

KITCHEN QUEST

Ready to create your own dream kitchen? **JASON LANDAU** (right), of Briarcliff-based **Amazing Spaces, LLC**, can help. To see more samples of his work, visit amazingspacesllc.com. And when you're ready to really get cooking, call Amazing Spaces at 239-3725. Initial consultations are free.



do you need a kitchen designer.

THE ANSWER MIGHT SURPRISE EVEN YOU!

BY MARY LYNN MITCHAM
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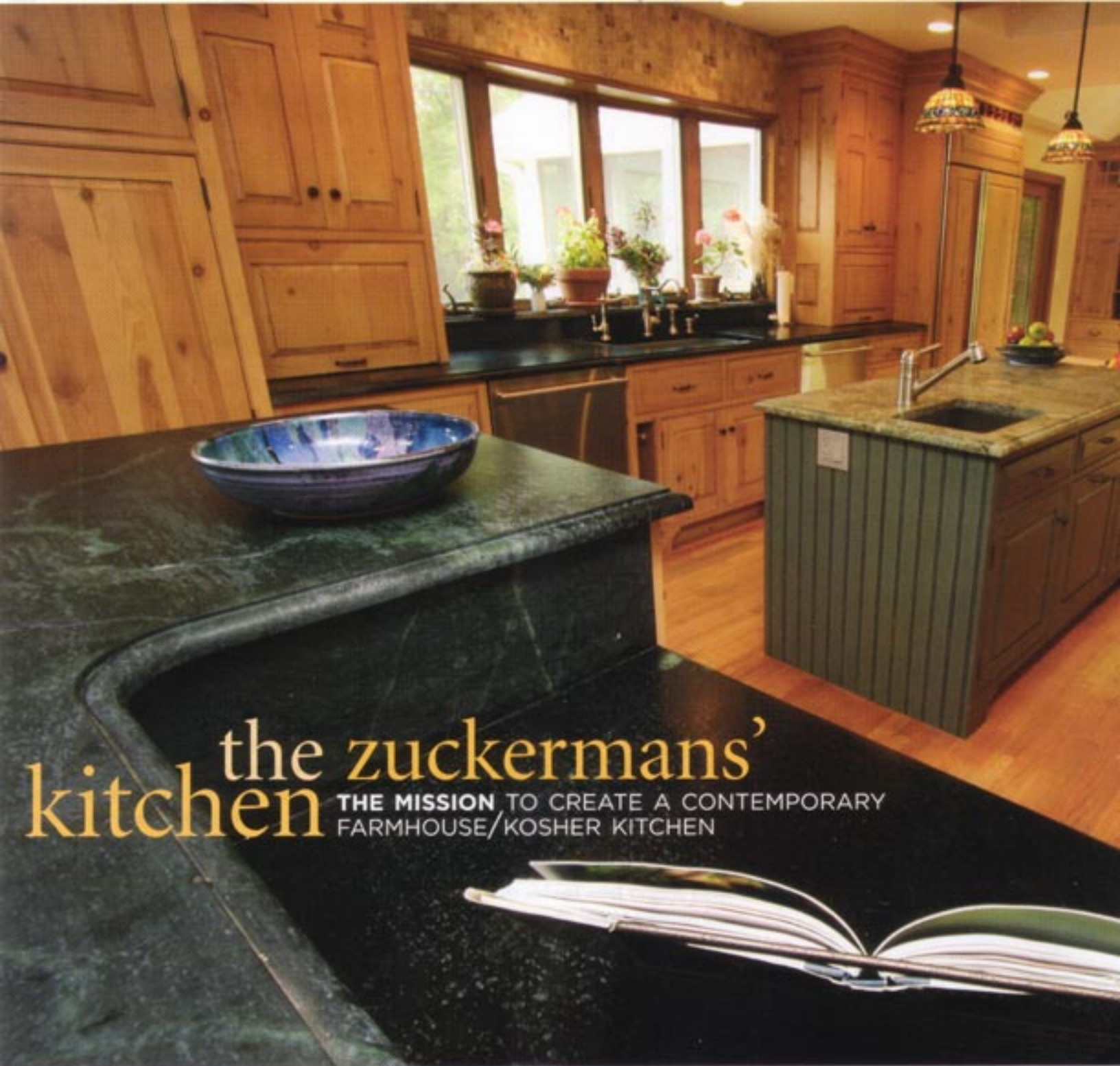
note to anyone thinking of redoing a kitchen: A great space isn't about Sub-Zero refrigerators, Viking stoves, or even sparkling granite countertops. A great kitchen is really about you—how do you cook? How do you relax? How do you like things to look? At least that's what we learned from kitchen designer Jason Landau, owner of Briarcliff-based Amazing Spaces, who specializes in creating custom kitchens. And by "custom," we mean he'll raise counters to your specified height; cut cabinets to accommodate your largest appliance; and create dedicated stations—say, for baking, sandwich-making, or (insert your own culinary passion here)—right where you want them, to ensure that, along with a showpiece, your kitchen is a place where you can comfortably cook and eat.

