



the nuclear kitchen

An oversized work table takes the place of the standard island in John and Peggy Lehman's kitchen. An extra-wide arched alcove sets the range apart from the rest of the kitchen.
Below: John and Peggy.

It's the core of a new house in suburban Chicago.

BY ELIOT NUSBAUM PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB MAUER PRODUCED BY SALLY MAUER

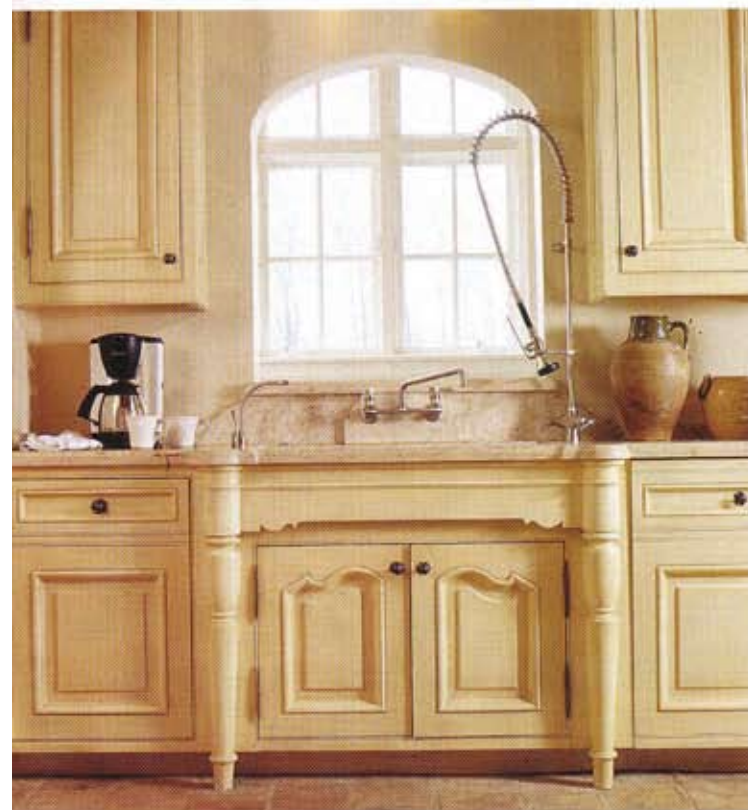
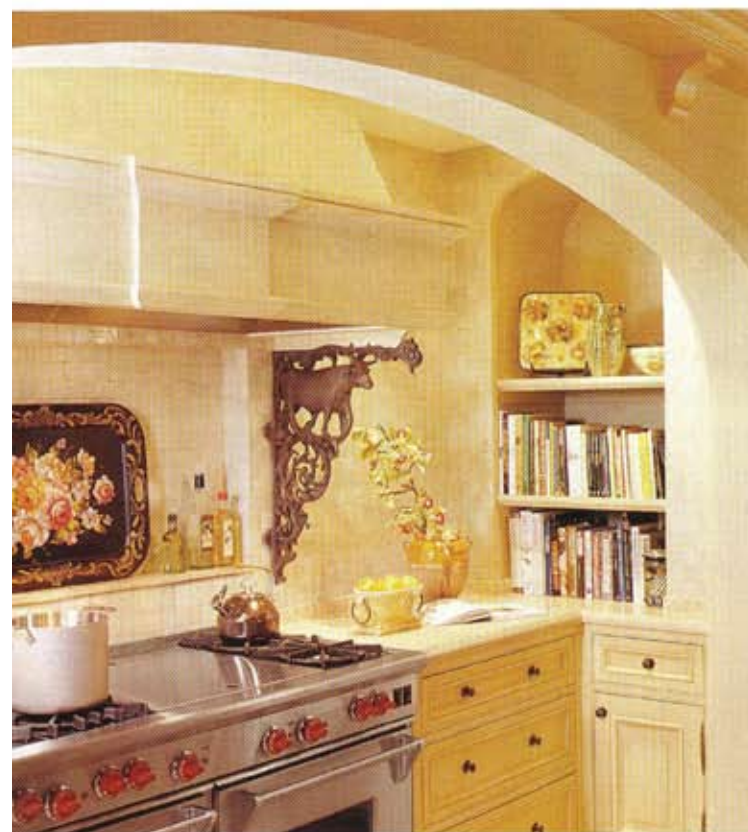


