

# Building a theater for the culinary arts

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MATTHEWS

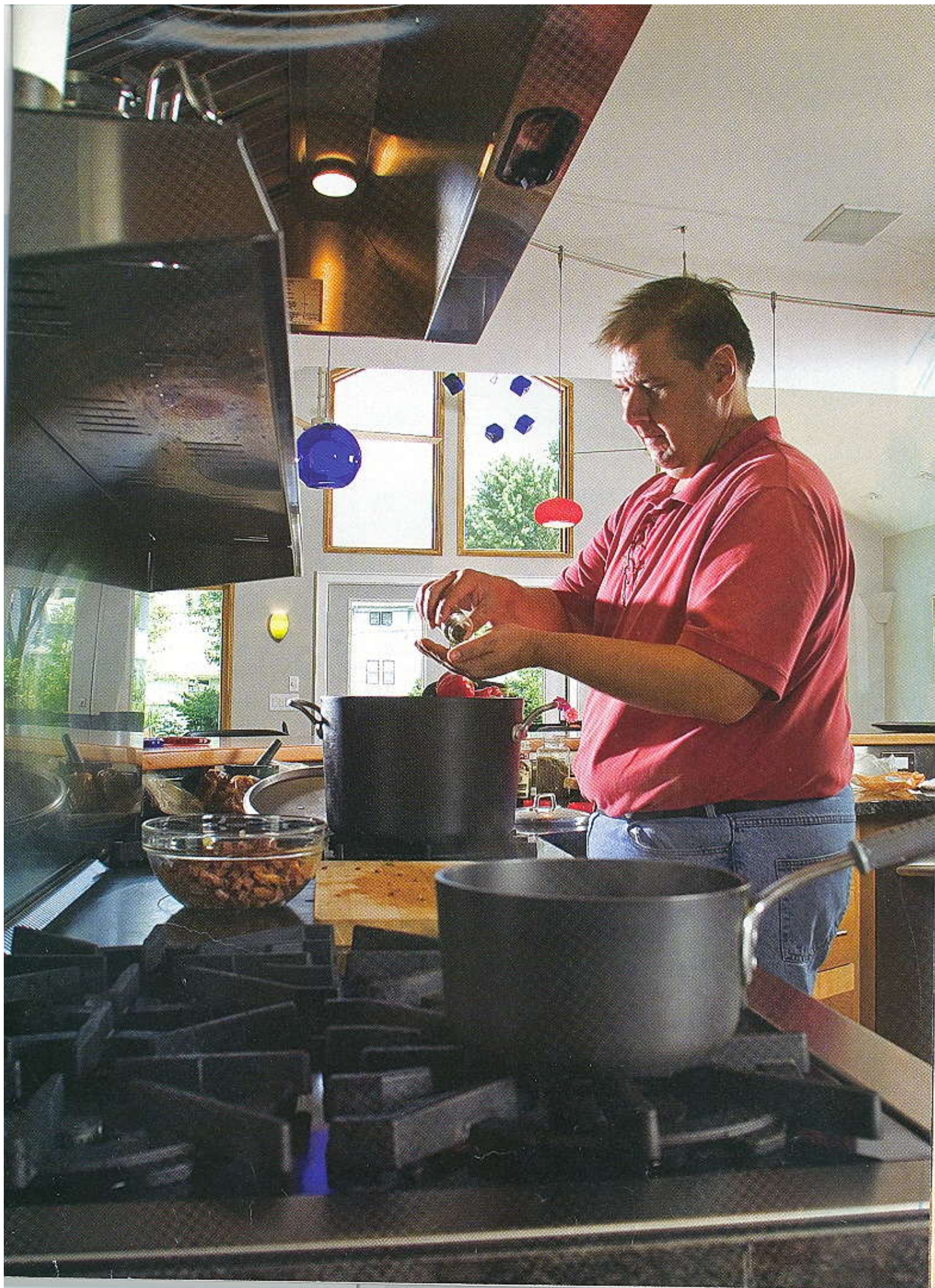
**After surviving years in a cramped kitchen, this Clintonville couple who love to entertain bought a home with remodeling potential. Their new dream kitchen even includes a long bar, where guests delight in sitting, socializing and watching.**

