

"Working behind our enormous island, I often feel like a bartender, reading the wants and needs and listening to the stories of friends and family who belly up for a drink, a nosh or a chat." — BETH PILAR STRONGWATER





the cook at home

A Cordon Bleu-trained chef designs her kitchen of a lifetime in Louisville

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MY FIRST DINNER PARTY featured *The Silver Palate Cookbook*'s raspberry vinaigrette, and shrimp with apples and snow peas served on my grandmother's china to three girlfriends. I was 13. So it rings true to say that the desire to feed people delicious, beautiful food is in my bones. Since that time, I have dreamed of creating my ideal kitchen, where people move comfortably, laugh easily and want to linger. And where, of course, I could cook like a madwoman.

It just took me a few decades to get there. In that time, I had studied interior architecture at California College of the Arts, obtained culinary and pastry degrees from Le Cordon Bleu Paris and co-owned a bakery in New York City. I moved to Colorado in 2011, but it wasn't until 2016, when my husband, Lee (also an accomplished cook), and I decided to remodel our 1980s McStain house in Louisville, that I had the opportunity to make my dream kitchen a reality.

We chose Harvey Hine of **HMH Architecture** to turn our dark split-level into an open, light-filled modern home. We loved Harvey's work and his ability to create beautiful functional homes that are both livable and timeless. Harvey understood that maximizing the views from the kitchen was the design priority. He gave us a completely new environment built around the existing studs.

Lee and I love to entertain and wanted a utility-driven, modern kitchen that could accommodate spontaneous dinner parties,

with a Scandinavian-inspired and Zen-like feel. A space that invited others to participate or just belly up to the bar and enjoy the view of the mountains and the intoxicating smells from the kitchen. Three words guided our project: functionality, simplicity and beauty. Here's how we did it. »

BETH'S NEW KITCHEN



Finding the right overhead hood was tricky. It needed to be sleek, so as not to disturb the view, and come with a large enough capture area to handle our heavy surface cooking.

THE OLD KITCHEN



The original awkward layout, had few windows, and a wall that separated the small kitchen, dining and living rooms. Hine added a large bank of windows and removed the wall with pantry at left, creating a single open living/ dining/kitchen space.

INGREDIENT LIST FOR OUR DREAM KITCHEN

1. Functional spaces but not at the cost of beautiful design

2. Ergonomic and logical work flow, with essential tools in easy reach

3. Lots of linear feet of countertop for multiple cutting boards
4. Highly efficient appliances and easy-to-clean surfaces

5. Custom storage for our glassware collection and loads of small cooking tools and appliances

6. A place for everything, so countertops are cleared to
- keep the focus on the view and a rotating display of beautiful and inspiring objects

7. Lots of natural light and dimmable, focused task lighting

8. A sink on the communal island and a cooktop facing the view



Having scrutinized all of our storage needs down to the inch, we have created a place for every dish, tool, pantry item and pot in the house as well as a coffee station and bar. Everything is within quick and easy reach but can be hidden away to keep the focus on the view and a feeling of serenity. »

AARON COLUSSI (TOP 2)

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BUDGET THOUGHTS

ITEM NO. 1: APPLIANCES

Within the budget of every renovation, there are many possible hierarchies. For our project, appliances got the largest piece of the pie. Namely, Thermador's Freedom induction stove has the industry's largest and entirely usable surface. It fits two 12-inch pans, a requirement for Lee's weekend brunch cooking. With exceptional responsiveness and precise controls, not to mention a wiped-clean-in-seconds surface, induction wins hands down over gas. In addition, the panel-ready, counter-depth Thermador refrigerator was a small fortune but worth every penny to achieve the sharp-lined casework wall that hides appliances and pantry storage in our open-plan space.

ITEM NO. 2: I FELL FOR KABI

With the remaining budget, custom cabinetry was out of the question. But I knew we could get a high-quality, extremely customizable product for a reasonable price from Denver-based **Kabi**. (I researched several places before coming to this decision.) Nancy Bean helped us create a design that made the most of our space and specific needs, like a coffee and tea station, a pull-out bar/pantry and a multitude of under-counter drawers, since the demo of an old wall added light but removed our pantry. Our contractor, Thomas Ramsey of **WestMark Design & Construction**, presided over a fastidious and meticulous install.



There is a sequence to our dinner parties: Guests start out on our island barstools for appetizers, then proceed to the snug banquette—a cocoon of down pillows—to eat. After dessert, when the candles have all burned down, we slide off the cushions and onto the living room sectional (handily a few feet away) for a horizontal departure.