NO ONE HAS EVER SAID you have to be a nuclear physicist to design a kitchen—but there are times when it might help. Take, for example, the kitchen of John and Peggy Lehman in suburban Chicago. When they designed their new home, they put the kitchen at the center of their plan, with most of the public rooms in the house orbiting around it. “We chose to design the kitchen as the nucleus of the whole house,” says John, “because we wanted so many things to be accessed from the kitchen. We found in past homes that everyone tended to gravitate to the kitchen—not only us, but any kids or guests who were around.” So making the kitchen the most important room in the house didn’t exactly take a quantum leap of logic.

The couple discussed this at length with architect Phil Liederbach, and together they came up with a workable, albeit >

In past homes, EVERYONE GRAVITATED to the kitchen.

—HOMEOWNER JOHN LEHMAN



tricky solution: Make the kitchen an inside room, which meant no direct openings to the outdoors. However, by placing the kitchen in a central location, they were able to make connections by spinning off rooms in every direction. Radiating from this central core is the family room, the dining room, the breakfast room, a gallery, a home office, and a rear terrace.



Of course, that left one looming issue to deal with: How do you bring natural light into a room that has no windows or doors to the outside? Here, too, a little bit of physics went a long way. Liederbach laid out the kitchen so that light from the adjacent spaces could reach directly into the inner core of the house. In some cases this was just a matter of lining up kitchen doorways with outer doors and windows. For example, a double-wide opening into the kitchen lines up with a wall of French doors in the breakfast room. In addition, an equal-sized opening on the opposite wall lines up with French doors in the gallery, and a single doorway lines up with a single door and large window beyond in the office. But even these clever arrangements didn't bring in enough natural light. So Liederbach also designed cabinets with glass doors on both sides and a pass-through, allowing light to pour through what would typically be a solid piece. He also ▶

designed an interior window above the sink that lines up with a glass door in the gallery between the breakfast and family rooms, providing not only light but a view of the backyard. Obviously, such an important room demands attention to detail. And Liederbach, working with project architect Erica Crispin Weeder and interior designer Alan Boyd, created a room worthy of most-favored status. Nowhere is this more clearly stated than in the fit and finish of the cabinets. Consulting with the Lehmans, Liederbach designed all of the kitchen cabinets as if they were pieces of furniture. Turned legs, complicated moldings, and compound edges on the German limestone countertops are as fine as any you would find in the other living areas. In fact, the cabinet holding the refrigerator was designed to look like a free-standing armoire with a clock built into the pediment—an idea Peggy borrowed after seeing ▶



A wide doorway and a cupboard with glass doors on front and back and a pass-through allow light from the breakfast room to reach into the kitchen, which has no direct access to the outside. Below: The view from the breakfast room; the arched window is over the sink.



Borrowed LIGHT WAS DIRECTED
in to illuminate the kitchen.



“our architect says”

In addition to architect Phil Liederbach's clever use of space and borrowed light, what makes the Lehman kitchen so wonderful is the attention to detail. Liederbach's plan is rich with ideas that help elevate the cabinetry from standard kitchen fare to the quality level of a living room. Here are a few of the highlights, *clockwise from near left*: The armoire housing the refrigerator and freezer is topped with an inset clock, the face of which is an antique. Complexly carved bases on the support columns and layered moldings are used throughout the kitchen. Turned wood legs and carved limestone countertops are furniture-quality touches. A wrought-iron chandelier brings a gestural line and a lot of light to the middle of the kitchen.

and a small television on a pull-out swivel base. The alcove at the other end of the kitchen is designed as a cozy seating area arranged around a fireplace—just the spot for a cold winter's day in Chicago, when maybe a view isn't so desirable.