*Opposite: Mark Wayda does cheffy things in the bigness of the kitchen/entertaining addition he and wife Julie Davis had constructed. A particular joy is the six-burner, dual-oven, 60-inch-wide, 950-pound Wolf Range.*

The kitchen in the small Clintonville home of Julie Davis and Mark Wayda was a bit cramped. Measuring little more than 10-by-10 feet, the room had limited cabinet space, about three feet of counter, a small underpowered gas stove and no dishwasher. Pots, pans and supplies were "just sort of jammed into the places we had to jam them" or stowed in the basement, says Mark. Trying to descend the cluttered basement stairs to retrieve a can of tomatoes or a frying pan "could be dicey, especially in the middle of a party."

Yet Julie, general counsel at Retail Ventures Inc., and Mark, director of public relations for the Ohio National Guard, regularly entertained anywhere from four to a hundred people. An adroit amateur chef, Mark would squeeze his Cajun and Creole specialties, gourmet dinner parties and entire Thanksgiving dinners out of the tiny kitchen, sometimes resorting to outdoor grills to accommodate the demand. "Cooking is a way for me to share with the people I care about," says Mark. "We love having friends and family around," adds Julie, who's been known to strong-arm guests into homegrown theatricals, as well as throw a party to celebrate the arrival of their new yard sculpture.

After spending the first 18 years of their marriage in that little 1,200-square-foot Clintonville home





**Above:** The remodeling plan included demolishing the old kitchen, knocking out the back wall of the house and constructing a new, larger kitchen and dining and entertaining area.  
**Inset:** An existing deck was removed and the patio torn up to make way for the addition and a new guest-friendly outdoor area.

with the tiny unrenovated kitchen, they decided to move. The couple wanted "something bigger, with a dream kitchen," says Mark. "And more bathrooms," Julie adds.

Unable to find an existing house that met their requirements and their price range, they decided, "If we were going to spend this kind of money, we might as well get what we wanted," says Mark. So he went house-hunting again, often ignoring the homeowner's attempts to showcase the house's highlights in favor of wandering the backyard with a tape measure.

They found an ideal 2,000-square-foot Clintonville home, built in 1945, with a 220-foot-deep lot. "The house was set up structurally for an addition," says Julie. "And, even if we did nothing to it," says Mark, "we could have lived happily in it."

But, of course, they had already started to plan out their changes. "I wanted the big kitchen, more basement under the addition and we wanted a big open room," says Mark. His ideal walk-in pantry, with a separate sink for prep work, would have the same square footage as the entire kitchen in their old

house. Most of all, Mark desired the largest, most powerful range he could fit into the kitchen. (His wife would later accuse him of wanting a room as big as the "Iron Chef" Kitchen Stadium.)

Their remodeling plan would add a thousand square feet to the first floor and included pulling up a large backyard deck, knocking out the back wall of the house, extending the kitchen area and constructing an entirely new room from

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scratch, with a 14-foot vaulted ceiling and a wall of windows overlooking the backyard. The large room, separated from the kitchen by a curving half wall/counter, would serve as a dining and entertaining area, as well as an entrance to the backyard and patio. Julie, never fond of the term "great room," christened the space adjoining the kitchen as "the giant room."

"We wanted it modern and very open,"

says Mark. "I wanted to be able to stand in the backyard and look through the house."

After deciding to stay in their old home during the renovations, they purchased the new house in February 2002. They hired a design/build contractor and looked forward to breaking ground as quickly as possible. In anticipation, they demolished the kitchen themselves in July, saving the cabinetry for reuse in Mark's basement

workshop. "I gave Julie a rubber mallet," says Mark. "Talk about stress relievers!" recalls Julie.

Then, alas, nothing happened. Their contractor wanted them to decide nearly everything, down to lighting, before the work began. But Mark and Julie were still making changes, and lacked

the time to complete every decision in advance. "We didn't have it all done, so the builder put it off," says Julie.

Herein lies a lesson. The relationship between a contractor and the homeowners is a kind of marriage. Compatibility is important. Some people remodel in a very orderly way; everything is preplanned and surprises are avoided at all costs. They need a contractor who likes to work in a tidy, linear fashion.

