



A kitchen to live in

BY MARIA LAPIANA

A true “family room” emerges from
a practical budget and a taste for simplicity



IT LOOKS CONTEMPORARY, FEELS COMFORTABLE And it's just the right size for Sophie Piesse, who enjoys spending time in the kitchen with her son, Marcus.

A first home, to many, is nothing more than a way station. A test print. A toe-dip into the ocean of investing. To architect Sophie Piesse, however, her first home is nearly perfect. And her kitchen, a thoughtfully designed “family room,” is the heart of the home they built on a tight lot and an even tighter budget.

It is a purposeful place that meets every requirement she has ever had for a kitchen: It's practical and pleasing but not showy. Open, contemporary, environmentally friendly. And just large enough for cooking, eating, and entertaining.

Walk through the full-light front door (see sidebar, p. 51) and you're in the hub of the passive-solar house Sophie shares with her husband, Robert Joyner, and their 2-year-old son, Marcus. At 260 square feet, the kitchen/dining area feels more spacious than it is. Two banks of wide, south-facing windows along the front wall offer views of the street and a small park.

“We live here because we like the neighborhood,” says Sophie. “And we live here,” she adds, with a nod toward the kitchen, “because we love this space.”

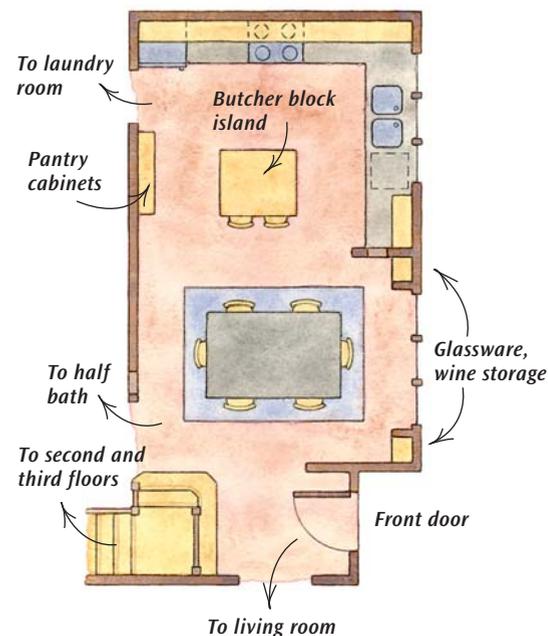
Function first...style a close second

Because Sophie and Rob both like to cook, the working side of the kitchen had to be highly functional. “We thought about what we like to cook and why we like to prepare it,” she says. “We thought about the best place to store things and how to cook and still talk with other people in the room.”

Countertops form a wide “L” on two walls, and an island with a pair of stools sits opposite, creating a small work triangle that is roomy enough for two cooks.

The island is topped with standard 1-inch butcher block with a simple lemon-oil finish. Towel bars from Häfele were mounted underneath. Plumbing lines installed under the island allow for a prep sink, should they decide to add one in the future.

The room has a subtle Scandinavian feel but with more warmth. Natural materials, hints of color, contemporary lines, and a mix of textures combine to create a space that invites a visit, a conversation, a cup of tea.



A KITCHEN THAT WORKS

Efficiency and an open floor plan allow husband and wife to share the work area, visit with company while they cook, and move in and out of the kitchen easily.

PARTICULAR ABOUT APPLIANCES

This was our first home, and we were on a tight budget. We both like to cook, so there were practical needs that had to be met and a number of things to consider when it came time to choose appliances.

A SINK WITH A DRAIN BOARD I grew up in Australia, and this made a couple of things important to me that aren't standard here. One was a built-in drain board. I knew it would come at a premium, but if I was going to be at this sink several times every day, it had to be right.

The Blanco sink I chose has two bowls—one large, one small. The smaller sink has a built-in colander, and the larger one has a knob that controls the stopper, allowing me to drain it without putting my arm in dirty dishwater.

