



FAMILY AFFAIR
The window above the farmhouse sink looks into the backyard. Right: The DeLuca family, including Maria's architect brother, Rosario Mannino (holding daughter, Giulia) enjoy homemade baked goods.



KITCHEN CENTRAL

A family of foodies renovates their hyperactive New Providence kitchen.

Maria DeLuca has a bit of a reputation, albeit a good one. The New Providence mother of three is known around town as the ultimate go-to person. Neighbors can count on her to provide elaborate home-baked goods for any special occasion, be it a school function, a Girl Scout fundraiser or a birthday party. Rarely is there a day that Maria isn't up to her elbows in flour. Thankfully, after a five-month renovation, her family's kitchen is up to the task.

Maria and husband, Michael, bought their two-bedroom, circa-1927, Craftsman-style home in 2002, before they were even married. They slowly renovated, adding two more bedrooms and a dining room for their growing family. When it came time to renovate the kitchen, they went all out. Maria and Michael are from close-knit families, so gatherings are frequent and always center around food. Getting the kitchen just right was paramount.

The project was a family undertaking.

Although Michael is a trained architect, the DeLucas brought in Maria's brother, Rosario Mannino, to spearhead the project. Mannino, who has his own design/build firm, is a registered architect and a licensed contractor.

Still, Michael and Maria were closely involved. "We were hands-on," says Michael. Their top priority for the kitchen: ease of use. "This is not a show kitchen," says Maria. "It's a functional kitchen. Pretty, but functional."

To start, Mannino decided to swap the kitchen and existing dining room. The original kitchen sat smack-dab between the formal dining room and the breakfast room. It wasn't practical. "With big parties, guests were walking right past me and the stove," says Maria. "I wanted them out of my space."

Maria knew she wanted a U-shaped layout with a massive center island. The absence of bar stools around the island is intentional. "This island is for me!" quips Maria.

MAXIMUM USE
Everything in the DeLucas' New Providence kitchen was chosen for heavy usage, from the restaurant-grade stove to the smooth granite countertop. Antique cooking utensils, displayed in glass-front upper cabinets and used frequently, have been collected over the years.

By LAUREN PAYNE | Photographs by LAURA MOSS



PRETTY & FUNCTIONAL
White-oak flooring matches the beams above. Beadboard was added to the ceiling for texture. The window is original to the kitchen, but transformed into a much-used window seat, as Isabella, bottom right, can attest. Gabriel and Julian, top right, enjoy helping and horsing around.



In keeping with the Arts-and-Crafts flavor of the home, the trio selected artichoke-green cabinets appropriate for the period. “We wanted a Craftsman kitchen to mirror the outside of the house,” says Mannino. “Some people thought we were crazy, but I love the green.” Mannino suggested the quarter-sawn white-oak floor, stained a rich gold. The beadboard ceiling adds texture; the beams (some decorative, others for support) are the same white oak as the floor. All appliances were chosen for maximum utility. Work space was carefully allocated. Spots are designated for different types of food prep, with the appropriate cooking tools within arm’s reach. The DeLucas collect antique kitchen tools, some from family, others found at flea markets and antique shops. They are on display, but easily accessed.

While Maria got her island, Michael got his adult area with a bar fridge and

counter space for serving his homemade wine. “I don’t bake,” he says emphatically.

There were also some compromises. While Mannino pushed for trendy soapstone countertops, Maria insisted on a perfectly smooth surface to roll out dough and fondant. A sleek Absolute Black granite was the winner.

One surprise bonus: The original window, left intact “for balance,” says Mannino, became a much-used window seat. “Isabella and Julian have taken naps there,” says Maria.

The entire family seems thrilled with the outcome of the project. “We had a budget, which we successfully overblew,” says Michael. “But the overblown budget definitely paid off with the reward of the style and design.”

Now, the kitchen is put to use by everyone in the family. Mike’s forte is meat. “I’m the one roasting and braising and all that

stuff,” he says. Gabriel, 14, likes to pitch in, helping decorate Maria’s baked goods. Twelve-year-old Isabella’s specialty is vanilla pancakes. “I like mine more than my mom’s,” she says. Even Julian, 8, whips up scrambled eggs. As Gabriel points out, “We don’t eat store bought.”

Maria posts her creations on @hazel-nuttycreates and is constantly finessing recipes. Her baked goods are well received throughout the town. It’s not just baking; as a first-generation Italian, Maria makes her own pastas and sauces. “I’m hardly ever cooking just one thing,” she says. “If there’s a cake in the oven, I’m starting the main course.”

Adds Michael, “This kitchen will implode by the end of the day. There’s so much action.”

RESOURCE: Architect: Rosario Mannino, AIA, Mannino Architecture and Construction, Rutherford; 201-677-3373, rsmannino.com