*comfy stools and a curving  
stainless steel foot rest for  
guests to chat and catch the  
kitchen action.*







**Above:** On the kitchen side of the bar, Wayda's "appliance envy" was soothed with the French-top Wolf Range, wall microwave and convection oven, dishwasher and trash compactor and, not visible, a large refrigerator/freezer. Their old kitchen had a small, underpowered gas stove and no dishwasher.  
**Opposite:** Exotic purpleheart wood, which Wayda says is "a weed tree" in South and Central America, was incorporated in the floor of the dining area.

Other people remodel as if they are painting a canvas. They sketch in outlines, move things around, change colors . . . and they need a contractor who can look at their ideas, shrug, smile and say, "Hey, we can do that."

Julie and Mark needed to make a change.

By midwinter, they had found a new contractor. Joe Sniderman, president of S & G Builders, won them over when he took a look at the blueprints and immediately asked them about the intrusive posts in the middle of the room, designed to support the wood beam spanning the width of the addition. Trying to make the best of the undesirable posts, Julie had already planned to brick them over and add sconces. Their conversation went something like this:

Sniderman: "Do you want these posts here?"

Julie and Mark: "Well . . . no."

Sniderman: "You can use steel."

By using an impressive 34-foot-long steel beam instead of the weaker wood version, Sniderman freed the space of any obstructions from the edge of the kitchen through the giant room to the back wall. And instead of making sure that every detail was settled before

construction began, he left things open-ended. "Our budget went from 48 pages down to two," says Julie.

The work began in earnest in April 2003 and the project continued to evolve the entire time. "From the start, every day, there was an e-mail, there was a fax, there was a love letter," says Sniderman. "Every day was something new. . . . We were designing as we went." However,

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the couple "made it easy for us—they knew what they wanted, they did their homework and they worked hard. . . . I enjoyed every bit of it."

The biggest alteration came a month into construction, during a very wet spring. The foundation under the addition had been poured, the basement walls built and the soil backfilled. Mark, who oversaw the day-to-day work, had pushed to make the addition bigger. Julie had vetoed the idea, convinced that her husband wanted to super-size everything

from the range to the pantry. On their way to a movie, Mark brought Julie by the work site. Upon venturing down into the freshly built basement for the addition, she nearly panicked: "Oh my God! This is going to be too small!"

"We decided right away we were going to suck it up and pay the extra money," says Mark. They called Sniderman immediately, while standing in the movie line, to ask him to add six feet to the addition. "And we were back to digging freakin' holes in the rain," sighs Mark.

The bump-out cost six times more than the original cost would have been, but neither of them regrets having a full 16 feet of addition

now. "Everything looks good on paper, but people cannot tell," observes Sniderman. Now Julie advises fellow remodelers to: "Go to somebody's parking lot with duct tape so you can mark out the room and walk around in it."

The next big challenge, Sniderman says, was "making the kitchen fit." The size of the appliances determines the size of the cabinets, which establishes the measurements for the counters. "It's a chain reaction," says Julie. And not every problem can be anticipated, like the

drawer that had to be trimmed once they discovered it snacked into the oven handle when opened.

The stainless steel, dual-oven, six-burner, French-top Wolf Range that Mark chose was 60 inches long and weighed 950 pounds. (Originally, he was hoping for a commercial 60-inch Vulcan range, but venting the 12 pilot lights proved impractical.) Extra steel was added underneath the floor to support the Wolf, which also required a powerful range hood. In addition, the kitchen features a wall microwave, convection wall oven, large refrigerator/freezer, dishwasher and trash compactor, all done in stainless steel. The pantry has its own stainless utility sink and super-

