

# Sweet Success

Good planning is the key ingredient in this confectioner's kitchen remodel

BY MARY-ELLEN FRIEDLAND



**A**s a chocolatier and trained pastry chef, I spend a lot of time in the kitchen. And because I love making chocolates, I managed to do it for years in the too-small, poorly designed kitchen of my Maryland home, storing my tools and equipment in nooks and crannies all over the house. Not a day went by that I didn't imagine what it would be like to have an efficient kitchen with lots of storage and room to entertain family and friends.

Finally, my husband, David, and I decided it was time to tackle the remodel. Over the years, we'd gathered pictures of kitchens we liked and made lists of the features we wanted in our kitchen, but our architect, Tom Manion of nearby Bethesda, Md., suggested we start by taking an inventory of what *wasn't* working in our existing kitchen. That was easy:



- The room was tight and confining.
- The lighting was bad.
- I had no place to store my collection of tools.
- I had no space dedicated to baking.
- The work-flow pattern was awkward.
- There was no room for socializing.
- The kitchen was hard to keep clean.

Looking at our list, we concluded we needed to overhaul the existing kitchen as well as remodel the areas around it.

### Finding light and a place for everything

Since we have nearby neighbors and our house is situated on a lot with no view, Tom came up with ingenious ways to bring in light while preserving a sense of privacy. He designed a steeply pitched roof with two skylights,

he used glass blocks behind the stove, and he placed rectangular windows along the bottom of the upper cabinets to bring more light onto the counters.

To determine how we would outfit our new, light-filled room, I thought carefully about how I spend my time in the kitchen. I melt chocolate and butter, warm eggs to be whipped into cakes, and cook meals at the stove, so I wanted a large central cooktop. I also use my mixer all the time, and I shape, roll, and cut dough frequently, so it was clear I could use lots of counter space.

Since I'm constantly pulling out rolling pins, cake pans, cookie sheets, candy molds, utensils, cooling racks, tart pans, and parchment paper, I wanted cabinets and drawers close at hand. We decided on custom cabinets because they would allow me to create the perfect storage spots for my vast variety of tools.

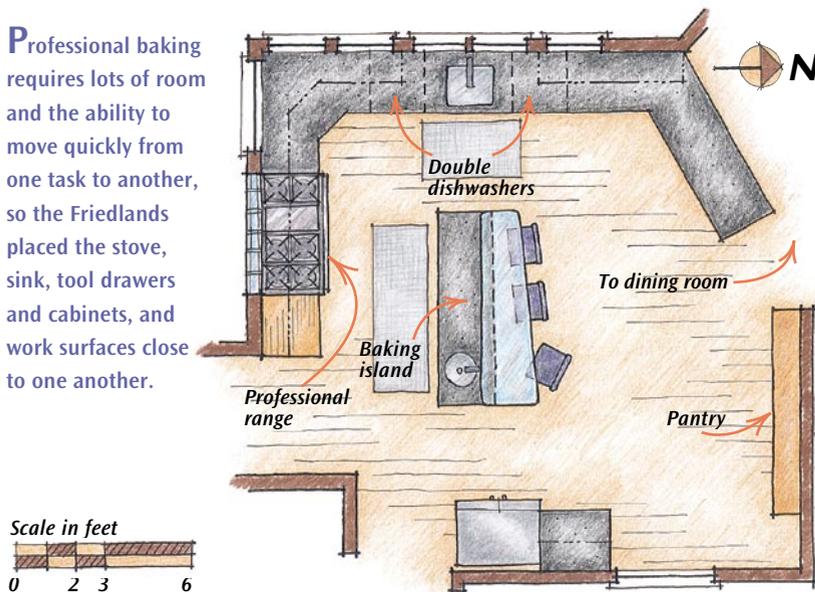
**EAT DESSERT FIRST** *With lots of counter space, an abundance of drawers, a professional range, and a baking island at the heart of her new kitchen, the author creates distinctive handmade chocolates at home.*

**COOKING LIGHT** Skylights, glass block over the stove, and shallow undercabinet windows flood the kitchen with natural light.



