



COUNTRY LIVING IN THE 'BURBS: A Main Line farmhouse gets a once-over rife with superb personal touches, including (clockwise from above) a tumbled limestone-topped island with prep sink in the kitchen, a soaking tub in the master bath, a stone fireplace on the back porch, and a pool with all the landscaped trappings of a summer retreat.

Custom Cozy

From its colorful yet functional kitchen to its back-porch fireplace, a Berwyn home revels in the warmth and whimsy of its owners—both inside and out.

MARI DOLBY SMILES when she talks about the kitchen in her Berwyn home—and she has plenty to smile about. Among all the rooms Dolby renovated in her stone farmhouse, the kitchen was a true labor of love.

That sense of ownership is certainly justified. From the exposed joints on the ceiling to the slate floor cross-hatched with walnut, the room reflects the European country style Dolby brought to the

rest of the house—one defined by lots of exposed wood and stone.

“It’s definitely more casual than we had before,” says Dolby of the home’s transformation, which took her and husband Kent three years to complete. “We wanted warmth and coziness in this house, as opposed to formality. My goal with the kitchen was to keep it cozy and really different.”

As the owner of Mari Dolby *see habitat page 145*



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Interiors in Berwyn, she knew exactly what she wanted, designing it to exact specifications. "A big focus of mine was an unfitted kitchen," she says. "I wanted a furnished kitchen rather than a cabineted kitchen." Even though she was going for an unconventional look in a traditional room, Dolby knew the kitchen had to serve its utilitarian purpose. "I cook a lot," she says. "Our family is food-oriented."

An oversized French antique armoire is the only piece of furniture in the room that isn't Dolby's design. The cabinets she came up with offer storage and conceal appliances. The most deceptive is a distressed taupe English cupboard that hides a refrigerator. Dolby modeled it after a cupboard she once admired, and Rutt Studio in Strafford built the piece for her. Since the only appliance Dolby wanted to see in the kitchen was the range, she made sure she picked a showstopper: a decorative 40-inch Viking model situated in a brick enclosure. "I wanted it to feel like an old hearth," she says.

It's the closest she's come to having the fireplace she's always wanted in the



CREATURE COMFORT: Archer & Buchanan Architecture of West Chester designed the sun-bathed morning-room addition, which merges seamlessly with the rest of the house.

kitchen. And its brick introduces another texture into a room heavy with wood.

Distressed pine cabinets border the range, a microwave is hidden in a pull-up cabinet and a tall cornflower-blue cabinet holds a coffeemaker and toaster oven. Adjacent to this makeshift breakfast bar, antiqued butter-cream cabinets support a farmhouse sink.

The kitchen's command center is a tumbled limestone-topped island equipped with a prep sink with pot-filler faucet, a dishwasher, and plenty of storage space. Dolby broke up the solid look of the limestone by adding another piece to the mix: a green-stained cherrywood pastry table topped with a marble slab. "It's a great place for my husband or guests to sit and talk to me as I'm getting dinner ready," she says.

The kitchen's pocket doors lead to a mini-library area where Dolby houses one of her passions. "I'm crazy for cookbooks," she says. "I have the rule that one book has to leave before another one can come in."

A slate floor crosshatched with walnut flows from the kitchen to the morning room, one of the new additions to the house. "We used [West Chester's] Archer & Buchanan Architecture, and they were excellent in melding the new additions with the old," says Dolby. "Most people can't tell what has been added. That's the best compliment."

Custom glazed ocher paint makes the room sunny and inviting, and a row of paned windows surrounding the room allows for plenty of natural sunlight to pour in. The well-lit space also serves as a second family room and dining area, its wrought-iron-based table the perfect gathering place for meals. "I spend a lot of time in this room," Dolby admits.

The private spaces in the home also follow the European country theme. Barn beams decorate the ceiling in the master bedroom, with its enormous 18-century French armoire and a heavily carved French sleigh bed. A large harvest basket filled with Dolby's custom arrangement of hydrangeas, roses and wild grass hangs above the bed. Her love of the color of red carries over to the Persian rug and leather armchairs in the sitting area. "I'm always tempted by red," says Dolby.

She also believes in incorporating the

black somewhere into a room, as it adds weight and seriousness to the space. To that end, a black leather screen with a floral design is the signature piece in the bedroom. But the room's real stunner is a massive antique crystal chandelier hanging above the bed. The striking contrast of the elegant crystal against the rustic barn beams works remarkably well. "I really love old light fixtures," says Dolby. "Antique pieces have so much more character and the finishes are so much more elegant on the older fixtures."

The Dolbys keep things clean and simple in the master bath. The stall shower and toilet are hidden from view in the corner of the room. A European-inspired tapestry hangs on the wall next to a white soaking tub, which rests on a base rather than the typical claw feet. Crystal scones from Paris, along with an antique French armoire, complete the space.

The Dolbys had been collectors of contemporary art for years, but their new house required more traditional work. So they filled the first floor living spaces with a variety of oils and botanicals. The couple wasn't willing to store their contemporary pieces, designing a mini-gallery for them on the stairway and the landing of the second floor. One wall is dedicated to three impressionist paintings by Romanian child prodigy Alexandra Nechita. Pieces by Chagall and Dali also line the walls.

The couple fell in love with the views of the eight-acre property from the home and were intent on emphasizing that natural beauty. The addition of a back porch complete with a fireplace makes the outdoor area compatible with every season. It's also Kent Dolby's favorite place to smoke cigars with his friends during parties. The couple entertains often, so a dining patio was added off the morning room for just that reason.

The landscape design is also credited to Mari Dolby. With the look of a private oasis, the pool is surrounded by tall grass, lush greens and a variety of colorful plantings. An interior waterfall wall separates the pool from the Jacuzzi, and a small stone cottage acts as the pool shed.

"This is the type of house we always knew we would end up in," she says.

And the couple has never felt more at home. ♦