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# KITCHEN

## AND BATH IDEAS

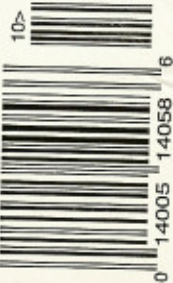
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September/  
October 2002  
Display until October 15

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# crowd pleaser

Whether it's a family dinner for six  
or a party for 30, the suburban Chicago kitchen  
of Debra and Larry Levis never feels crowded.  
Its high-capacity design is also high in style.



WHEN YOU HAVE A FAMILY OF SIX AND LIKE TO HOST dinners for 30, the kitchen is more than the heart of the house. It's the nerve center. "They are a kitchen-centric family," architect Charles Renner says of his clients, Debra and Larry Levis of suburban Chicago. The kitchen, Renner says, "is the center of their social life and family life."

The Levises knew a kitchen remodeling was in their future when they bought their 1960s home. At 220 square feet, the existing space offered plentiful countertops and cabinets, but a peninsula layout blocked traffic flow. "It wasn't set up functionally to run a large family," Debra says. The peninsula chopped the room in two, and the eating area was too small for the couple and their four children. "We couldn't fit around the kitchen table," she says.

In making the kitchen more crowd pleasing, Renner took something of an institutional approach. "There are certain aspects of the kitchen that almost resemble a cafeteria," he says. For example, Renner says he treated the new center island like a cafeteria table. The 9-foot-long island, which replaced the peninsula and extends into the former eating area, can be a serving line, work space, or sitting area. Plus it offers lots of storage. There are two sinks to serve multiple cooks, two dishwashers for speedy cleanup after big meals, and a professional-grade range for heavy-duty cooking. The island layout gives the room a new lengthwise orientation and handles a large group more efficiently, Renner says. "It allows multiple people to be in the kitchen and not run into each other," he says.

The feel of the new kitchen, however, is far from institutional. Custom-stained cherry cabinetry, granite countertops, and red-oak flooring set an elegant tone. A visual focal point is the range's tumbled-slate backsplash. Renner spent hours laying out the colorful tiles until he achieved the desired random look. "You just look at it as a piece of art," Debra says. But like the rest of this busy kitchen, the slate is practical, too, an easy-clean surface that works well, Debra says, "when spaghetti and pasta sauce start flying." **KBI**

Resources begin on page 130.

Photographer: Jim Hedrich, Hedrich-Blessing. Field editor: Elaine Markoutsas.

Written by Gary Thompson.

**OPPOSITE:** Now that Debra and Larry Levis' kitchen is an island layout open to the family room, sight lines lead the eye to the professional-grade range. An artful backsplash and high-style hood make the range a strong focal point. **TOP RIGHT:** To deal with a full house, the kitchen holds two pairs: dishwashers and sinks. Two dishwashers flank the main sink, where Debra and daughter Molly work. A second sink is a few steps to their right. **MIDDLE RIGHT:** Architect Charles Renner made a long wall of pantry cabinets stylish and practical by opening up the tops of the custom-stained cherry units with glass fronts for display. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The multifunction island is the centerpiece of the kitchen's now-elongated layout. It offers storage, seating, work space, and a place for the Levises' twin sons, Bennett and Sam, to develop their culinary skills. Their older brother, Dan, also likes to cook.

