

# Gathering Place

With traditional touches and plenty of light, a Short Hills designer creates an award-winning kitchen her whole family can enjoy.

BY LAUREN PAYNE  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURA MOSS

• The removable fretwork on the antique glass-front cabinet doors was inspired by Chinese window screens.

• Seamless quartz countertops are "super easy to clean," says designer Amy Yin.

• The six-burner La Cornue stove was a splurge. It's topped by a massive chrome hood.

• Deep drawers hold tableware so virtually everything is within reach of young helpers.

It was hardly an unusual challenge for interior designer Amy Yin. Her clients wanted to transform their dark, cramped suburban kitchen into a sunny, wide-open, kid-friendly space conducive to large family gatherings. The clients, however, were unusual: herself and her husband, James Ooi.

Yin and Ooi purchased their Short Hills home in 2002, but had put off tackling the kitchen. "We lived with this kitchen for nearly 10 years before figuring out what to do with it," says Yin. Busy work schedules and two young kids—Benjamin, now 9, and Oscar, 6—made it tough to make the kitchen renovation a priority. Finally, Yin moved it to the front burner. "I realized the only way to make time for our kitchen project was to treat it as if it were a client's," says Yin. "James and I held weekly design meetings." Armed with a plan, the renovation began.

## The Project

The first big step was removing the wall dividing the kitchen from the adjacent family room. Once the wall came down,

## 96 Shades of White

The neutral palette and calming vibe of designer Amy Yin's kitchen is right on trend. "Neutrals, including a wide range of whites, are naturally soothing," says Yin.

There are 96 shades of white, says designer Robin Wilson, author of *Clean Design: Wellness for Your Lifestyle* (Greenleaf, 2015).

Wilson says exploring the subtle differences in white is a top design trend for 2016.

Several paint companies have embraced this neutral palette. Benjamin Moore calls 2016 "the year of white." The New Jersey-based paint giant named Simply White its color of the year, describing it as an elegant, sophisticated and refined choice. "There's an honesty in white," says Eileen O'Neill, Benjamin Moore's creative director. "White doesn't go in and out of style."

At Sherwin-Williams, Alabaster—a mix of cream and ivory—is the color of 2016. "It provides an oasis of calmness," says Jackie Jordan, the paint maker's director of color marketing.

Farrow & Ball, a boutique paint company offering a palette of 132 hues—in contrast to Benjamin Moore's 3,500 colors and 1,500 from Sherwin-Williams—added nine new colors for 2016, including two off-whites, Shadow White and Drop Cloth, both light neutrals without yellow undertones.—LP



**OPEN SPACE** Designer Amy Yin adjoined the kitchen with the family room. Glossy wood floors unite the spaces. Decorative pendant lights add ambiance.

Yin replaced a single window with two pairs of south-facing casement windows that flooded the reconfigured space with light. She then set her sights on a massive La Cornue stove. "That was the big splurge," she says. Yin topped it with an equally massive decorative hood and selected a backsplash of marble, granite and mother-of-pearl inlays. "I love the combo of black and brass and chrome," she says.

The main focal point? Yin designed glass-front cabinets inspired by the traditional wooden window screens from her ancestral home in Suzhou, China. "We wanted to incorporate some element of Chinese architecture in this space to honor our heritage," says Yin. The removable fretwork (for easier cleaning) was milled in Alabama, placed on antique mirrors made in New Jersey, then crafted into pocket doors. The fretwork's design motif is repeated in the marble backsplash; its curves are echoed in the glass pendant lighting, explains Yin.

Counters are kept clear; small appliances are stored in the spacious walk-in pantry or behind the glass-front cabinet doors. (Both locations are outfitted with LED lighting and electrical outlets, so appliances can be used where they're stored.) Yin created smart storage at every turn. Deep cabinets hold glasses, table linens and cookbooks; deep drawers accommodate dinnerware and cutlery. By keeping dinnerware in lower drawers, "the boys can help set the table and empty the dishwasher," says Yin. Base cabinets hold kid-friendly snacks along with markers and other art supplies. "It fosters their sense of independence," she adds. Even the microwave is at kid level. "It's a push of a button to heat up their own snacks," Yin says.

The island sink abounds with smart features. A colander can be tucked under the ma-

hogany cutting board, custom designed to sit flush with the sink. A roll-out base cabinet has a food-grade maple chopping block, designed with Amy's mother, Lucy, in mind. "She can sit while she chops," Yin says.

With 70 square feet of counter space, cooking en masse is an easy feat. "I want my children growing up and appreciating their heritage," says Yin. "An easy entryway is through food."

### The Food

Yin and Ooi are Chinese Americans. Yin's parents fled communist China as children in 1949. They met in college in Taiwan and started a new life together, first in Canada and later in the States. Ooi's family is also ethnic Chinese, from Malaysia. Aside from his sister, who lives in Hong Kong, all members of both families are stateside. Yin and Ooi's home is the family gathering place; the kitchen is the hub of all the activities. "It can get crazy loud," says Yin. "It's a ruckus, but it's always a fun time."

The family regularly prepares traditional Chinese meals—from simple courses like dumplings and pot stickers to more elaborate meals that require everyone to pitch in. Her late father's favorite recipes are among Yin's essentials. "It's important to keep that alive," she says.

Despite the chaos, Yin never worries about a mess. "It's quick and easy to clean," she says. "Everything gets swept into the sinks." The kitchen was awarded top honors by the National Kitchen & Bath Association in 2014, an achievement to be sure, but it's daily life that is most rewarding to Yin. "This kitchen was designed to be lived in," she says. ■

**Resources:** Amy Yin Interiors, LLC, Short Hills. 908-899-1553; amyininteriors.com



**EXTREME STORAGE** A large walk-in pantry—space stolen from the adjacent family room—provides more than ample storage. Amy's mother, Lucy, uses the roll-out chopping block while Benjamin, 9, keeps her company.



**FAMILY FRIENDLY** The breakfast bar, outfitted with LED lighting and electrical outlets, is concealed behind pocket doors. "This kitchen is designed to be lived in," says interior designer Amy Yin, with son Oscar, 6. The family frequently cooks together.