I chose a Grohe faucet for its simple, elegant design. It also has a retractable spray arm and a high neck for filling large pots. The pair cost about \$900, but to me it was worth every penny.

The Bosch dishwasher we chose is energy-efficient and very quiet, which is important in an open-plan house.

A DUAL-FUEL RANGE My second Australianism was the need to cook with gas, but Rob wanted an electric oven because he feels it cooks more evenly. The economical solution was the dual-fuel range from Frigidaire's Professional Series, which has a clean built-in look.

A TALL, SKINNY FRIDGE At 2 feet wide and 2 feet deep, the refrigerator from ConServ saved a foot of counter space, and because it is 6½ feet tall, it made better use of the vertical space. Its capacity isn't huge by today's standards, and it's not frost-free, but it has the fridge on the top, which we love, and a large freezer with drawers on the bottom. We have had to defrost the fridge only once in four years. It is very quiet, and it runs on about \$45 a year. We buy a lot of our food fresh and don't buy in bulk, so the capacity has never been an issue, even when we have fed 75 people at a party.

—Sophie Piesse,
architect and homeowner



COOKING MADE EASY
The homeowners were able to find kitchen appliances that met all their requirements. The sink has an integral drain board, the range has a gas cooktop and an electric oven, and the energy-saving refrigerator is tall and narrow with the freezer on the bottom.





A CLEVER USE OF MATERIALS MAKES THE KITCHEN “CUSTOM” AT A FRACTION OF THE PRICE

Some of Sophie’s secrets: mixing and matching cabinet components, and adding a beveled maple edge and a hand-painted-tile backsplash to simple laminate countertops.

The stainless-topped dining table is surrounded by simple straight-back beech chairs. “I love to mix materials. I like stainless with mostly blond woods, but you don’t want too many different textures,” Sophie says.

The brick-red concrete floor, with radiant heat, gives the room an earthy quality, but this kitchen gets its professional look from stainless-steel appliances, Calphalon cookware hanging from a pot rack over the island, stainless-steel-glazed tiles behind the stove, and streamlined beech cabinets.

In fact, all the cabinetry is stock from Ikea, but you’d never know it. Sophie and Rob mixed and matched pieces (it’s called Kvadrat but is no longer available) and created cabinetry that looks custom, at a price they could afford. They added some doors—with both plain and wire-embedded glass fronts—and took away others. They changed the hardware, and in the dining area, from a pair of narrow cabinets, they devised two unique pieces that hold pottery, vases, serving dishes, and wine.

The countertops are a charcoal-colored laminate from Nevamar dressed up with beveled maple edges and hand-painted backsplash tiles from Australia.

A narrow shelf made of stock, stain-grade trim was built in under the window on the sink wall. It gives Sophie all the room she needs to add some small personal touches along the 3-inch-deep sill.

“I like smaller, better design,” she says. “You come in, and you can relate to a space. It’s comfortable right away.” 

Maria LaPiana is associate editor.

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A DOOR FOR PRIVACY AND LIGHT

For our south-facing front door, we wanted full-length glass to maximize our daylight and solar gain. We realized over time, however, that we needed a little more privacy than the door allowed. Not wanting to lose the light, we decided to keep the door and just change the glass.

I love sandblasted glass, but I didn’t want a manufactured design. I wanted something personal, so I designed it myself and found Clear Vue Glass in Durham, N.C., to make it for me. I learned that they could create a new, insulated, double-glazed sheet of glass and install it into the existing door. They put the sandblasted texture inside the insulated unit, which makes cleaning it much easier.

I wanted the design to be fun and functional. The basis for my design is a simple pattern of squares. The circles gave me the opportunity to create peep holes—one is at a good height for Rob and me, and the other is in the lower part of the door for our son. The long vertical rectangle will allow him a space to look out as he grows.

The cost of the insulated glass unit, tempering, sandblasting, freight, and installation ran to about \$900.

—S.P.

