

fresh connection

At an Old Greenwich contemporary, a sleek kitchen scheme extends the family's cooking space to the great outdoors

by JUDY OSTROW photographs STACY BASS styling KARIN LIDBECK



right and opposite:
New, larger openings, frosted-
glass upper cabinet doors, and
a glass backsplash reflect
and amplify natural light.





Putnam Kitchens installed the Cuisines Laurier cabinets, fabricated with linear-grained amber wood. "Jill wanted modern looks and low maintenance, so we specified a brushed-finish granite and three-quarter-inch thickness," says Kuehler.

On an evening stroll down Greenwich Avenue a couple of years ago, homeowner Jill Vollmer spotted a large flat-screen television inside one of the retail spaces. It was playing a slide show of beautiful building and renovation projects, and she took note of the architect's name. The next day she called Laura Kaehler.

Jill and her husband, Chris, had purchased a 1981 Old Greenwich contemporary a few years before. They loved it but had finally decided to make some improvements so that it would function more effectively for their young family. An understanding architect was the final element of the renovation equation.

"We like the clean look of modern design, which is why we chose a contemporary house," says Jill. "Laura does all kinds of work, but as soon as we met, I realized that she was a great listener. She quickly figured out and responded to our particular needs and taste."

For starters, the kitchen would need a better layout, with space for storage, cooking, dining, and a "control center" for Jill's computer and paperwork. In addition, the Vollmers grew up in the West and wanted to give their kitchen an indoor/outdoor connection.

"When they bought the house, it had a small deck, with a long single run of stairs to the backyard. This design made the separation between the kitchen and the steep, down-sloped landscape seem even larger," recalls architect Laura Kaehler. "Jill couldn't work in the kitchen and keep track of her children outside from the windows. The

below: All the angles: Small spaces that work hard include the island, with its four-inch-thick rock maple counter; a computer center for Laura, with a frosted-glass enclosed pantry tucked into the adjacent corner; and space-saving, horizontal-lift upper cabinets.



below: With a quick move on the double deck, the outdoor kitchen/dining space can morph into casual and elegant seating enhanced by furniture from Henry Hall Designs and sconces from Studio Ghidini.



deck itself wasn't really large enough for cooking, dining and entertaining. So a complete redesign was in order."

What emerged was a simple, bright, and functional space that transitions smoothly from interior to outside, finished with a carefully selected palette of materials that suit the Vollmers' style preferences.

Says Richard Basic, a member of the Kaehler team who functioned as project manager, "Jill was not only interested in looks; she wanted the materials in the new kitchen to perform as promised. She tested out countertop materials with all kinds of foods and liquids, to make sure they delivered on the 'easy maintenance' claims."

An expansive transition from the interior to the outdoors completes the update of the Vollmers' living spaces. Large windows and the use of glass for upper cabinet doors and a backsplash reflect and amplify natural light.

The new double-level deck that Kaehler designed creates a natural flow from house to backyard. It replaces the awkward backyard slope with a thousand square feet of cooking, dining, and relaxation areas that step down gradually to grade. The plan offers spatial flexibility that provides for every possible function, from playdates to quiet evenings in front of the outdoor fireplace. The architect even designed a large planter between deck levels, then filled it with ornamental grasses, to better relate the large deck area to the landscape.

"It gives the deck a look of nature for all four seasons," notes Jill. "We love this layout. It gives us clean expanses of space, inside and out, and the house meets all our expectations. We enjoy every bit of it."

RESOURCES

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