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Designers' Kitchens

Three designers, three dream kitchens

By Barbara Winfield • Photography by Phillip Ennnis

A Complete Do-Over

Maria Bilotta Distefano of Bilotta Kitchens

When Maria Bilotta Distefano and her husband, George Distefano—each owners of their own home design/renovation businesses—purchased their home in North Salem, they knew they would have to make some pretty radical changes, starting with the kitchen.

"It was horrific," Bilotta says. "A bathroom opened up right into the eating area. The space was small, the cooking area crammed. Cabinets were an inexpensive stock—pickled oak—and were falling apart. And the appliances were completely out of date. It was a kitchen-company owner's worst nightmare." She should know. Along with siblings Regina Bilotta and Jim Bilotta, Maria owns and runs Bilotta Kitchens, a full-service kitchen and bath company that specializes in cabinetry design.

Bilotta wanted a kitchen that would not only accommodate her family's lifestyle but embrace the best of the products and designs out there. To achieve this, she asked Mel Elion, a top designer in Bilotta's Mamaroneck showroom for 10 years, to work with architect Terry Lennon of Somers and general contractor Fred Boehmer of Boehmer Homes of La Grangeville, New York, to bring her dream kitchen to life. Bilotta looked to her past to hone her vision, recalling boisterous family gatherings where everyone pitched in to make the meal. Thus, Elion included in her design a large banquette area for casual sit-down meals and a wide multi-purpose island with three stools, designed for both food preparation and light dining.

In terms of style, Bilotta favors a rustic aesthetic, complete with state-of-the-art appliances and top-of-the-line amenities. And number-one on her wish list: a pizza oven. The Old World "appliance" brings back special memories of pizza-making with her siblings, cousins, and grandfather, an Italian immigrant who brought a love of cooking with him from Arpino.

To accommodate Bilotta's request for a sophisticated country look, Elion recommended cherry cabinets from Bilotta Kitchens' private cabinet collection, with perimeter cabinets sporting custom inset doors of rustic cherry wood and an island of antique cherry. Green Verde Vecchio granite countertops and a soft moss shade for the walls complement the warm wood. Sixteen-by-sixteen-inch honed limestone tiles used for the floors have decorative metal inserts that match the copper tabletop in the banquette area (hand-made and finished by George Distefano) and other copper accents, such as the pizza oven's ledge.

A magnificent ivory-colored cherry hearth was designed to surround the 48-inch professional Wolf range. Behind the range, framed by the crackled tile backsplash from Waterworks, hangs an antique glass mirror with metal trim from Distefano's shop, GlasSolutions, a New York-based architectural glass and metal company. Besides providing an interesting focal point, installing a mirror behind the range has a practical purpose, allowing the chef to keep an eye on the often boisterous and energetic activities while cooking.

(Previous page) Maria Bilotta's 400-square-foot kitchen boasts a large hearth area with a stainless-steel dual-fuel range surrounded by crackled rectangular tiles, sconces, and an antique glass mirror. Over the range is a handy pot filler, an item frequently recommended by Bilotta for its ease of use. On the far wall next to the hearth stands a 48-inch side-by-side Sub-Zero refrigerator paneled in the same cherry as the cabinets. The generous island is equipped with an undermount Franke stainless-steel sink with a bronze oil-rubbed faucet by Rohl, a built-in ASKO dishwasher, and a double trash pull-out. The dining table's unique copper top, along with the copper trim on the ledge leading into the family room and along the edge of the pizza oven, are all custom made and finished by George Distefano at his custom-metal shop, Ornametal, based in Newburgh, New York.

The focal point of the kitchen is the wood-burning pizza oven by Earth Stone in California, used often by George and the couple's three children. To its right is a second sink and plenty of counter space for prepping and cooling the pizzas. An undercounter Sub-Zero beverage center is hidden behind a cabinet in this secondary prep area.