

COOK'S TOUR DE FORCE

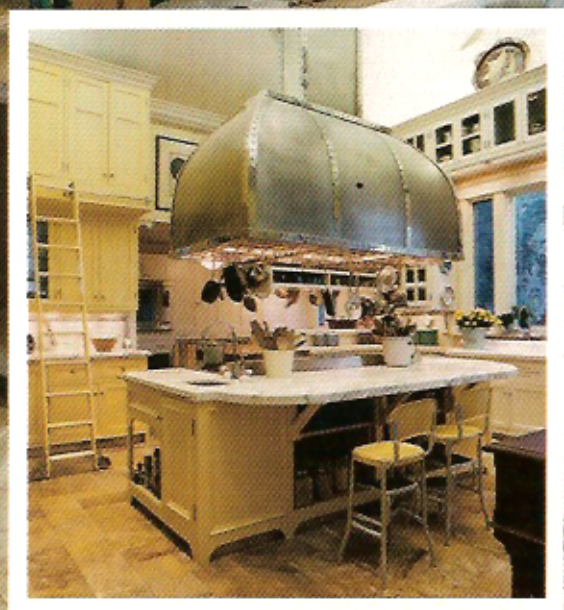
A dream kitchen drives a farmhouse's remodel

In early 1999, Linda-Marie Loeb, a chef and former restaurateur, moved into what had been a weekend retreat for her family: a gingerbread-accented 1879 farmhouse on a hilltop overlooking miles of vineyards in California's Napa Valley. It had been six years since she'd purchased the place, and she decided to leave behind her restaurant career to raise her children in this community she knew only from visits. Originally drawn to the house because of its romantic setting—and that breathtaking view—

BY LAURA FRASER

STYLED BY JODY THOMPSON-KENNEDY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TODD HIDO PROCESS PHOTOGRAPHS BY LENNY GONZALEZ



OPPOSITE PAGE: Ample new dormers now bring light into the upper story of the Napa Valley Victorian farmhouse. THIS PAGE: Extralong work ladders were mandatory for mounting 12-foot-high cabinets in the new kitchen; installed, the cabinets are easily reached using 8-foot-tall library ladders (INSET).

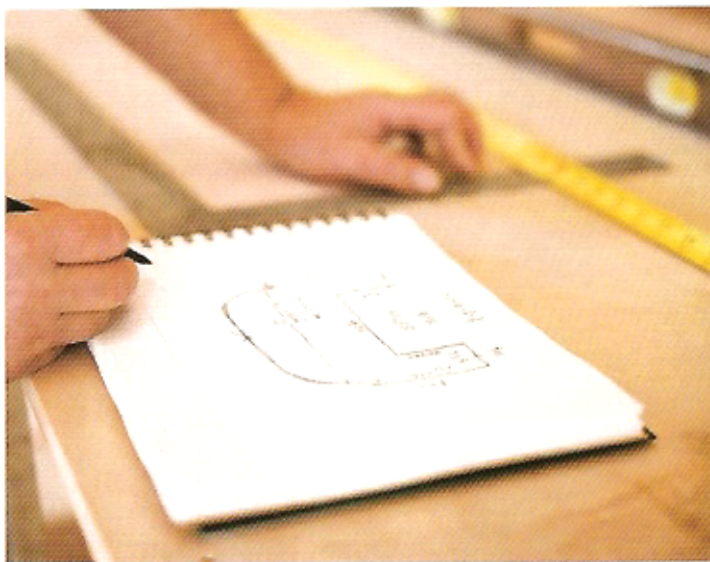
Linda-Marie soon recognized that the property, with its agreeable climate and healthy soil, would be an ideal spot to garden. She hoped to parlay her hobby into a business by starting an organic herb farm on part of her 80 acres and planned to hold cooking classes in her house. Both were dreams she'd let sit on the back burner during her years as a chef.