Granted, creating a dream kitchen doesn't have to be an over-the-top affair. After all, you could just run down to Home Depot and pick out some tile, some granite, even stainless-steel appliances. But going the kitchen-designer route affords you luxuries you might not get otherwise, and often for roughly the same cost. In the case of Landau, you get the expertise of both an architect and an interior designer in one. His mission, he says, is to "create a better space that fits either the home or the client." He'll help you do everything from buy cabinets and countertops to gut and expand—even relocate—the entire kitchen. And thanks to his interior-

design background, there is no guesswork—indeed, the backsplash, tiles, and countertops he picks, will all go together. For the record, his clients aren't people with money to burn: they're regular residents (mostly in Westchester and Fairfield counties) who aren't sure how to make the most of their square-footage, or they're those busy neighbors that barely have time to eat dinner, much less create a perfect space to prepare it.

Still, these folks feel the kitchen is an essential part of a house—essential enough to invest a minimum (on average) of \$75,000 into redoing the room. And while that sounds like a lot (heck, it is a lot!), you'll come away with much more than an array of fancy appliances or new cabinets. Most of Landau's clients find new and different ways to maximize their overall living space. By merely reworking the kitchen, Landau can improve the flow and feel of an entire home.

To give you an idea of just how custom a kitchen can be, we asked Landau to choose three of his favorite Westchester kitchen redesigns. Here, you'll see the varying degrees to which Landau worked with each client, the particular missions he helped execute, and, of course, the end results. In working with Landau, the homeowners were able to do things they didn't think were possible (a microwave drawer built into a center island?), and, yes, they all ended up spending a little more than they originally planned. But then—no one's complaining.



the zuckermans' kitchen

THE MISSION TO CREATE A CONTEMPORARY FARMHOUSE/KOSHER KITCHEN

Sheera Zuckerman lived in her Ossining farmhouse for eight years before she and her husband, Richard, decided to redo the kitchen. She describes the original space as "gray, peeling Formica." Aside from merely updating the look, she wanted to expand and bring in more natural light. But when she started looking at showrooms, nothing felt right. "I needed someone who would hold my hand through the process," she says. "At the showrooms, I didn't get hand-held."

After interviewing five contractors and five private designers, she hired Landau, whom she found through a friend. "I liked that he was

concerned with our needs and listened to what we wanted." Aside from a kosher kitchen—a setup that completely separates items that touch meat and items that touch dairy—Sheera wanted what she calls a "Big Chill atmosphere." In other words, an easy flow for having two people cooking and entertaining simultaneously. She also wanted to be able to load and unload the dishwasher easily, to have lots of storage—for her two sets of serving pieces—and to have generous light in which to work. The original kitchen was dark, and Sheera was insistent that her new kitchen couldn't be bright enough. "I didn't want to have to turn my lights on in the morning," she says.

The Zuckermans worked with Landau for about a year on their kitchen (three to five months is more typical). "We just couldn't make up our minds. The three of us [Landau, Richard, and Sheera] reworked our plans *ad nauseum* until we were 100 percent satisfied." Fortunately, the gut renovation lasted only about three months, during which time Sheera got reacquainted with her toaster oven, an indoor propane-burner (both in a makeshift set-up in the living room), and her barbecue.

