

CotY award project



wonderful kitchen

By **Lisa Readie Mayer**
Al Ojeda, Photographer



Top: Warm tones and natural textures lend a Tuscan feel to this inviting kitchen.

Above: Decorative accent tiles create visual interest in the backsplash behind the commercial range.

Cold and sterile. That is how Jill Quaglietta of Monroe Township describes her circa 1987 “before” kitchen. Complete with stark white cabinets, gray-white plastic laminate counters, white tile floor, and a peninsula that cut off flow to the dining area, the outdated kitchen was anything but the inviting hub for cooking and entertaining she longed for.

Instead, Quaglietta envisioned a Tuscan look incorporating woods, natural textures and visually interesting design elements that would create a warm and homey feeling for herself, husband Mike and 21-year-old twin sons.

“There was just one problem,” recalls Ron Tobia, president of Kitchens Direct, Inc. “When Jill came to us, she had been shopping around and was told what she wanted to do couldn’t be done with her budget. But we came up with a plan to work within her price range. She was impressed by that and hired us.”

The “us” refers to Kitchens Direct, Inc., a 17-year-old company

in Hillsborough specializing in kitchen and bath remodeling. With 38 years in the home construction business, third generation builder, Ron Tobia is at the helm. His wife, Dottie, son Ronnie, daughter Regina Perry, nephew Floyd Holmes and “extended family members” Alycia O’Connor and Ed Wheeler, all play integral roles in this consummate family business where personal attention is a core principle.

And it appears Quaglietta made the right choice in this contractor: the remodeled kitchen has won two prestigious awards. One is a Contractor of the Year Award (CoTY) from the Central Jersey chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry in the category of Kitchen Remodel between \$60,000 and \$100,000. The project also captured a northeast region Chrysalis Award from *Qualified Remodeler* magazine, judged best in its category by the editors of some of the nation’s top home and garden publications.

FROM STARK TO STRIKING

Before coming up with the winning design, the staff took photos of the Quaglietta’s kitchen and worked with the homeowners to tweak the plan. Although, according to Tobia, there was “quite a bit” of remodeling involved, the new design maintained the original footprint of the existing kitchen, which helped to keep costs in check.

In a huge departure from the uniform plain-Jane white cabinets, Tobia installed new toffee-stained maple cabinets with staggered heights and depths to enhance visual interest. Two glass-front cabinets flank the sink to lighten the look, while the range hood jacket matches the wood of the cabinets.

The traffic-clogging peninsula was removed and replaced by an island as the stunning focal point of the room. The island is topped with a gorgeous black walnut counter featuring an intriguing “end grain” pattern in which the boards are cut on end, rather than as long planks, and the small sections are pieced together. The wood is sealed with a thick, glossy, Durata permanent finish.

“This is a very beautiful and interesting look,” notes Tobia. “Using wood for the island counter gave us an opportunity to introduce a warmer surface to complement the granite on the perimeter counters.”

DECORATIVE ELEMENTS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

A hammered copper sink, discovered by Quaglietta through an online source in Texas, provides texture and is another unique element of the room. Its dark tones are repeated in accent tiles in the backsplash behind the commercial range and in the pendant lighting above the island. The deep color is also carried through the browns and rusts in the natural slate floor, which the homeowner found in a Baltimore store specializing in slate.



Above: With the former peninsula replaced by a central island, the kitchen now opens into the eating area for better flow when entertaining. The sliding doors provide plenty of natural light and easy access to the outdoor deck.

Right: The new kitchen incorporates a practical desk with plenty of cubbies and shelves to keep clutter at bay.



“Jill made all the color choices and decorative selections herself,” points out Tobia. “She has a great eye. Every choice was perfect.”

In fact, Tobia praised Quaglietta’s ability to make choices and decisions as a key factor in the success of the kitchen makeover. “Some clients agonize over decisions,” he says, “but she was excellent at making choices. She could tell us exactly what she wanted, which is extremely helpful. Jill was among the top 1 percent of clients in this area.”

One of those decisions was to go with an out-of-sight microwave drawer in the island base rather than a wall-mounted installation. Designed for below-counter positioning with the controls at the top of the drawer, the user does not have to bend to access the appliance. Pot and pan drawers beside the microwave offer greater functionality and convenience.

PRACTICALITY IS IMPORTANT, TOO

Opposite the island, the refrigerator was designed to look like a pantry with ceiling height cabinetry panels masking the double doors. “A stainless steel refrigerator would not have worked with the copper sink, warm woods and rich colors in the floor,” points out Tobia.

Next to the refrigerator is a hutch-style unit with glass-front cabinets and a built-in desk, which replaces a freestanding cart that functioned as a makeshift desk in the previous kitchen. Cubbies >>>



Left top: Concealing the microwave under the counter is both clever and convenient.

Left middle: Varying cabinet depths show off the beautiful crown molding of the cabinetry.

Left bottom: A unique copper sink sourced online from Texas is a focal point of the kitchen.



above the desk for sorting mail and shelves for cookbooks help maintain order and tidiness in the kitchen. Now, according to Quaglietta, keeping her new kitchen neat and clean is a labor of love. "Before I was so tired of the kitchen I didn't even want to be in it," she remembers. "Now it's my favorite room in the house. I'm always cleaning it and wanting it to look perfect. "I just love it and am so happy we did it," she adds. "Ron and his crew were great to work



with and everything came together smoothly and perfectly. The new kitchen is better than I ever expected."

The award-winning Kitchens Direct, Inc., 739 Route 206, Hillsborough, is a family-run business specializing in kitchen and bath remodeling for 17 years. Visit www.kitchensdirectinc.com or call 908-359-1188 for more information. Kitchens Direct, Inc., is a member of the Central Jersey chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. Visit www.cjnari.org for additional information on NARI.

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