



RENOVATION | BY CHRISTIANNA MCCAUSLAND

# SPACE-AGE MODERN

*The kids didn't define this redesign.*



**DESIGNER**

Jennifer Gilmer Kitchen &amp; Bath

**CONTRACTOR**

M.R. Thornton &amp; Sons

**APPLIANCES**

Miele

**CABINETRY**

Premiere Custom-built Cabinetry

**FAUCET**

Grohe

**SINK**

Lenova

**MARBLE**

Rock Tops Fabrication

**ISLAND**

The Grothouse Lumber Co.

**WHEN MIKE AND KRISTEN** Graham decided to move from their home in Locust Point to leafy northern Baltimore County, they left behind a lot of things they appreciated: a house with a contemporary interior, a bustling urban life, and easy access to Starbucks. But they had fallen absolutely in love with a house's wooded lot in Baldwin,

which promised a quiet haven for the busy couple—who both work in medical-device sales—and their two young children, now ages 5 and 9. A few things would have to go, though—like the standard-issue, traditional interiors and the ho-hum kitchen.

"It was a perfectly functional kitchen, but it wasn't to our taste," Kristen says.

Built in 1996, the house featured builder-grade wood cabinets, rose-colored tile, and some questionable space planning.

"We host a lot of parties and the original spacing for people to sit—three bar stools—didn't leave space to gather or room for a family of four."

The couple knew they wanted to go



Designer Paul Bentham of Jennifer Gilmer Kitchen & Bath conceived a plan that would work with the room's rectilinear shape and that reflects Kristen's love of clean lines and minimal clutter.



modern, but not so over-the-top as to clash with the architecture of the house. Going for a style that would be "like the inside of a W Hotel," they immediately repainted the house in cool, gray tones—covering the previous yellows—and removed the windows and plantation shutters that inhibited the view. After a flood forced the issue of renovating the kitchen, an internet search connected them with Bethesda-based Jennifer Gilmer Kitchen & Bath.

"We wanted to go with a contemporary look, but one that wouldn't scare people off or hurt the value of the property," says the project's designer, Paul Bentham.

Bentham conceived a plan that would work with the room's rectilinear shape, a design that plays well to Kristen's love of clean lines and minimal clutter. He also pushed for a high-gloss white color scheme to contrast with the warm, shiny walnut veneers. The new design has ample storage and conveniences for entertaining, with bi-fold cabinet doors that open to the ceiling with a mere touch of the hand, vertical wine storage, and two ovens with ergonomic handles.

"We also moved the cooktop from the back wall to the island, so whomever is cooking wouldn't have their back turned to their guests," Bentham explains. "We installed a retracting range hood, too, so the line of sight is fairly uncluttered."



The focal point of the kitchen is undeniably the island, a 2.5-ton single slab of rare Peruvian walnut with a waterfall edge that is cantilevered into the space. It creates ample room for guests and family meals.

"I actually have an engineering background," Bentham notes. "We worked out the weight ratio of the waterfall edge and the top and how far we could cantilever it without being detrimental to the structure, like working out a bridge span. An island on such a massive scale was just so much fun to do."

The couple sourced the plush white barstools themselves as well as the mag-

nificent chandeliers, which are made of thin ribbons of wood. They also found the grain-matched marble for the backsplash and countertops, which gives the room a sense of gentle organic movement.

The island is by far the Grahams' favorite part of the new kitchen, though another touch comes in a close second: the Miele built-in coffee system. It may have been costly, but when these city slickers had to wean themselves from the \$1.95 cups of joe at their beloved Starbucks, they knew that unlimited access to a quality brew right at home would more than make up for the Miele's expense.

The only one of Bentham's suggestions that the couple balked at was white floors, opting instead for more practical gray in an oversize porcelain tile (five feet by 18 inches) that parallels the long line of the island.

"Some of these elements are high maintenance, especially with small children," Kristen concedes. "I can't put a bottle of wine on the marble countertops or a hot pan on the wood island, or it will mark it."

But the Grahams decided to take a stand as parents: "Our kids came into our world, so we try to teach them to be environmentally aware and respectful of nice things and nice spaces." ☼

