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THIS PAGE Both Gelbers got what they wanted in their new kitchen: He customized his one-person workstation; she specified the cabinetry, lighting, and goose-neck spray. OPPOSITE PAGE Splashes of color against the contemporary neutrals of the kitchen make the family room a welcoming space.

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD BY KATRINA WITTKAMP





SLEEK EFFICIENCY

Since they moved into their Victorian farmhouse in a North Shore suburb in 1985, Frank and Sandy Gelber have gradually increased its size to suit their changing needs. Two years ago, it was the kitchen and dining room's turn. The couple kept the work space the same size, but altered its equipment and remodeled a family room a few steps down to serve as a living/eating extension.

Because Frank, the family chef, likes the look of old, while Sandy, in charge of clean up, likes new, each gave a wish list to kitchen designer Mick De Giulio of de Giulio Kitchen Design in Wilmette and Chicago, and to architects John Leonard and Elissa Morgante of Morgante Wilson Architects in Chicago. "Frank knew how he wanted the kitchen to function; I knew how I wanted it to look to keep it clean and have it work with other rooms and the outdoors," Sandy says.

Frank selected a range with double convection ovens, six burners, and griddle. "My mother was a dietician, and I helped her cook growing up. I was also one of eight brothers," says Frank. In contrast to the growing number of kitchens that offer multiple work zones, he wanted the kitchen to be a one-person workstation. He also requested granite countertops since they stay colder for the baking he does.

Sandy's list included stainless-steel cabinetry, a professional goose-neck sprayer, square recessed lighting fixtures, and under- and over-cabinet lighting. "I was willing to have Windex in my hands forever," she says. De Giulio convinced her to go with aluminum cabinets since they show fewer fingerprints and still convey contemporary verve. He ran them high to emphasize the room's verticality—ceilings are 10 feet high in the kitchen and 12.5 feet in the family room.

The couple selected sophisticated black granite countertops. Oak floors with a dark oak inset and mahogany banding bring old and new rooms together. A zinc band in the floor adds modern zip. A microwave, set into a cabinet in the family room, is handy for re-heating food and making popcorn. The family room's lively color palette, with the patterned rug designed with the couple's initials, gives it just the panache the Gelbers wanted.