DREAM JOB In the end, Sheera got her country look and kosher requirements, all packaged in a huge, light-filled space. Distressed pine cabinetry



Our kitchen reflects our lifestyle, says Sheera Zuckerman about the kosher space she designed with Jason Landau. **FAR LEFT** A room of one's own: Soapstone countertops, separate storage for dairy dishes and meat dishes, and a baking station created specifically for Sheera's height. **TOP** Sheera with husband Richard at their Jurassic green granite island. **LEFT** Landau's idea: A faux cabinet-door doubles as a dog gate. **ABOVE** With swing-out shelves, the double-doored butler's pantry stores a lot more than you'd think.

hang over rustic, green soapstone counters; a solid, oak floor offers radiant heat; and huge dish-drawers in a center island separate her meat plates from her dairy ones. Along with installing a bigger window over the kitchen sink, not to mention adding two stained-glass Tiffany-style pendants and 20—yes, 20—high hats, Landau designed a wall unit around a Palladian window, to make sure Sheera doesn't have to turn her lights on before noon. Of course, she has enough high-end appliances to open a restaurant: two ovens, a warming drawer, a microwave (built into the island), a stainless-steel dishwasher, with garbage/recycle bin to match, and a stainless-steel fridge.

PERSONAL TOUCHES Most important, though, the kitchen is all about Sheera and how her family lives. Since she loves to bake, Landau designed a baking station, with appliance garages tall enough for her food processor, shelves high enough for her tallest cookbook, and multilevel counters, including one perfect for making her famous apple and blueberry crisps. "I'm short. This counter is lower for rolling," she says, demonstrating how comfortably she can push a rolling pin. Even her two yellow Labs were factored into the kitchen—one oversized "cabinet" door doubles as a dog gate between the kitchen and living room. Says Sheera, "This is my favorite room in the house."

WHAT'S IN?

SIMPLICITY Clean, simple looks with little ornamentation reflect today's simplified lifestyles, says Landau.

DARK KITCHENS are making a comeback. "I'm doing more dark-wood kitchens than ever before," he says.

DISH DRAWERS You'll find less wall cabinetry in kitchens today, so many clients opt for dish drawers. "I love it; you don't have to lift anything heavy above you," says Sheera Zuckerman, about her own.



the armones' kitchen

THE MISSION TO CREATE A TOTALLY
FUNCTIONAL SHAKER-STYLE KITCHEN

the Armones seem like your typical Westchester family: busy, busy, busy. With three boys, two working parents, and a full-time nanny, the family has its fair share of backyard playdates, indoor parties, and weekly family gatherings. And much of the action takes place—you guessed it—in the kitchen. That's why John and Robin Arnone knew, when they moved to their Croton colonial three years ago, that the "barebones, white-Formica kitchen" would have to go. "The lighting was terrible," remembers Robin. "We knew we would redo it."

For this career-oriented couple (both work in the financial industry), though, the question was:

How? Like many people do, they started their journey by heading to one of Westchester's high-end showrooms. Says John, "They said, Draw your kitchen, [and] then they'd throw it into a computer and create a design." Not quite the personal experience the Armones were looking for. Fate stepped in when John picked up a home magazine and found a kitchen he loved inside. When he looked into it further, he learned the kitchen had been designed by Landau, who, as luck would have it, was based right here in Westchester.

When it came to their kitchen, the Armones had a few definites—a tile floor, a wine fridge, a traditional look—but they didn't quite know how

to translate their ideas into cabinetry, counter islands, and appliances. And that's where Landau came in. When they first met with him, they thought they'd talk about rangetops and granite slabs, but instead he dove into their lifestyle: What do you like to do? What kind of glasses do you drink out of? What's your typical morning routine? "He brought in a real personal touch," says John. "We trusted him," adds Robin. "We could see how other things in his brain worked."

And so, short on time themselves, the Armones gave Landau free rein—to a point. "We trusted Jason's judgment," says John, "so we told him to go to the shop, pick samples, and we'd go from there."

