

Kitchen Highlights
on the Bay

BY KEITH DEMPSTER



A workplace that gleams. *Part of an open plan, the kitchen's maple cabinets provide contrast to the polished-granite countertops and brushed stainless-steel appliances. Photo taken at A on floor plan. At right, the large island's water view makes it a good place to work and socialize. Photo taken at B on floor plan.*



Furniture-grade cabinetry, a wood-burning pizza oven and sleek details set this shiny kitchen apart

Charles and Karen Faber built their house right on Narragansett Bay for the light, the air and the great views. Despite the picturesque setting, the house is home to some serious business, most of it in the kitchen (photo facing page). An enthusiastic and talented cook, Karen wanted a state-of-the-art working environment outfitted with professional-grade appliances including a wood-burning brick oven (photo left, p. 80) and cabinetry as elegant in function as it is in appearance. Because of architect Shahin Barzin's open plan, the kitchen would have great water views, but it also would be in plain view of the living and dining areas and would have to complement the appearance of those rooms.

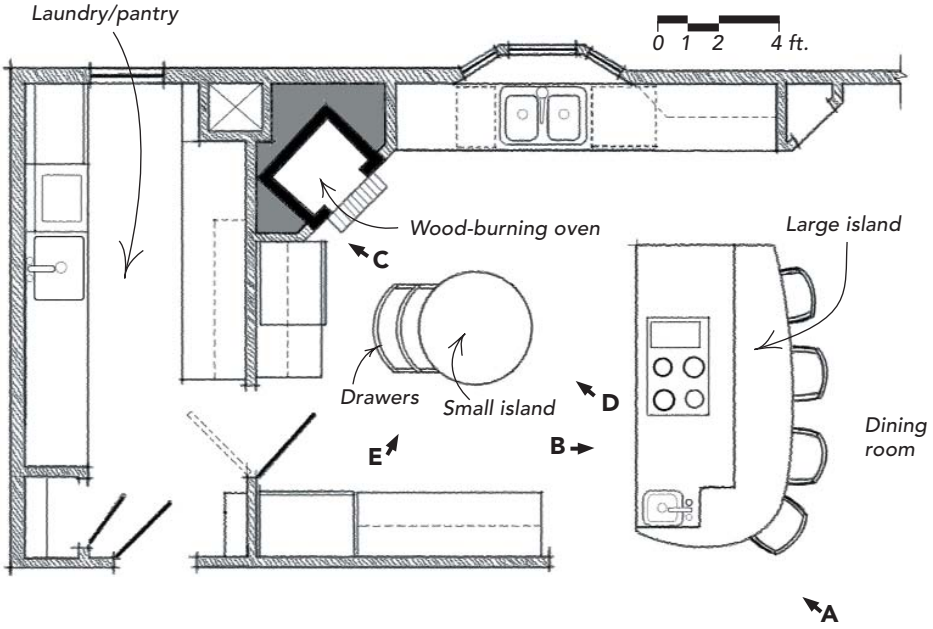
In a nutshell, the strategy was to hide what could be hidden and to put the rest on display. The hiding part was relatively easy: The adjacent laundry room also doubles as a pantry (floor plan, p. 80), where inexpensive stock cabinets provide abundant storage. Putting the kitchen on display took some doing. Thompson & Brouillette Inc., the company I work for, was hired to build the cabinetry.

Cabinetry complements open plan

The Fabers wanted maple for their kitchen cabinets; the wood goes well with the white-ash flooring and reflects light from the adjacent windows. We used a clear catalyzed

THE GASTRONOMIC ARENA

Ringed with a range, various ovens, a sink and a refrigerator, the small circular island is the hub of the workspace, allowing the resident chef to have easy access to the entire room. The larger island, a combination of casual seating and serious cooktop, forms a boundary between the dining room and kitchen.





Curved doors slide around the island. *A collaboration between the shop foreman and hardware manufacturer led to the design of the curved track that keeps the doors rolling smoothly. Photos taken at D and E on floor plan.*



FEEDBACK



Wood-fired brick oven vents out and up. *One of the kitchen's specialized appliances, the oven traps radiant heat in its dome and vents smoke and hot air through the door to a hood. The fire's ashes are pushed to the back of the oven and replaced with a pizza, a roast or loaves of bread. Photo taken at C on floor plan.*

WOOD-FIRED OVEN

I have always been an avid cook. For about 20 years, I lived in a 17th-century house in Italy, where I did all my baking in the kitchen's original wood-burning oven. When my husband and I began to plan our new house in the States, I knew that I wanted a similar oven.

After a lot of research, I found Earthstone. I chose the smallest model (#60), a preassembled unit designed for interior use. The oven cost $2,100, plus an additional $500 to ship it to the East Coast.

The most unusual aspect of the oven is that the flue is on the outside (photo left). Earthstone founder Maurice Sabbagh said that when you design an oven, you can put the flue in the cooking chamber that's accessible only through a long, unwieldy tunnel; of course, the problem with an internal flue is that the oven loses heat. The alternative is to use the oven's mouth to exhaust the fire. In this case, the trapezoidal hood just above the oven's mouth collects the smoke and directs it into the flue; the dome-shaped oven retains all the heat. So far, I've never had any smoke in the house from the oven.

I use the oven for just about anything that goes in a conventional oven: bread, cakes, casseroles and pizzas (of course), as well as roasts and steaks, which are cooked on a grill insert. Last year's Thanksgiving turkey took 2½ hours to cook, and the oven's high uniform heat didn't dry out the bird.

I build a hardwood fire in the middle of the dome and monitor the temperature on the oven's exterior thermometer. If I haven't used the oven recently, it might take a couple of hours to reach the desired temperature, but it retains heat for hours afterward. To cook a pizza, I let the fire die down, push the ashes to the back of the oven, wipe down the oven floor and put the pizza right on the bricks.

