

all together now

A modern renovation in the historic heart of Montclair gives this family of five more family time.

Text by
Haley Longman
Design by
**Rachael Grochowski
of RHG Architecture +
Design**
Photography by
John Bessler

Designer and architect Rachael Grochowski of RHG A+D in Montclair melded the wife's modern, minimalist tastes with her husband's more transitional style—and large stature—in this completely reconfigured kitchen with custom-stained white oak cabinetry. Hidden storage throughout keeps the kids' clutter out of sight, while cleverly concealed doors lead to a mudroom.



When a homeowner decides to redesign parts of a house, often the goal is to open up the space and make it more conducive to hanging out with family and friends. But one couple found that their Montclair reno project got *them* to open up too.

A big undertaking for Rachael Grochowski, architect and designer at Montclair-based RHG Architecture + Design, was transforming the family's "disjointed" 1980s kitchen into a spacious communal area where all five of them (plus one dog) could not just eat, but hang out together. "The kitchen/great room area is where they spend the majority of their family time," says Grochowski, "so they wanted a place where their kids could each individually be doing separate things and not feel crowded." That meant incorporating tons of seating via a vast island with six stools, a large dining table and a sitting area with four swivel chairs, all by Restoration Hardware, facing the linear fireplace and mounted TV. The spacious kitchen also doubles as a "luxurious and upscale" common spot for entertaining, allowing guests to break off into different sections yet still be in the same room. And there is certainly a conversation starter in the dramatic, custom accent wall made of Statuario Venato polished marble—chosen instead of tile to give the room a more "authentic, natural look"—which is a backdrop to the bar and sink areas.

This page: Gold metallic shelves add interest to the kitchen's bar area. A second faucet in the sink dispenses soda water, and an ice bin and freezer hidden under the counters make entertaining a breeze. Opposite page: The modern linear fireplace by Fireplace Xtordinair, flanked by swivel chairs and side tables from Restoration Hardware on either side, backs up into the home's elevator. "We used a modern slate finish on the fireplace and created millwork detail around the frame that is more transitional," Grochowski says. Meanwhile, the kitchen's pop of purple is "transitional between masculine and feminine."

The home's second floor, where the three 8- to 14-year-old kids' rooms are, remained untouched, yet Grochowski and her team gave the third floor a major overhaul, turning two bedrooms and two bathrooms into an office, a master bedroom, a master bathroom and two master closets. "They had two separate his and hers bathrooms," she says. "We thought it made sense to combine the bathrooms, but they were concerned about sharing the space, so we created a separate toilet room and their vanities are separated by the transparent shower to give them distance."

Physical distance, sure, but not emotional. The designer says that after the one-and-a-half-yearlong project was completed, the homeowner told her their new bathroom setup had improved the couple's communication. "She said they talk so much more now because they're both in that space together," Grochowski beams. "Before, they would be getting ready in each of their bathrooms and maybe see each other over coffee on busy mornings." Who could blame the couple for wanting to spend more time (together or alone) in this gigantic ensuite, with its 12-foot-by-5-foot shower and four separate showerheads of both the rain-water and purified water varieties? An accent wall covered in "midnight" wallpaper by Calico on the far wall adds interest and grounds the space so it doesn't feel like "an expansive space of nothingness," the designer says.



Thanks to marbled wallpaper by Calico and a custom globe pendant by Soffi, there is interesting texture in the almost-all-white master bathroom. The 12-foot-by-5-foot glass shower is opposite the WetStyle soaking tub and separates the two vanities so that the Mr. and Mrs., who previously had separate bathrooms, could have their own separate areas.

Besides the wooden vanities, “everything else is really white.”

Finding natural light in the historic home proved a difficult task with this project (“the windows had a unique shape,” says the designer), but perhaps the biggest challenge throughout the process was making room for the husband’s preferences—both physically and aesthetically.

“He works in finance, but in college he went to school for architecture, so he had a real interest in the aesthetics of the project,” she says. “And he is very tall, about six-foot-nine, so we had to create a design that accentuated the height.” The man of the house had “free rein” design-wise and liked the transitional look, but his European wife still wanted her modern, minimalistic tastes to be represented too.

The result? A multi-functional family home in the heart of historic Montclair that seamlessly married two tastes—while maintaining marital bliss.

