



With an active family and social life, ample seating was a must for the Loftins. An expansive farm table, breakfast bar and comfortable TV area allow for multiple activities in a shared space.



kitchen coterie

Intentionally or not, a family kitchen is the ultimate multi-purpose room. It alternately acts as a home office and conference venue, TV room, homework station and crafts studio, as well as the place where meals are prepared and enjoyed. So when Karen and Jeff Loftin set out to build the Biltmore Forest house they share with their two teenage daughters, they got real about the most important room in the home.

“We needed plenty of space for our whole family to hang out, because that’s where we live,” explains Karen. “In our previous house, we’d all be crowded around the little TV set in the kitchen, so I wanted a living space off the kitchen where everyone could spread out, lie on the couch, watch the TV and still be there with me while I was cooking dinner.”

BY KATE REYNOLDS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN WARNER



The keeping room in the Loftin's Biltmore Forest kitchen is awash in natural light from skylights in the cathedral ceiling and through French doors which lead to the solarium. The limestone mantel mimics the design of the range surround.

The challenge for architect Bill Ashe and interior designer Kathryn Long of Ambiance Interiors was to create a central hub that would be highly functional without appearing utilitarian. The solution was to treat the cooking station as the hearth, which both separates and joins the dining and family areas.

The surround for the six-burner Dacor gas range was treated as a mantel; its shape echoing the lines of the limestone fireplace in the keeping room. Anchoring the space, a large island provides ample workspace and plenty of storage while housing a built-in dishwasher and icemaker.

A peninsula, which separates the cooking area from the breakfast nook, contains a deep, porcelain farm sink, directly across from a smaller, stainless steel utility sink in the island. "We eat a lot of vegetarian foods, so we use a lot

of fresh ingredients," says Karen. "I can't believe how often, when Jeff and I are cooking together, we end up using both sinks at the same time."

With the preparation area front and center, a clean, uncluttered look was key. Kathryn and Karen chose modified French-country-style cabinetry from Mountain Showcase of Hendersonville, finished in a soft, buttery glaze. "The glaze gives the cabinets an aged look," notes Kathryn, "and it's also practical. It's not perfection to start with." This refined yet relaxed sensibility is complemented by Veneziano Gold granite from Mountain Marble and Granite. "It's formal, but simple," she adds.

The palette suits Karen's love of bright, airy spaces. "I like light — sunlight, light wood, soft colors," she says. Ambient light washes in during daylight hours through translucent, French lace curtains on the large bay windows, the skylights in the cathedral ceiling of the keeping room and the French doors of the solarium that lies just beyond it.

Using a pale, monochromatic background of creamy shades, Kathryn has punctuated the décor with carefully chosen deep hues in the distressed farm table and wrought-iron accents. Rustic textures, from woven rush chair seats to the wide, oak plank floors to rag rugs and runners by local weaver Susan Eggerton create richness without pretense.

With such welcoming ambiance, it isn't surprising that everyone congregates here, so ample seating was a must. In addition to the leisurely sofa and chairs in the TV area, a trio of high-backed stools line the counter of the peninsula, the table can easily accommodate eight, and two stools are cleverly tucked beneath the corners of the island, making good use of otherwise wasted space.

The abundance of seating options allows family and guests to be present, but out of the way. "We do live in our kitchen," notes Karen, "and if it's not designed to be comfortable, you find people just leaning around on the cabinets, which is simply not where you want them to be."

Not that Karen can't handle a crowd. In addition to the range oven, the kitchen features a second convection oven, as well as a microwave and a warming drawer. A spacious, separate walk-in pantry boasts a stand-alone freezer and a backup refrigerator. "I'm really a functional cook," says Karen. "I wasn't looking for a gourmet kitchen per se — but I have everything I need to be a more avid cook when I have the time."

And while the Loftins enjoy entertaining, it is in the quiet, more intimate moments that the kitchen serves them best. "On a weekend morning, I'll make cinnamon rolls or my husband will take over and make pancakes. We'll watch a movie, read the papers and just hang out with the dogs by the fire. We're all so relaxed here. It's a great feeling." □



A central island anchors the kitchen, providing flexible storage options and incorporating two corner stools to make use of otherwise wasted space.