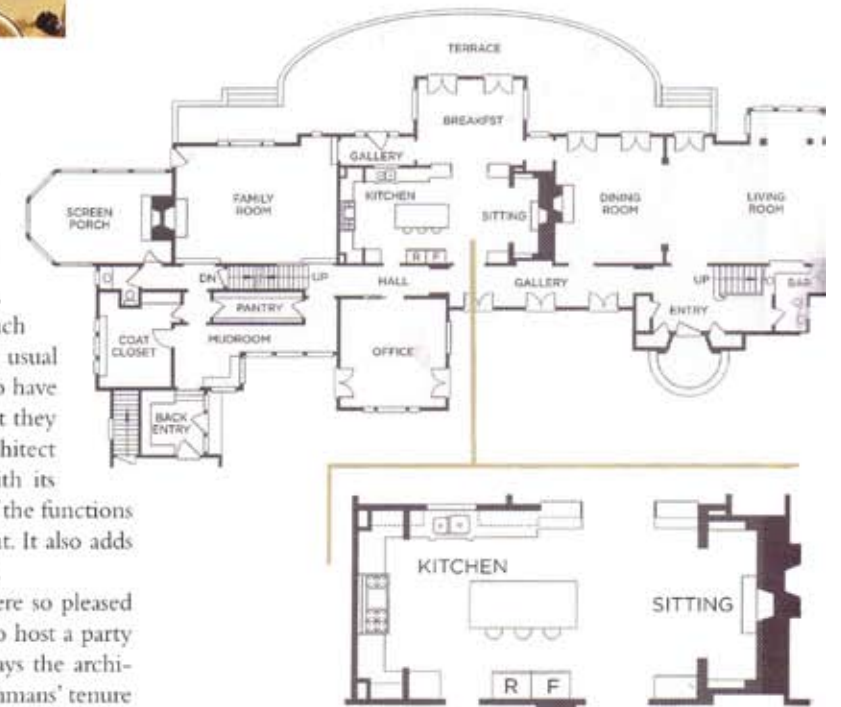
In contrast to the built-in pieces, Liederbach designed a work table to take the place of the usual center island. The Lehmans knew they needed to have some kind of work surface, says the architect, but they didn't want it to feel like an island. So the architect designed a long table of reclaimed hickory. With its turned legs and storage drawers, it fulfills most of the functions of a standard island but without the visual weight. It also adds the rich, warm brown of the wood to the room.

And speaking of warmth, John and Peggy were so pleased with the results, they invited Liederbach's firm to host a party for 100 friends and colleagues in their home. Says the architect: "It was a wonderful way to kick off the Lehmans' tenure in the house. It entertained and flowed beautifully, just as the Lehmans wanted." And, of course, it was a great test run for the house, which operated perfectly and without a meltdown. ■

Architects: Phil Liederbach and Erica Crispin Weeder

Interior designer: Alan Boyd

For more information, see sources on page 216.



a refrigerator that was set inside an old armoire in the home of fashion designer Jessica McClintock.

Boyd developed the palette of creamy colors and finishes, and Weeder figured out how to accomplish those finishes—three to four coats of hand-rubbed painting—and then taught the artisans how to do it. Wood-beam ceilings, which run into the breakfast room, help keep the area intimate and visually connect the two spaces. Likewise, antique terra-cotta roof tiles from France are used on the floor throughout the kitchen area to tie kitchen, breakfast room, and family room together. And radiant heat makes the floor a welcome source of warmth.

To temper the scale of the large room and maintain the friendly feeling the Lehmans wanted, Liederbach designed matching alcoves at each end of the kitchen with substantial, 16-inch-thick archways separating the two spaces from the rest of the room. In one alcove, there's a hood and a heavy-duty range bracketed by under-counter cabinets. Smaller niches built into the side walls hold cookbooks, a few decorative pieces, >

An inglenook opposite a similar space containing the range offers snug seating around a small, simple fireplace—an ideal spot to gather for a cozy wintertime chat.

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