Once she and her two sons moved in, Linda-Marie realized that certain aspects of the house that had been easy to overlook as a weekend—like the fact that the galley-style kitchen offered barely enough elbowroom to prepare three meals a day—would not be tolerable in a full-time residence. Even so, when she thought about

remodeling, her initial goal was modest: to update the kitchen—a single-story '60s-era addition to the farmhouse—and expand it a bit. “I swear that’s all I wanted,” she says now, two years later, having hired more than 50 contractors in what turned out to be a far more ambitious floorboards-to-cupola renovation, featuring a spectacular, no-holds-barred cooking area.

As Linda-Marie started fine-tuning a wish list for a chef-worthy culinary workspace, she began to suspect that the rehab might be more involved than she thought, so she approached San Francisco-based designer Lou Ann Bauer, whose work had been recommended by a friend. “I wanted lots of light, lots of storage, glass-front cabinets, and professional appliances,” she explains. “I told Lou Ann I’d need a pair of wall ovens, plus two dishwashers for my classes. I just didn’t have the imagination to make it all happen.”

But when Bauer and Charles Carlson, her project manager at Bauer Interior Design, toured the house, they understood at once that the kitchen was but one significant problem. “The only bathroom didn’t function well, and with two kids, Linda-Marie needed another,” says Bauer. “The four upstairs bedrooms—in a converted attic—had low ceilings, with limited natural light coming in through some small '70s-era shed dormers. And the only way to reach the second story was by an exterior stair that ran up alongside the kitchen.” In brief, “nothing worked that well,” Linda-Marie says.



COUNTER FITTING


Don't let the diminutive drawing (ABOVE) fool you. At roughly 104 by 63 inches, the house's marble island countertop is the largest that Roman Gruca, owner of Marble European Style, has ever installed. Weighing some 700 pounds, it took the strength of eight men and much of Gruca's mental stamina to get it in place. “I was so nervous, I couldn't talk for hours afterward,” he says, noting that a fractured slab, in addition to being suddenly worthless, can cut into a hand as sharply as a shard of glass.

Gruca had already invested many man-hours at his Oakland-based shop, prepping the stone. After cutting the $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch stone to size with a diamond-bladed bridge saw, he gave its edge extra heft by laminating a $2\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-high marble strip underneath the rim. Next, he used a router to carve an ogee edge and gave the entire surface a honed finish with 240-grit diamond sandpaper turned on a handheld angle sander. Finally, he rubbed in a sealer to repel oil and moisture, loaded the slab onto an A-frame, and drove it 60 miles to Linda-Marie's home.

Once there, 16 hands carried the slab inside to set it onto the island's plywood top. Quick-setting epoxy eliminated any second chances. Fortunately, Gruca didn't need any; following the successful touch-down, he cut out the 71-by-27-inch notch for the range with a diamond-bladed hand grinder, gave the marble a final cloth-polish, and let out a well-earned sigh of relief. —Dan DiClerico



Every cabinet—including those with open shelves—is organized to enhance a particular work zone.



“Together, the range and hood weigh a ton, so we had to beef up the rafters and floor joists—then make sure they complied with earthquake codes.”

—CHARLES CARLSON, PROJECT MANAGER

While the planned renovation added a total of just 800 square feet to the 2,800-square-foot farmhouse, Bauer and Carlson’s plan made ingenious use of every inch. For starters, the redesign called for lifting the roof to extend the ceiling height in the bedrooms; while they were at it, the team decided to expand the existing dormers and add two new ones to create space for another bath. Because of the added weight, Sebastopol-based contractor Ken Sawyer and his team had to reinforce the framing of the entire house. To accomplish this feat, he brought in a 50-foot crane, which was tall enough to hoist and slide two 20-foot-long solid-steel I-beams between the wall studs of the living room; these run vertically from pad footings in the foundation up through the living room to the ceiling line of the

With multiple burners and grills, the huge French stove is the hub of Linda-Marie’s cooking classes.



