

“THEY WANTED SOMETHING CONTEMPORARY CASUAL... THEY ARE BOTH VERY SOPHISTICATED PROFESSIONALS WHO ENJOY LIFE, COLLECTING WINE, AND TRAVEL. THEY'RE VERY URBAN AND THE KITCHEN DIDN'T REFLECT ANY OF THAT.” - DESIGNER, GWYNETH HAND



DRAMA QUEEN

BY CHRISTIANNA MCCAUSLAND | PHOTOGRAPHS BY BOB NAROD

It's impossible to imagine that the kitchen owned by Darshna Dhake and Matthew Rick, now an homage to dramatic, contemporary style, was once a ho-hum suburban room. "It was basically a builder-grade townhouse built in the '80s," Dhake explains. "There was nothing wrong with it, but it lacked personality, which made a person reluctant to go in there and cook. The layout was also not very helpful for working in the kitchen."

When Dhake and Rick met with Gwyneth Hand, a designer with Jennifer Gilmer Kitchen and Bath Ltd., in Chevy Chase, Maryland, they knew they wanted something modern and low maintenance. The space needed more cabinets, but they needed to be flexible enough that Dhake, at 5'3", could reach cabinets without her husband, who is 6'5", hitting his head.

"They wanted something contemporary-casual," recalls Hand. "However, in getting to know them, it was evident that they'd enjoy something more glamorous." Hand continues,

Left: Much of the color scheme for this sophisticated yet low-maintenance kitchen was inspired by the unusual red-veined granite used for the island.

Middle: This urban kitchen is outfitted with raised cabinets that flip up for easy storage and a rectangular island with a circular seating area at one end.

Right: Raised wine storage racks make for an attractive display and a back-painted red glass backsplash can be easily wiped clean.

"They are both very sophisticated professionals who enjoy life, collecting wine, and travel. They're very urban and the kitchen didn't reflect any of that."

To remedy the spatial problems, the design opened up an awkward L-shape into a galley-style kitchen. Raised cabinets over the range (on flip-up hinges for ease of access), give the space a voluminous feel. Juxtaposed from these cabinets are raised wine storage racks that are both functional and decorative.

The most important addition to the kitchen is the island, which inadvertently inspired the entire kitchen. The couple had given Hand a photograph of a large, circular peninsula that they liked, but that was never going to work in the space available. Instead, Hand designed a rectangular island with a round seating area at one end.

"When we went to look at granite for the peninsula, I pointed out this iron red granite and they just fell for it," says Hand. For her, it seemed the perfect fit. "Darshna loves color and she loves red. I thought of red as her trademark color."

The red veins swirling through the grey granite inspired the kitchen's dramatic color palette. The backsplash is back-painted red glass, which is reflective enough to give the space a larger feel without being overtly mirrored. The glass also suits Dhake's directive that the room be low maintenance as the glass can easily be wiped clean.

To complement the sheen on the backsplash and complete the modern look, Hand used gloss-black laminate for the cabinets and gave them a metallic edge. As the room had plenty of shimmering surfaces, the black marble countertops were honed to a leather finish for textural contrast. Similarly, the floors are oak, but stained charcoal for added interest.

Hand exhausted a lot of effort on the room's finishes. For example, the drawer and cabinet pulls are stainless steel wrapped in black leather, the perfect blending of the room's metallic and textured materials.

The round seating area, which could be dubbed the heart of the design, is held aloft by a semi-circular pedestal of stainless steel laminate. Dhake randomly happened upon the light fixture while doing some online browsing. "I was actually looking for something more traditional to contrast with the modern, but when I saw this I loved it," she states. "The nice thing is it is very delicate glass, but it is very easy to clean."

Dhake also found the seating area's aluminum chairs. Initially, she'd wanted

transparent "ghost" chairs, but couldn't find them in a counter height. The silver seats successfully draw together the other metallic accents throughout the kitchen.

The new layout of the kitchen opens it to a living space, so the less clutter visible in the kitchen, the better to maintain the home's modernity. "As long as you have storage space there's no need to clutter your countertops," Hand explains. "This design is so sleek, anything would detract."

To give the couple ample space to stash their things, Hand squeezed cabinetry into even the tiniest space, like in the small rectangular bump out on the rectangular island, which has a slim cabinet. The space beneath a stairway adjacent to the kitchen had been drywall; angled storage was slipped into that otherwise wasted space.

The tidy lines of the new kitchen create a nice canvas. "We travel a great deal, so we can display things we've found, vases and such, without it being fussy," says Dhake.

The sheer volume of storage and its varying heights ensures that both Dhake and Rick can use the kitchen comfortably despite their difference in size. "It's wonderful because I can reach everything and Matt hasn't hit his head yet," she says with a laugh.

And use the room they do.

"We were never huge entertainers in the past, but we have started to entertain more, and I think that's because the kitchen is so conducive to entertaining," says Dhake. "Now we can have people over, we can mix drinks and serve food and talk at the same time. It's a much more inviting space."

"I loved all the individual pieces but was uncertain how it would assemble, yet it all came together well," Dhake continues. "It feels like a reflection of our personalities. It's exactly what we wanted without knowing it as we went into it."

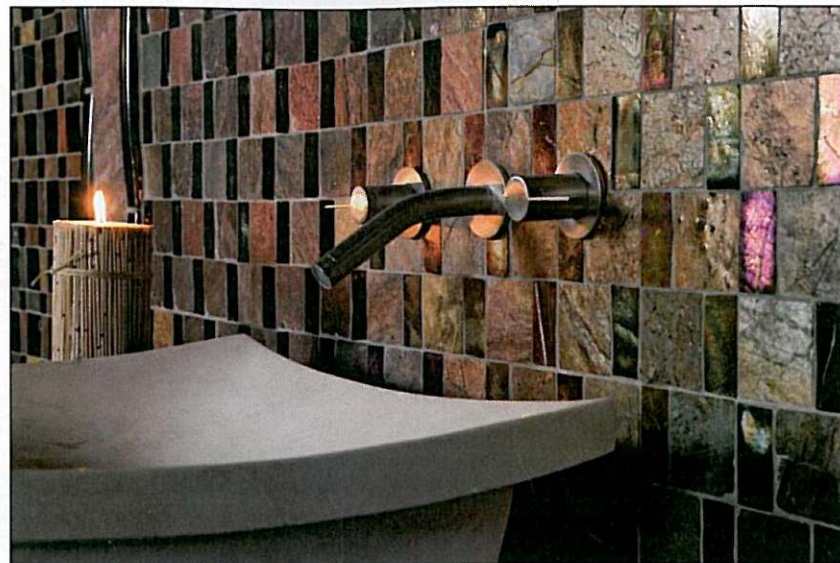
Hand likes to think of this as her Hollywood kitchen though it isn't about a style so much as it is about the personality of the owner. "I like to help my clients have a kitchen that is theirs," says Hand. "When I think of this project, the word glamorous comes to mind; it has a special look that is very much for them."

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