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in Challenging Spaces

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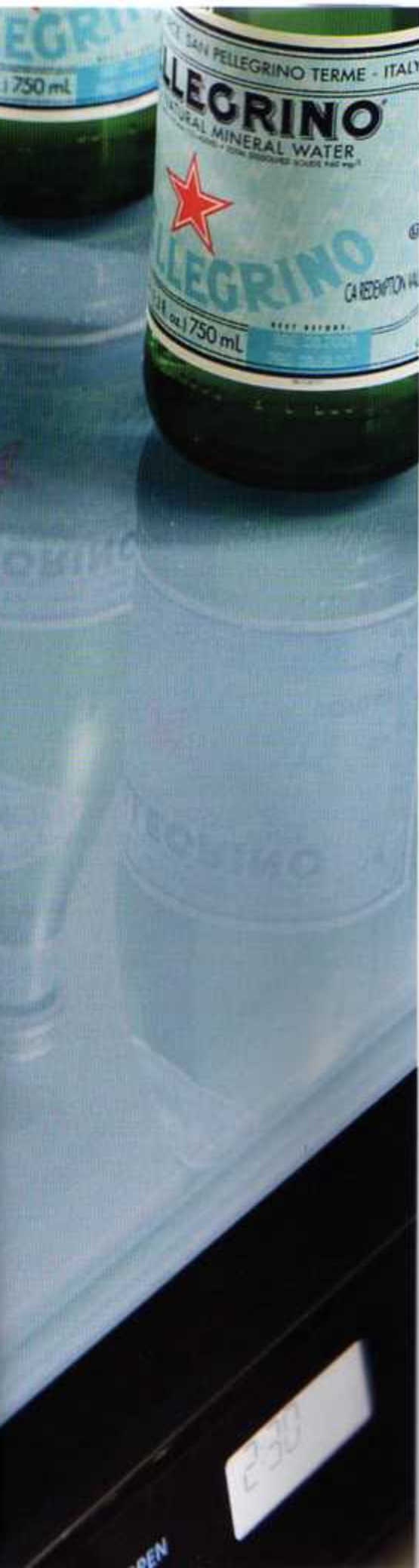




By Margery Stem

Kitchen Magicians

Three top designers tackle tough spaces
and come up with red-hot results



Whether the room is toaster-tiny or big enough to house a computer along with the cooktop, designing a great kitchen demands thinking outside the walls. These days, families expect to live (not just cook) in their kitchens. But in some spaces, simply finding room for cooking can be a design challenge. We asked a trio of talented designers about some of the difficult spaces they've tackled—and how they turned them into showcases that are stunning as well as smart.



LEFT: As a salute to this poolhouse kitchen, designer Terry Scarborough painted the back of the glass countertop a shimmery blue. ABOVE, TOP: A wall behind the chairs was removed to allow light into the space and room for the island. BOTTOM: A row of shiny steel fronts and an elegant stone floor with the appearance of wood lead to an adjacent dining area.

LITTLE BOXES, BIG STATEMENT



As they did in Jericho, the walls in Bronxville came tumbling down. The 180-square-foot poolhouse space that Terry Scarborough turned into a kitchen was darkish and a tight squeeze even for walkways and a prep area. "There was a wall right behind the stools that had to come down," says Scarborough. "There was another wall between the breakfast room and the dining area: Cutting it down brought light into the space and allowed the traffic to flow. If we'd kept the wall, the room would have been too small for an island."

The island was a must for eating and entertaining, but it had to serve functional purposes as well. "On its back side is a microwave drawer," Scarborough notes. "That solved a problem for us, because we really wanted to have a microwave in here, but we didn't want to be looking at it." A stainless-steel farmhouse sink has ample counter space on both sides, along with a dishwasher to the left and a wine cooler to the right, with an icemaker under the cabinet—of major importance for poolhouse parties. "That was the challenge here: making it look great but fitting in all of the appliances we wanted to use," says Scarborough.

But talk about tiny! The kitchenette that Scarborough was asked to design in the downstairs playroom of an Armonk, New York, home measured less than 65 square feet—truly Lilliputian, even for a space that was playing second string. (The primary kitchen was upstairs.) But Scarborough proved more than up to the task: Her inspired mix of fine design and functionality won the 2007 Pinnacle Award for Excellence—the premier honor bestowed annually by the Connecticut Chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers.

The kitchen, a gem of gleaming surfaces in stainless steel and rich teal blue, had daunting limitations. "Realistically, there was only one wall for storage—the back wall," explains Scarborough. "We put up two tall doors there: On the left door we created two drawers that conceal the dishwasher; in the center we placed the refrigerator; and in the two drawers on the right, we hid the freezer. So that one wall holds almost all of the functional parts of the kitchen."

Other objects in the space were something of a roadblock. "The kitchen is in a corner of a large room that has a banquette, an eating table, and a big living space with a play area behind the kitchen," Scarborough notes. To accommodate the sink and the two-burner Wolf cooktop, an island was de rigueur. But once the island was dropped in, room for walking was sharply curtailed, and further storage was out of the question. "The island connected to the wall, like a three-sided peninsula," says Scarborough, "so there was no storage space there. Plus we needed space off the floor for the appliances opposite the island to open. And the banquette starts on the back side of the island, to the left, about six inches away, so we couldn't have a walk space."

Finding the right materials and creating the color scheme were the fun parts. "We came up with the stainless column in the center, with teal cabinets to the left and right. With the island, we reversed that color scheme: The cabinets on the left and right sides are all stainless fronts, while the sink base in the center is teal. We did that for interest, so it didn't all look the same."

Serendipity also played a role. "Amazingly, the homeowner already had the fish picture [now on the kitchen wall], hanging in the hallway outside of the room." Scarborough knew a graphic element was needed, so she and the owner nailed up the picture on a whim—and bingo! "It was perfect. It looked like it should have been the inspiration for the space!" she exults. >>



OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP AND BOTTOM: This basement kitchen has a two-burner cooktop on a corner of the island, plus pull-out dishwasher, refrigerator, and freezer. ABOVE: There's even room for eating!