RAIL CALL

History repeats itself—and that's just what designer Lou Anne Bauer had in mind when she envisioned the rear deck railing on this Victorian farmhouse in the Napa Valley (ABOVE). After reshaping the deck to better echo the lines of the house (instead of a straight run, it now bows out at the bay window, for instance), Linda-Marie's team of architects and contractors custom-built a railing to match the existing Chippendale-inspired balustrade on the front veranda. "We wanted to retain the essence of that original style, while bringing it up to modern codes," says project manager Charles Carlson.

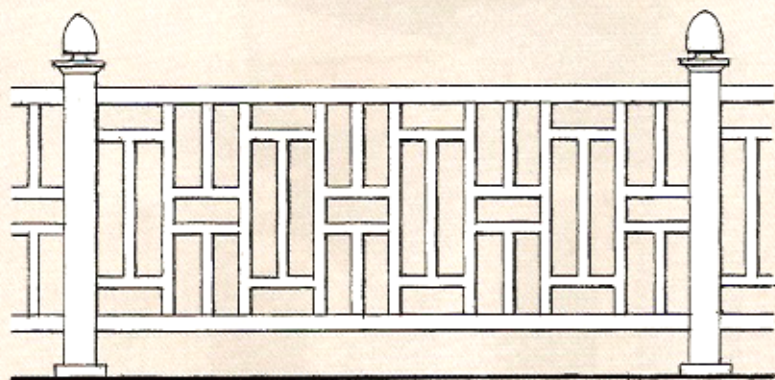
To do so, Carlson first sent a section of the original rail to a local milling outfit, which delivered back to the site over 2,000 feet of 2½-inch fluted rail, cut from western red cedar. To protect it on the job site (and establish a good foundation for later painting), contractor Ken Sawyer and his four-man crew spray-painted a coat of protective primer over the entire bundle. Then they set to work measuring out the new railing in compliance with local ordinances; in California these require any structure 30 inches above grade to have a 36-inch-high railing, with spaces of no more than 4 inches between any of its members. (The existing front rail, at 24 inches high with some 9-inch gaps, was also tightened up.)

After cutting the lumber to size with a chop saw (TOP RIGHT), Sawyer brushed the end grains with wood primer to keep out moisture. Next, he and his crew pieced together the railing in sections ranging from 4 to 9 feet (MIDDLE RIGHT), following the original pattern of interlocking horizontal and vertical balusters. A pneumatic nail gun loaded with 2½-inch galvanized finish nails (BOTTOM RIGHT) saved time—and possibly a few thumbs. The sections were toe-screwed into boxed posts, made from mitered 2x6 red cedar boards, to provide a cavity through which Sawyer could run electrical wiring for lanterns that sit atop them, illuminating the deck. Posts and lanterns were staggered at intervals along the railing, a nod to the Victorian taste for variety. Posts without lanterns were capped with hand-turned, acorn-shaped finials. Finally, a full two weeks after work on the railing began, the crew covered all nail holes with a two-part wood filler and then sprayed on two coats of high-quality exterior low-sheen paint. —Dan DiClerico



“When attaching a deck railing, screws will hold better than nails. To prevent rust, use treated screws—exterior-grade stainless steel if you’re near the water; otherwise, galvanized will do.”

—TOM SILVA, THIS OLD HOUSE CONTRACTOR



The ornamental fretwork on Linda-Marie's railing (ABOVE) was inspired by a design popularized by English cabinetmaker Thomas Chippendale. The pattern of interlocking fillets, or bands, creates an interesting play of light and shadow on the surface of the deck.



new second floor. Two more steel I-beams were installed between the joists in the first-floor ceiling, and two across the roofline. The steel not only reinforces the existing framing but also provides extra support in the event of an earthquake—a concern that has to be addressed by all new construction as well as remodels in northern California.