The oven gets a lot of use in the winter, but it sees a lot of use in the summer, too. The best part is that I don't have to clean it: Spills are incinerated and shoveled out with the ashes.

—Karen Faber lives in North Kingstown, Rhode Island.

Floor-plan drawing: Paul Perreault

lacquer finish that holds up well to the heavy demands of kitchen work.

The architect's design uses plenty of open shelves—both wood and glass—in a variety of configurations. The glass shelves are supported on stainless posts made in a local metal shop and set into solid-maple brackets, which in turn are set into maple-plywood panels that amplify the furnished look of the room. Upper cabinets have doors with sandblasted-glass panels that give the illusion of an opening but don't reveal much of the cabinets' contents.

Small details also contribute to the kitchen. Recessed lights in the ceiling give Karen plenty of task lighting and make the room glow at night; hanging over the islands, the pendant lighting made by Herstal [S] has the right balance of simplicity and elegance that suits the room. Also, the rail and stile widths of the doors are proportionally larger than normal kitchen doors, giving the cabinet fronts a more solid look. The simple brushed-chrome drawer and door pulls from Häfele [S] are based on a sample the architect saw while traveling in England. We've found that Blum or Hettich undermount slides [S] work best on any pullouts or drawers.

Islands big and small

The kitchen plan revolves around two islands, one in the room's center, the other a larger structure between the kitchen and the dining area. To enhance the furniture effect, both islands sit atop stainless-steel legs rather than toe kicks. Like the surrounding counters, the tops are polished black granite.

The centerpiece of the kitchen—the circular island—started out square. It eventually evolved into a circle to ease traffic flow between equipment and work centers. The architect likes to provide 42 in. of walking space between counter surfaces, with 36 in. as an absolute minimum. On the cooktop side, curved doors conceal canned and dry goods (top photos, facing page). At the other side of the island, a large drawer has storage space for food-processing equipment.

Clad with skins of thin stainless steel, the doors are made of ½-in. thick layers of poplar plywood that were bent over custom-made forms and glued with epoxy. The interior sides of the doors are veneered in maple. The two doors ride on custom-made track hardware codesigned by Häfele and our shop foreman, Greg Columbo.

The larger island is both a workstation and an informal dining area. Seating around the semicircular counter makes cooking on the six-burner range a social event as well as a culinary one. This island has plenty of storage space, too. Deep drawers just below the burners keep all Karen's pots and pans within easy reach. □

Keith Dempster is an associate at cabinetmakers Thompson & Brouillette Inc. of Providence, Rhode Island. Photos by Charles Bickford.

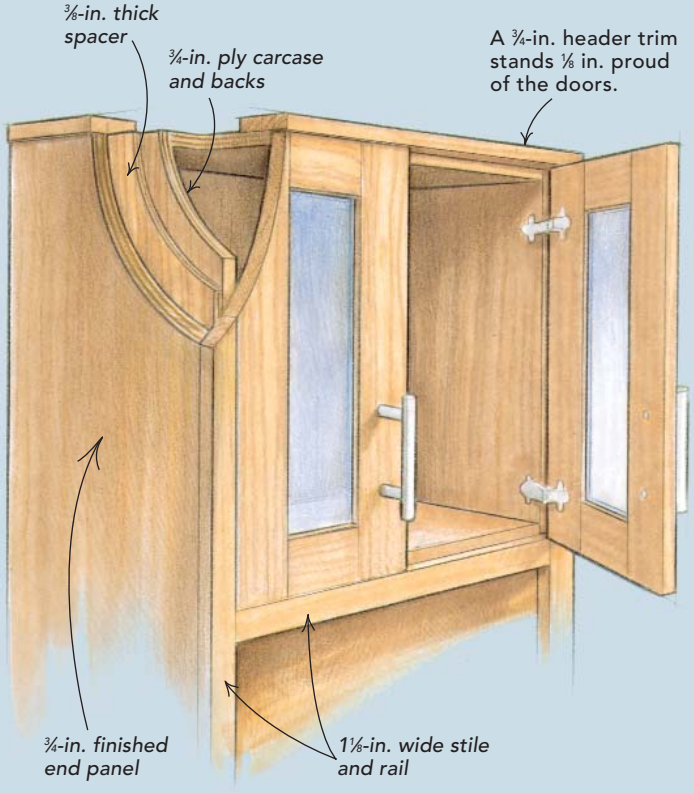
GREAT IDEA: EUROPEAN CABINETS WITH A FACE-FRAME LOOK



Our shop has worked to refine our cabinet engineering and construction to give our clients a better product. We start with a modified Eurostyle of cabinet. Carcase construction is ¾-in. plywood throughout, including backs and stretchers. When the back is screwed onto the cabinet, the assembly becomes extremely rigid. The racking that usually is associated with European cabinets just isn't there.

As in a traditional European cabinet, the doors are full overlay, but we then add end panels, fillers, undercounter moldings and crown headers that are installed ⅞ in. proud of the carcase (drawing right). This second layer of construction not only strengthens the cabinets as a face frame might, but it also creates a design whose doors are fully inset (and fully adjustable) into the clean lines of a modern cabinet.

—K. D.



ONLINE CONNECTION

Tour this kitchen on our Web site at www.finehomebuilding.com.

Sources

Wood-burning brick oven

Earthstone
www.earthstoneovens.com
(800) 840-4915

Cabinet hardware

Häfele
www.hafeleonline.com
(336) 889-2322

Blum
www.blum.com
(800) 438-6788

Hettich
www.hettichamerica.com
(800) 438-8424

Pendant lighting

Herstal
www.herstal.dk

Drawing this page: Bob La Pointe