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**WRITER MEG FOX PHOTOGRAPHER LAUREN MCCONNELL INTERIOR DESIGNER AMY MANOR
ARCHITECTURAL & SPACE DESIGN ARCHITECT MICHAEL J. MONROE AND DESIGNER STEPHEN GASSERT**

The flow of traffic was enhanced around a granite-topped center island where the double sink was relocated. Modern hand-blown glass pendants over the island reflect a "beautiful patina" that fades from white to amber, designer Amy Manor says. Their clean lines are juxtaposed by more traditional elements such as the rustic chandelier in the breakfast room.



Character Strengths

Designer touches, upgraded features and a more efficient layout elevate a once-generic home

AFTER DISCOVERING WATER DAMAGE in their home—located beside preserved wetlands in Little Silver—Lori and Arnold Natali felt the time was right for making significant improvements to the basic-grade construction. "The kitchen wasn't practical at all, and the breakfast area was very small and uncomfortable getting in and out of," Lori Natali says.

Architect Michael Monroe and designer Stephen Gassert—both in Red Bank—were enlisted to

improve the layout and flow of the room. They worked primarily within the existing footprint, though they did bump out the breakfast area into what had been an outdoor deck. The formerly cumbersome space is now wide open and easily accessible from adjacent rooms. The expansion also allowed room for a larger dining table and a built-in bar, ideal for entertaining.



Far left: An expanse of windows and a more efficient layout open the kitchen to light and views of the surrounding nature preserve. “The colors are so beautiful and change with the season,” homeowner Lori Natali says. Cream-painted cabinetry, golden walls, natural stone surfaces and warm woods harmonize with the setting.

Left: Removing an outdoor deck allowed space for an enlarged breakfast room and a custom bar with plentiful storage. A trio of windows incorporated into the built-in assures uninterrupted views. Manor selected a wide horizontal stripe sisal rug to visually widen the room and balance the linear proportions of the farmhouse table and benches.

STYLE & SUBSTANCE

Monroe and Gassert addressed structural issues by shoring up the ceiling with steel girders, cleverly concealed in a coffered design. Says Gassert of the collaboration: “We helped to customize and detail what was a generic house and make it special.”

Custom cream-painted cabinets with inset panels keep things classic and take into consideration storage for kitchen essentials, from cooking oils to cookbooks and spices, Natali says. “I needed a place for everything so we took advantage of every space,” she says. Family members love to cook, so a professional-style Wolf range with double ovens was a priority. So was the generous granite-topped island—where the double sinks were relocated—that allowed more space for dining, prep and serving.

DESIGN REINFORCEMENT

For assistance in choosing finishes, furnishings and accents, Natali enlisted Red Bank-based interior

designer Amy Manor. “Amy made it easier and knew what I was looking for, which was a relief for me,” Natali says.

Golden-hued walls reflect the home’s sunny landscape, warm wood tones combine light and dark, and modern mixes with tradition. “The goal was to keep things “warm, casual and comfortable,” Manor says. “I think we achieved that.” ■

SOURCES architectural design and room layout, Michael J. Monroe of MJM Services in collaboration with Stephen Gassert of Gassert Design Inc., both in Red Bank; interior design, Amy Manor of Amy Manor Interior Design in Red Bank; custom cabinetry, Doug Peters Kitchen Concepts Inc. in Little Silver; carpentry/builder, William Sustick Construction in Fair Haven; tile backsplash, Donna Martin, CKD, of Tiled Interiors in Red Bank; dining table, Fremarc Designs in City of Industry, California; rustic chandelier, Currey & Co. in Atlanta; Italian hand-blown pendants over island, Oggetti in Miami; granite countertops, Colonial Cream; walls, Safari (AF-335) by Benjamin Moore.

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