Upgrading the farmhouse was important to Linda-Marie, but, heeding her original wish list, Bauer decided that the centerpiece—and primary focus—of the renovation had to be the cooking area. To that end, she and Carlson convinced Linda-Marie to replace the old addition with a grand, 21-by-36-foot kitchen and family room, plus an adjacent conservatory that would be used for dining. With that plan in mind, they then underscored her passion for cooking by creating a dramatic architectural statement: The new kitchen soars 20 feet to a peaked roof and windowed cupola that washes the walls with light.


Outfitting a kitchen of that size so that it would not overwhelm its occupants was a daunting task. When Bauer's firm drew up the layout, it included 80 cabinets, all custom-built from paint-grade poplar, and all super-sized so they wouldn't appear puny within the room. Many of the cabinets are so massive (one is 7 feet tall, 6 feet wide, and 30 inches deep) that, upon their completion, cabinetmaker Greg Gomes, of Classic Cabinets and Furniture in Benicia, had six burly subcontractors sit inside several while he snapped a photo. To gain access to the upper reaches of the 12-foot-high banks of wall cabinets, Bauer designed three sliding library ladders on wheels that run along 8-foot-high rails mounted on brackets screwed into the cabinet frames. When not in use, the ladders tuck into their own spaces against a wall.

Gomes and his crew constructed each cabinet by hand like a piece of furniture, including inset flush doors. Units are customized according to their contents. One, for example, accommodates a large 1940s enamel sink with twin drainboards, while others store pots and pans or homemade jams and herbs. Some have rippled glass inserts so Linda-Marie can see dishes inside. Bauer painted the cabinets two shades, cream and yellow, then accented them for visual interest with knobs in 15 different styles.

Countertops, made from Jerusalem limestone, are set at heights that vary from 34 to 36 inches to prevent back strain while serving as workspace for such tasks as peeling vegetables or rolling out dough. Although the standard countertop depth is 24 inches, Linda-Marie requested that hers be 30 inches deep so that small appliances can sit out without getting in the way.

Setting the slab of Italian marble on top of the kitchen island proved to be one of the biggest challenges of the job. Measuring 104 by 63 inches and weighing 700 pounds, the stone required eight men to lift it into position (see “Counter Fitting”). For extra support where the marble cantilevers for seating, wooden corbels, cut to the same profile as the house's exterior eaves brackets, were added.

Appliances, too, exceed the norm in size and needed additional support. As a focal point in the room, Linda-



"Unlike fixed-glass English conservatories, this one has pairs of windows that open to take advantage of prevailing breezes."

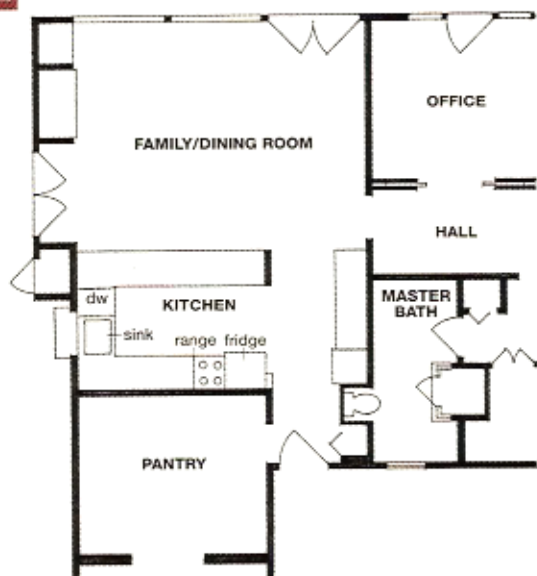
—LOU ANN BAUER, INTERIOR DESIGNER

Marie selected a 72-inch-wide, 800-pound La Cornue range from France, featuring two ovens, eight burners, four gas grills, two electric grills, and a barbecue. To bear its weight—and that of the 48-inch-wide stainless steel refrigerator and 30-inch-wide companion freezer—Sawyer doubled up the joists under the radiant-heated floor, which is covered with French limestone.

