

sweet and savory

GOOD CHEMISTRY AND THE FINE ART OF COOKING.

By Chad Carlberg

Walk up the back porch and into the home of Ingrid and John Molnar and you will discover why they are both smiling with pride—it's their kitchen. Yet this cooking couple deserves bragging rights, having spent over a decade living with an ordinary kitchen whose extraordinarily bad design made their shared joy of cooking an endless labor of love.

"I'm a baker and John's more of a cook," Ingrid reveals.

Quickly, John quips, "I'm an artist. She's more of a chemist." They laugh as if congratulating themselves for having grown so comfortable with one another that their conversations roll like an old act that never tires. It's hard to imagine that they would have had any difficulty in designing and renovating a kitchen. But mix a baker and a cook, an Italian and a German, and a dash of marriage, and the resulting pastiche is a recipe for living with an outdated kitchen long past its expiration date.

"I wanted a microwave that wasn't on the counter and wasn't so high that the kids would have trouble using it," says Ingrid, now mother of high school-aged twin girls. "I also needed a vertical drawer for cutting boards and cookie sheets—"

"—And I had to have a stove with good control that could get hot fast," John adds. "This induction cooktop was the way to go. We have no gas in this house so we had to get clever. But when we researched it we were sold. This thing boils water in ninety seconds."

Their individual must-have list goes on and on, and they revel in how well they each recall their concoction for the perfect kitchen.

Outside of the Molnar residence, the ingredients are almost always a little different, yet the indecision and anxiety about "pulling the trigger" is shared by couples everywhere. Every one of them is searching for a sign about the next step. The Molnars were fortunate to

find theirs in the form of a Kitchen Views designer from Berlin, Mass. named Diane Hersey.

John whips up lunch as he speaks, a simple *Pasta Puttanesca* recipe he picked up from his maternal grandfather. He doesn't mention it, but is delighted to show off the speed and efficacy of his new cooktop stove.

"Diane was just what we needed. Because my wife and I are very good in the kitchen. We work together all the time. But we envisioned different spaces because we like different things."

Ingrid adds that Diane was a superb listener, and was able to take in a lot of information to help them create the kitchen they had always wanted.

"It's a wonderful process," Diane explains. "People always know what they want. They just need to be guided with the right sort of questions, and become active in a dialog that is not all that familiar to them."

It is clear that Diane is fluent in the language of design. Her

work is stunning, but the aesthetic of her creations is only a partial tribute. For even in the span of a lunchtime visit, an equal balance of Ingrid's and John's individual personalities is evident in the kitchen's design. It is both slick and precise, earthy and relaxed. It is whimsical and practical, and it works beautifully.

Their contemporary kitchen with high-gloss wine-colored cabinetry by UltraCraft is accompanied by touches of glass, aluminum and stainless steel. The cabinetry in the two-level island is a bird's eye maple look-alike. Countertops on the periphery and the island are both engineered stone. The island's cool blue gray echoes the kitchen's stainless steel, while the warmer tans found in the peripheral counters build a connection between their immediate surroundings and the wooden beams and hardwood throughout the house.

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“That’s Diane,” Ingrid says plainly. “I look around and I can see so much of each of us in here, and she made it work.”



John continues, “When we were researching kitchens we wanted something unique. We kept getting these people selling us their line... Or this medieval custom millwork. She was the first person who worked to understand that we weren’t like most people and that we wanted something different.” Ingrid adds that in addition to listening, Diane was masterful in creating a kitchen whose workflow intuited their every move. “Excuse me, John. Can I get in there?” she says playfully, recalling their daily dance in a tight, galley kitchen. “The whole thing just flows so well now.”

John lights up, recalling those days when a bad kitchen was made adequate through the goodwill of the cooks who worked in it. Rather than turning wistful, however, he chuckles at his newfound fortune—the pasta’s already done.

From the Molnar’s kitchen emerge two beautiful open rooms, both late additions in the renovation process, each responses to careful design choices in the kitchen space. For the first time this day, the husband and wife are quiet, save for the clang of silverware on porcelain bowls. The afternoon sunlight has found its way into the house and rests like a tired hound beside the wood stove.

“That was delicious.” Ingrid breaks the silence, swiping the dishes from the counter and loading them into the dishwasher in one move. After several hours talking chemistry and the art of designing the “perfect kitchen,” it is the finality of a quick and simple meal made from scratch that best punctuates a story many years in the making. And like a satisfying meal, it was indeed worth the wait.



[AFTER]



Clockwise from top-left: John and a family friend in the old kitchen. The Molnar family celebrates the holidays. Plans for the new kitchen; (x) marks the identical corner in before & after images. Detail of new kitchen area (formerly the dining room). Ingrid and John prepare a *Pasta Puttanesca* for lunch. A view of the kitchen from the dining room.