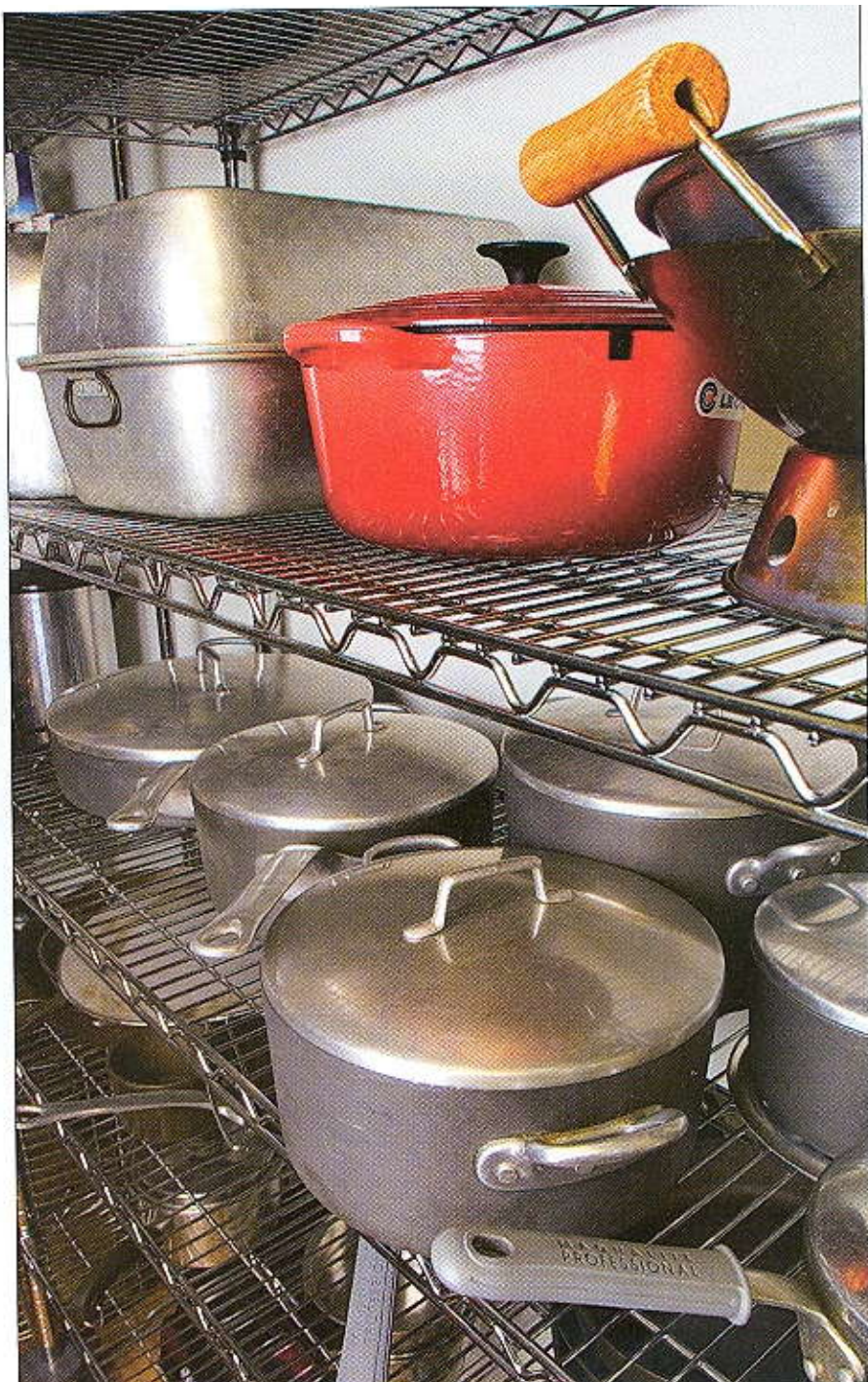
**His ideal walk-in pantry, with a separate sink for prep work, would have the same square footage as the entire kitchen in their old house.**

powerful garbage disposal for chewing up the toughest vegetable peelings. After years in his limited little kitchen, says Mark, "I had appliance envy, I'll admit it."

For Julie, the focal point of the addition is the two-tiered half-wall separating the kitchen from the giant room. On the kitchen side, the lower wall is a sweep of black granite countertop and cherry cabinets. On the giant room side, a long curved wooden bar tops the upper wall, providing seating for at least eight people. Guests can sit and eat while watching Mark create specialties like Chicken and Tasso (boneless chicken and spiced Southern ham, braised in butter and a secret spice mix) and Crawfish Julia (a creamy Cajun pasta dish).

