

Practical Luxe

BY KATE O'CONNOR
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID DIETRICH

It has been said that convenience is the ultimate luxury. If that's the case, then Larry and Mary Arbaugh are living the lush life. Consider their kitchen and keeping room suite, for example. Bright and airy, it has the welcoming feel of a mountain inn — rustic, yet elegant — inviting the visitor to sit, relax and take in the valley view.

You wouldn't immediately be aware of the carefully considered ergonomics, the myriad of functional considerations integrated by a talented team of design professionals into a solution that appears effortless. But spend some time with Mary in the kitchen and you realize the power of good planning.

Inspired by the homeowners' desire for the welcoming feeling of a "mountain inn," Platt Architecture designed this combination kitchen and keeping room, infusing it with light from high clearstory windows. Kathryn Long and Ambience Interiors dressed the space with classic, yet comfortable furnishings from Lee, upholstered in their own fabric line.





Reclaimed materials from Antique Hardwoods and Beams provide texture — and a sense of heritage — in the Arbaugh kitchen. The floors throughout the home are salvaged oak with walnut stain. Antique wormy chestnut was used to create the custom center island, handcrafted by Mountain Showcase and topped with Island Coffee Brown granite from Mountain Marble and Granite.

Transplanted North Carolinians, the Arbaughs had been longing for the mountains and creating their dream home wish list for many years while living in Tempe, Arizona. When they finally set out to manifest it on a lovely wooded property in Balsam Mountain Preserve, the first step was to create a cooperative team that shared their vision: Al and Parker Platt of Platt Architecture, Kathryn Long of Ambiance Interiors and Bob Dylewski of Bronco Construction.

The configuration of the kitchen was Mary's domain. "I renovated my kitchen in Arizona three times," she explains, "so I had a pretty clear idea of what I wanted. We sat down with Al and Kathryn and sketched it out in about two hours. They had so many practical suggestions." Robin Casto of Mountain Showcase came on board to fine-tune the cabinetry concepts.

The overall scheme called for the kitchen area to be separate from, but easily accessible to the main living space, so the Platts envisioned a knoll off the wrap-around central walkway. Incorporating the work area and a cozy keeping room complete with a bay window-seat alcove for casual dining, the open plan allows small or large groups of friends and family to gather comfortably. Despite its location on the northwest side of

the house (to capture the view), the space is flooded with natural light thanks to high dormers and an oversized window on the southeast exposure.

Reclaimed beams, posts and oak flooring from Antique Hardwoods and Beams set the rural tone. "That added a lot of texture and created a connection to the history of the area," notes Parker Platt. "The space is clean and new, but these elements introduce a sense of age and permanence."

It's the arrangement of the elements — and the attention to detail — that make this workspace so beautifully functional.

Antique Hardwoods also supplied the salvaged wormy chestnut for a central island that anchors the work area. Handcrafted by Mountain Showcase and topped with a five-by-eight-foot slab of Coffee Brown granite from Mountain Marble and Granite, it is loaded with storage — even behind the recessed panels of the breakfast bar section.

It's the arrangement of the elements — and the attention to detail — that make this workspace so beautifully functional. Divided into stations that address specific tasks, the island and perimeter feature deep drawers with full extension and soft close hardware to provide easy access — no digging at the back of shelves.

It's common sense design: baking and cooking utensils reside beneath the island, across from the deep Shaw's porcelain farm sink, catty-corner to the dual convection ovens and warming drawer and parallel to the glass cook top, which rests directly above drawers that hold pots and pans. "We added a separate storage area for the lids," notes Casto.

Other stations include a utility sink and prep area near the paneled refrigerator/freezer, a cleanup and dish storage section, with open racks to show off Mary's collection of Fiestaware and a deep double-door pantry fitted with slender pullout drawers. A built-in wine cooler at the hallway side of the island allows libations to flow without interrupting the chef's process.

It's all pulled together with classic, low maintenance furnishings in a fresh, subdued color palette: country with just a touch of European flair. "Kathryn's gift to pick out colors is just amazing," says Mary. "It doesn't shout at you, but you walk in and feel comfortable. It feels like home."

And that's the greatest luxury of all. □

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Designed with efficiency in mind, the Arbaugh kitchen features dedicated workstations to make preparation, cooking and cleanup a breeze. Planned by Robin Casto of Mountain Showcase, the custom cabinetry — in a Chesapeake finish with light chocolate glaze — makes the most of available space with deep drawers for storage and an easy-access dish rack for display of the homeowners' Fiestaware collection.