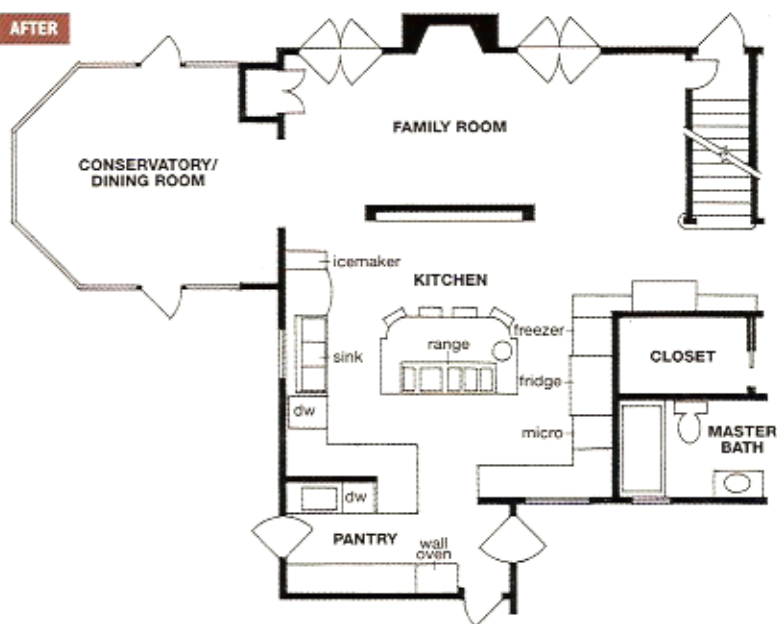
The enormous custom-made hood (78 inches long, 42 inches wide, 39 inches high) that hangs above the stove required extra structural reinforcement, too. "You can't just suspend a 1,400-pound hood like that," says Bauer. "You have to plan for it." Sawyer and his crew beefed

Outfitted with a French country table, the dining room conservatory offers expansive views over its adjoining deck to trees and vineyards beyond.

BEFORE



AFTER



up the rafters, from 2x12s to 6x12s, then installed a flue chase that runs from the top of the hood to the roofline and attached it to the rafters with four giant lag bolts. (The strengthened rafters also help support a windowed cupola.) To bolster the vaulted ceiling and the added weight of the hood (and to allow for sway in the event of an earthquake), Sawyer and his crew ran two threaded steel rods through a pair of decorative tie beams, boxed in with

white-painted birch, that span the room on either side of the chase. These and other decorative timbers provide visual interest, in keeping with the Victorian style of the house.

The kitchen renovation started a domino effect in the downstairs of the house. “Lou Ann just kept saying, ‘Trust me,’ and I did,” Linda-Marie says with a laugh. For example, there had been no dining room in the house, so Bauer designed one—in an insulated

15-by-15-foot, polygonal conservatory that extends onto a deck off the kitchen and offers spectacular views. On the revamped deck, Carlson had railings hand-milled to match existing ones at the front of the house (see “Rail Call”), but with spaces tightened to meet modern building codes. Finials accenting the railing alternate with lamps that light the deck.

As a final flourish, Bauer even managed to take care of a couple of details outside the scope of the job. One day, she asked Linda-Marie about her interests beyond cooking. Linda-Marie mentioned that she loved reading and going to the theater. Lou Ann then suggested that she meet her brother, Rod Bauer, himself a passionate cook, who shares these interests. Once again, Linda-Marie went along with the plan. In the end, she gained not only a new home but a new husband and name: Linda-Marie Bauer. ■

BELOW: Work progresses on the raised deck along the back of the house. TOP: Floor plans illustrate how the kitchen and family room have been joined and enlarged, and where the conservatory dining room was placed.

