful. When
clad in glass mosaic tile, the professional-style
range hood—essential for a chef's kitchen—
becomes an artistic focal point.

• Visually connect rooms and elements with
like colors, finishes, and styles for harmony
and easy transition. A palette of soft blues and
browns supports the Purcell home's modern
Mediterranean style.
CHEF’S SPECIAL
Pages 36–43


Interior design: Wendy and Gregg Blackband, Rachel Azzolina, lead designer, Blackband Design, Costa Mesa, California; 949/872-2234; blackbanddesign.com.


Professional pantry organization: Katie Koentje, The Neat Method, San Diego; 858/952-9850; neatmethod.com for a location near you.