## STANDING ROOM MOSTLY

Professional baking requires lots of room and the ability to move quickly from one task to another, so the Friedlands placed the stove, sink, tool drawers and cabinets, and work surfaces close to one another.



My baking center island is where I store the items I use all the time. A drawer on one end of the island houses my mixer on a lift, allowing me to easily bring it up to counter height. The top drawer in the island is long and wide but shallow; it's where I keep frequently used baking and cooking utensils. Under it, two more divided drawers store half-sheet pans, parchment, and other paper products, as well as pie and tart pans.

The last drawer is long, wide, deep—and flexible. I can make it into as many as 10 sections by moving around wooden drawer dividers. This is where I keep the numerous gadgets I don't use everyday.

Cake pans and wire cooling racks are stored in a cabinet with vertical dividers designed to accommodate a variety of sizes. This prevents items from being buried in the bottom of a drawer. A spice rack drawer is located next to the stove, underneath the wooden chopping block.

Cabinets separating the kitchen and dining area hold numerous platters, flat serving pieces, and glasses on

## MAKE A FEW LISTS, CHECK THEM TWICE

I'd recommend that any homeowner who has an eye on a new kitchen take the time to do the following:

► **Make three lists.** Write down everything you must have, everything you think you want, and everything you think you don't need. Refer to your lists regularly, add to and subtract from them freely. When you realize your lists have not changed in a while, call the architect.

► **Listen to the experts.** Choose your architect, designer, and contractors carefully, and once you hire them, trust them. A case in point: For years, I was determined to have black-granite counters in my kitchen. My experts told me repeatedly it would show every crumb, fingerprint, and tiny water spot. I dug my heels in, until the owner of the granite company told me I'd live to regret the decision. So I changed my mind and went with a patterned gray stone instead. I thank them every day.

► **Take inventory with blueprints in hand.** Make a list of all of your kitchen supplies, then look at your blueprints and decide where every item will go. Finding a home for everything is worth the extra effort.

► **Consider the big picture.** Think about activities other than food prep that take place in your kitchen. Do you enjoy having friends and family close at hand while you're preparing a meal? Then you'll like an open floor plan. If you prefer a little calm and some space while putting the finishing touches on a meal, then choose a layout that allows for more separation between cook and company. Will children be hanging out in the kitchen? Then by all means, incorporate space for them into the overall design.

► **Budget for what's important to you.** The most expensive part of our renovation turned out to be what I love most—the custom-designed cabinets. To make room for them in the budget, we selected standard-size windows from catalogs and reconfigured them in different ways to get a custom look without added expense. Spend your money where it means the most. —M-E.F.



**MIXING IT UP** Mary-Ellen's much-used (and heavy) mixer (left) is stored in a cabinet in the baking island. A hinged shelf swings up easily, making the mixer accessible at a moment's notice. Below, dark-gray patterned granite doesn't show fingerprints and stains, and it's the perfect work surface for rolling out dough.



**TUCKING AWAY TOOLS** Mary-Ellen designed the cabinets and drawers in her baking island with adjustable, vertical dividers for cooling racks, trays, and odd-size tools. She considered her kitchen activities carefully and placed her most frequently used kitchen equipment where she could get at it quickly and easily.

the dining side, making them readily available when I'm setting the table. Two floor-to-ceiling cupboards provide plenty of pantry room.

### Making a warm, welcoming space

Finally, it was important to us that our kitchen be attractive and welcoming as well as functional. Tom, along with our interior designer, Linda Steimke, and our builder, Jeff Brown, added trim and details throughout the first floor that enhanced the whole look of the space. In the end, we were pleased with the way the project came together. I got everything I wanted in my new kitchen—and it looks great. 

*Mary-Ellen Friedland creates distinctive handmade chocolates in her Potomac, Md., kitchen.*

*For more information, see Resources, page 86.*