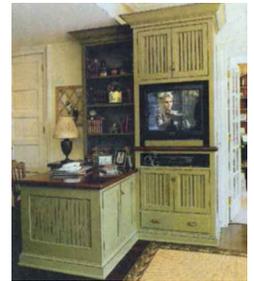


## TRADE SECRETS

Julie V. Iovine



## Designers Arrive in the Kitchen with Creature Comforts

*"Wooden counters are a great investment. They stand up to use so well, like a leather armchair."*

**SANDRA NUNNERLEY**  
Interior designer

SOME modern kitchens are geared up with enough equipment to retool the Mir space station, yet still manage to invoke the well bred charm of Jane Austin's parlor. Tea anyone? It can be steamed up on the Aga or zapped in the microwave oven, then served in a room newly commodious with a kitchen sofa, pillows, even an armchair.

The designer has arrived in the kitchen bringing an eye for creature comforts and materials once reserved for showier parts of the house (yes, even the limestone from the entrance hall). The last barrier between rooms has finally come down.

Never have there been more soft, rounded edges and waxable woods than in the state-of-the-designer's-art kitchen by Sandra Nunnerly, a Manhattan interior designer, for Annemarie and Michael Garstin and their three children. Working with Douglas Moyer, a Sag Harbor, N.Y., Architect, Ms. Nunnerly took advantage of a level sophisticated craftsmanship more commonly found in other parts of the house. Using Strong cornices and tongue-and-groove paneling for the cabinetry and turned edges on work tables, the designers have created an elegantly inviting ambiance for the once nitty-gritty working kitchen. Thus, the return of the copper sink from the tool shed, to be used as a basin for cut flowers.

"My goal was to make it look like I'd never been there, while making everything work in an absolutely efficient way," said Ms. Nunnerly, who with the architect reshaped half the ground floor of a 1906 shingle styled cottage in East Hampton to accommodate a sumptuous 950-square foot kitchen and eating area, sweeping from the formal front to the terraced back of the house.

At the room's center, an Island establishes the kitchens roots as solidly late 20th century American. But the island is not the standard rectangle recognizable in every prime-time situation comedy. It has an angular z-shape and, with eight useable sides and a Five Star range in the middle. The island has two heights - one at chopping height for preparing vegetables; the other, a limestone counter eight inches higher, for barstyle meals on the fly. (The limestone makes a great looking buffet for hot dishes straight out of the oven.)

The original old-fashioned kitchen had been exceedingly dark and riddled with small unusable spaces. Ms. Garstin is the kind of weekend chef who wants her family and friends in close proximity when she cooks. The most striking idea was to add a new bay with built-in window seats, casement windows and a five foot ceiling. "We barely use the dining room anymore, even for parties," said Ms. Garstin, who owns a public relations agency in Manhattan.

For the families like the Garstins, said Johnny Grey, the author

of "The Art of Kitchen Design" (Cassell, 1996), the big kitchen is not a luxury, but the last rendezvous and thoroughfare. "So much of daily life, not just socializing but the coming and going, is focused on the kitchen that in ten years it will probably have a different name," he said, adding that the kitchen is no longer the room in the back. "It's the largest downstairs room in the house, pulling in elements from all the other rooms around it."

As romantic as it looks, the Garstin kitchen works with commando efficiency. Ms. Nunnerly asked Ms. Garstin to run through the daily drill: Here's a bag of groceries from the car. Now what? First off, there had to be plenty of clear counter space near the two most likely ports of entry, for the grocery bags. Within easy reach of the counters, two Sub-Zero refrigerators were installed: one for food, one for drinks. The sink for the vegetable preparation is on the island next to the stove. "After you clean the veggies, you can turn right around a plop them into the pot," Ms. Garstin said. For anyone brandishing a colander of hot dripping pasta, its a relief to know there's also a 30 inch wide porcelain farm sink across from the range. A hand hammered copper bar sink was positioned by the door to the dining room.

Precision planning has not translated into a steely streamlined esthetic. Ms. Nunnerly used careful design detailing and a lot of woodwork to disguise the hardware with sitting-room elegance. Even the refrigerators are paneled, and the counters are made up of mahogany. The designer, who grew up in a creaky old house in New Zealand, said she shared her enthusiasm for using lots of wood with Ms. Garstin, a close friend, who was born in Scotland. Ms. Nunnerly pointed out that the wood surfaces and stained floors add softness and warmth, making the kitchen feel inviting throughout the year.

"So what if it gets a burn mark here and there," Ms. Nunnerly said, scoffing at the notion that the wood might be impractical. "Americans are such cleanliness freaks. Imperfections are the soul of a beautiful house."