"It's kitchen theater," says Julie.

At first glance, the cherry wood bar top looks like a continuous curve, but it's actually a complex series of rounded angles. "That was a challenge," says Sniderman, explaining, "First, we got a lot of cherry wood and glued and sanded and made a big rectangle." Setting the sheet of wood atop the half-wall and using a cardboard template, the carpenters cut the wood *in situ* to create the bar. "We had to make it," says



*Big crowds require big pots and pans: The couple regularly entertains from four to a hundred people, and their new walk-in pantry saves trips to the basement, where they had stored cooking equipment in their old house.*

Sniderman. "Trees just don't grow like that."

Below the wood top, the half-wall is faced with brick and has a stainless foot rail, for a more authentic bar look. But the house originally had no brick, inside or out. The answer was "thin brick," which is real brick, made from shale and clay, but cut into half-inch-thick slices and applied like tile. The thin bricks also cover the kitchen walls.

To match the rest of the house, they put in oak flooring. Mark, an experienced woodworker, hoped to incorporate an

exotic hardwood called purpleheart into the floor of the giant room. The deep violet wood grows in South and Central America, where it is used for floors, exterior steps and dock pilings; "It's like a weed tree down there," says Mark. After trying to mill the dense boards himself and burning up his router bit, Mark passed the purpleheart to Sniderman: "He gave me hunks of wood, literally hunks, and we milled them to hardwood flooring size," recalls Sniderman.

Julie and Mark drew up an abstract inlay for the floor: a curling swoop that



*Thin brick was applied like tile to the kitchen walls, and oak flooring was installed to match the rest of the house. Davis uses the baking counter at center to make pies.*

ends in the center of the room, with a perfect purple circle floating nearby. Julie thinks the flooring guys actually installed the swoop upside down (“it was more of a squiggly exclamation point”), while Mark remains convinced the boards were placed according to their plan. “It visually brings you into the space,” he insists, demonstrating by walking along the purple boards.

To finish the room, they painted the walls a soft gray (after trying green and yellow shades that they didn’t like) and accented several walls with a

checkerboard design from a magazine how-to that Julie had ripped out of *Better Homes & Gardens* years earlier.

“Actually, Joe [Sniderman] thought it was stupid until he saw it,” says Julie. “I thought it was stupid until I saw it,” adds Mark. In fact, they liked the results on one wall so much, they added a larger checkerboard to another wall.

The back wall of the addition, which provides most of the natural light, is nearly all windows, custom-made by Jeld-Wen. With the room’s northern exposure, “We wanted views and light,

but enough wall to protect you from the cold,” says Julie.

Furniture is fairly minimal: bar stools snuggled up to the curving wall, a nine-foot dining table for buffets and sit-downs, and two butter-colored leather recliners by the fireplace. Most of the room’s color comes from numerous paintings, prints and sculptures; many of the pieces were collected during trips, particularly to New Orleans. (“I dreaded the times they said they were going on vacation,” confides Sniderman, “because if they saw something they wanted, it would go into that house.”)

The entire project, from purchase to moving in, took more than two years. Mark grew so weary of friends and family asking about the house that he designed a website just to answer their questions. But the wait wasn’t all bad. “Because the design process was so long,” says Julie, “a lot of the mistakes we were getting ready to make, we didn’t.” Mark adds, “It’s hard work, it’s exhausting . . . and I had a blast doing it.”

Less than a month after they moved in, the couple threw their annual bash in honor of Julie’s birthday. Cooking for 80 people, Mark served up a slew of hot and cold appetizers, four major entrees and an enormous pan of seafood paella. Mark calls his cooking style “frenetic,” acknowledging that “You try to be as organized as you can, but life doesn’t always afford you the opportunity to have everything chopped into little cups.”

Testing out his new kitchen, under fire, for the first time, Mark recalls, “There’s this two-hour period where you’re just cooking nonstop. An hour into that phase, I realized I had not taken more than a step in any one direction.”

That was when he realized he finally had the kitchen he’d always wanted. “This is it.” ■

*Katherine Matthews is a freelance writer in Columbus.*