

By Kim Berndtson

Shuttered New England Church Gets Second Chance

When it came to finding inspiration for the design theme for this Portland, ME renovation, Tina Richardson looked to the structure's previous life...a former church that was built in the late 1880s.

Richardson, owner of Maine Coast Kitchen Design in Gorham, purchased the shuttered chapel as an investment, seeing potential in the structure's vaulted ceilings, exposed beams and tall, arched windows. Lacking a homeowner at the time, she designed the space to appeal to the mass market

looking for an authentic, comfortable home for family and guests.

As it turns out, she hit the nail on the head, so to speak. The couple who ended up purchasing the property – empty nesters who own a local business – have a special fondness for the place. “They used to actually go to church there!” says Richardson. “They have always had an attachment to the property, so they are the perfect buyers. When they saw we had changed it into a single-family home, they put in an offer. They fell in love with the entire space!”

QUINTESSENTIAL ‘CHURCH’ ELEMENTS

At the heart of the transformation is the spacious kitchen, which showcases a focal-point cooking center where the altar once stood. Its pièce de résistance is the La Cornue range, which is set off with a single-slab of Skyros marble and a Whitehaus pot-filler. “Since it’s one piece, there are no grout lines,” she says. “Plus, it’s easy to clean.” Richardson flanked the range wall with towering symmetrical cabinets – custom designed by Maine Coast Kitchen Design – that

nearly touch the tall ceilings.

While the La Cornue steals the show, the marble pays homage to the church's past. “Marble is quintessential ‘church,’” says Richardson. “I wanted to use it as much as I could throughout the kitchen.”

As such, she also included it in the main island, which runs parallel to the cooking center. It features a dramatically curved front edge as well as plentiful seating. “This is the perfect place for serving guests,” she says. “When I designed this space, I envisioned a family that liked to en-



COOKING CENTER

Serves as the focal point, taking center stage as the former altar once did

FLOATING STAIRCASE

Leads guests to the third floor theater room, via ‘the highway to heaven’

MARBLE-TOPPED ISLAND

Matches cooking center backsplash to pay homage to quintessential ‘church’

Photos: Jeff Roberts, Jeff Roberts Imaging



ENTERTAIN WITH EASE

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ertain, and this couple does, so it is a perfect fit for them.”

Richardson included a matching custom marble sink – fabricated and installed by Maine Coast Kitchen Design – that faces into the living and dining space.

MULTIPLE ISLANDS

Two additional islands, one that serves as a baking center and the other a beverage center, are nestled between the cooking wall and main island. Richardson topped them with boldly veined Verde Bamboo granite. “Granite is a good choice here because of its durability,” she says. “A lot of prep work and baking is done on these islands, so the homeowners don’t have to worry about scratches.”

Richardson included a prep sink in one island, crafted from matching granite. Since it is custom made, the designer pitched the sink bottom. “When you run water, it doesn’t collect in the corners,” she notes. “The sink is very durable, and maintenance free,” she says. “It will look the same 10 years from now as it does today. Both sinks in the kitchen are a topic of discussion whenever the family entertains. They are truly unique, one-of-a-kind conversation pieces.”

Because the entire kitchen area is so spacious, Richardson called upon her years of design training to strategically place all of the elements – such as the islands, appliances, cooking wall, etc. – to enhance functionality. “There was a lot of space to utilize,” she says. “That was actually one of the biggest challenges. With such a big, blank open canvas, it took a lot of creativity to ensure everything is

accessible so you aren’t walking too far from the refrigerator to the oven or to the prep zones.”

ELEMENTS TO ENTERTAIN WITH EASE

Another highlight of the transformation from church to home is the butler's pantry, which features Vetrostone countertops, a custom-built quartz farmhouse sink, inset cabinetry and a chandelier accent “to sweeten the space,” she says. This area is also home to a desk and office. “The Vetrostone has seashells intermixed in it, so it’s very coastal,” she says. “It’s absolutely beautiful, and it screams ‘Maine!’”

“The pantry is a great feature because, overall, this home was built for entertaining,” she continues. “When they have guests, all of the dirty dishes can go into the pantry and they can close the door. And, with the deep, single-bowl sink and dishwasher, cleanup of large serving platters and lobster pots is easy.”

While the kitchen takes center stage in the home, Richardson also designed the guest bedrooms and bathrooms as well as the master suite, “which is located where the church choir used to sing in harmony,” she notes. A third-floor bonus room, which the designer turned into a theater, is accessible via a floating staircase she affectionately calls “the highway to heaven,” adding, “The house is set up so the master suite is basically its own ‘wing,’ as are the guest spaces. It’s a great setup for when the homeowners’ grown kids come to visit. They can essentially have their own private quarters.” KB DN



STRATEGIC PLANNING

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Richardson added dual custom-crafted sinks to the kitchen...one marble, the other granite. “Both sinks in the kitchen are a topic of discussion whenever the family entertains,” she says. “They are truly unique, one-of-a-kind conversation pieces.”



FOCAL-POINT COOKING WALL

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