Meet the Messers (clockwise from front left) Hillary, her husband, Eric, and their sons, Matthew (18) and Douglas (15).



the messers' kitchen

THE MISSION TO CREATE A FAMILY-FRIENDLY KITCHEN WITH A HAMPTONS BEACH-FEEL

Hillary Messer has a sweet tooth. And you need only walk into her beach-house-style kitchen for proof. Four glass candy-drawers—one stocked with Starburst, one with Mike and Ikes, one full of bubble gum, and one a mix—are tucked into the wall near the sink. Along with high ceilings, sunlight beaming in through oversized windows in almost every wall, and a brick fireplace that cozily separates the kitchen from the living room, they help make this luxurious space more her own. Of course, the kitchen wasn't always so idyllic. When the Messers, who own Sunrise Building & Remodeling, in Briarcliff (sunrisebuilding.com), first moved into

the house three years ago, it was basically a "1950's ranch"—far from Hillary's dream home. Little by little, they worked to create a house that emits oceanside ambiance. The first year, they worked on the infrastructure—connecting to a new sewer system, installing a new furnace and air-conditioning system, and working on the bedrooms, among other things. Two years later, they were ready to tackle the kitchen.

Unlike the Armones and the Zuckermans, who handed the lion's share of their kitchen projects over to Landau, Hillary had strong ideas about what she wanted and didn't want. "I loved the idea of having the outdoors as part of the indoors," she

says. "I didn't want a cookie-cutter colonial. Too vanilla." And though her project was just as big as the others—her kitchen required an architect and six months to complete—Hillary wasn't looking for a ringleader, but a design consultant whom she could bounce ideas off and who would help bring her ideas to fruition. Her husband, Eric, met Landau on a kitchen installation in Chappaqua; Landau was designing the project and Sunrise was installing the kitchen, and they clicked.

Being that Hillary had such a strong vision of what she wanted—and the fact that Eric's company installs kitchens—why would they bother with a kitchen designer at all? "Kitchen designers are



Once the center island's cherry top—custom-made by a furniture builder in London—was installed, the Messers' new kitchen was complete. Hillary found the surface-mounted glass lighting at Mohegan Electric in Mohegan Lake. **LEFT** Snack, anyone? Two of the family's candy drawers. **RIGHT TOP** A pot-filler hangs over the Wolf gas cooktop, Hillary's "splurge." "I love indoor grilling," she says. **BOTTOM** Hidden outlets in the island increase work space.

imperative," Hillary says. "If you needed a doctor, you wouldn't go to a general practitioner, you'd go to a specialist. I knew what I wanted, but Jason organized what I wanted. He forced me to think through how I was going to use the kitchen."

DREAM JOB The Messers' architect David Graham did a general layout, which involved switching the kitchen and dining room spaces and, behind the new kitchen, adding a family room. From there, Jason helped Hillary strategize her kitchen, placing the double-oven near the refrigerator and helping to choose wood colors for the center island and three colors for the cabinets

(porcelain white, glass, and cherry). At 21-by-24 feet, the Messers' kitchen is eminently bigger than it was. Towering windows and a skylight over the island draw lots of natural light; a limestone tile floor (with radiant heat) and a neutral backsplash—in various shades of beige and brown—behind the cooktop, create an airy atmosphere. "To me, it looks like beach glass," says Hillary, about her backsplash tile. "I saw it and said, 'That's it.'"

PERSONAL TOUCHES This kitchen is clean and spare. Jason created charging stations, which look like appliance garages, to hide outlets for cell phone and iPod chargers and keep all those

unruly cords out of sight. Built-in grates in the granite near the sink make an unobtrusive drying rack for dishes; so the Messers don't have any clutter. In the center island, Jason installed a sandwich station—two refrigerated drawers where the couple stow enough coldcuts to bulk up two teenage boys. And then, of course, there are those colorful, fully stocked candy drawers. They may have been Hillary's idea to begin with, but we're guessing, by now, the whole family has grown to love them. **rv**



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