

# MASTERING MANGIA

An Italian family knew the value of a state-of-the-art kitchen for entertaining, but patiently waited for a design they could pronounce *bellissimo*.

Design by **Aparna Vijayan, Ulrich Inc.**  
Photography by **Dove Photography**  
Text by **Donna Rolando**

**“We’re Italian,** so cooking is super important,” the owner of a Closter house explains. “And nothing is better than cooking in a kitchen that’s state-of-the-art.” She’s grateful for the efforts of designer Aparna Vijayan of Ridgewood’s Ulrich Inc. in giving her a kitchen that, as she says, “inspires you to cook.”

This owner has a ready answer why, when she and her spouse bought their six-bedroom, farmhouse-style home, they overlooked the kitchen’s imperfections. “I absolutely love nature,” she says, “and in this town there really isn’t much land with a decent amount of yard space.”

Already in love with life in Closter, the couple with two school-aged kids didn’t want to change ZIP codes. Turns out they didn’t have to, with a rare find on two acres. They snatched it up in 2017 and targeted the rustic,

This Closter home’s long-awaited renovation combines drama—all eyes on the stone-and-marble hearth—with enhanced functionality. The designer’s new layout ends congestion and adds a foot of island space.







farmhouse-style kitchen for termination—one day.

“I knew in time we would do the kitchen, amongst other things,” says the homeowner. Its flaws were all cosmetic, she thought. But what she gained from Vijayan’s fresh perspective was more than a fresh style. The designer created additional space within the kitchen’s framework and provided a modern, even elegant, twist on country style.

It was quite a challenge, Vijayan recalls, to cut a new doorway and new steps to the dining room. Yet the effort improved the flow and ended a bottleneck to the left of the range where guests would pass from dining room to kitchen.

Besides the wow-worthy arch, the new doorway supports a family-friendly layout. This means the kitchen can finally use its large footprint to offer abundant entertainment space. “Now, during the holidays if they have more people, it doesn’t feel closed in,” Vijayan says.

The designer also seized underutilized space in the breakfast zone, extending kitchen cabinets and an island toward the party-sized black table so that “now the whole room reads as one room.” That meant reining in the barrel-vault ceiling that delineated the space and made two side walls largely unusable, Vijayan explains. Further cohesiveness comes from the two-tone finish of gold and black lighting (Visual Comfort) visually connecting island and table.

Always dramatic with its arched wall of windows, the breakfast area now reveals a practical side—a coffee bar/beverage station, pantry and appliance garage, while the island boasts an extra foot of space.

“I tried to bring in a lot of classic details,” Vijayan adds. The color scheme, for example, is classic—a distressed finish, cottage black for the island and Dove white for the perimeter by North American Cabinetry, all custom, with honey bronze hardware.

“Also, with dogs and young kids, everything had to be low-



Nothing says country like chicken wire, but designer Aparna Vijayan of Ridgewood-based Ulrich Inc. evokes elegance with satin brass in the cabinetry's crimped, woven-wire grille.





maintenance,” she recalls. No problem with the quartz counters from Primo by Unique Flooring America—they only mimic Calacatta marble. Ditto for easy-care porcelain floors by Vista with the look of chevron-pattern bleached wood. Goodbye, terracotta tile!

There’s not just one focal point in this kitchen, but several, as Vijayan endeavored to deliver drama at every angle. The wife’s delight is the stone hearth arched over a 48-inch Wolf range and grill, which combines a Calacatta-marble, picket mosaic with Ashland tumbled dimensional stone. Marble niche shelving on two sides of the hearth keeps spices handy.

“The old kitchen had a mantel-style hood,” says Vijayan, explaining that her clients “liked the idea of a hearth.” The wife, she says, “likes textures, and there’s stonework on the outside of the house. The rest of the kitchen has traditional subway tile from Boston Art in a two-by-nine pattern, slightly more modern.”

Another focal point lies opposite the dining-room entrance: the armoire-like Sub-Zero refrigerator/freezer, which Vijayan centered with that doorway for balance.

Though the home is not rustic in the extreme, flavor is provided by country details such as the dual Kohler farmhouse sinks, each with brushed gold faucets by Waterstone. Inspired by chicken wire, display cabinets are topped with crimped, woven-wire grille in satin brass from Architectural Products by Outwater. Texture derives from floating shelves with African wenge and beadboard.

In a culture known for *delizioso* (pizza, pasta and pastries are only the start), this reimagined kitchen is now rightful king of the castle, where nothing clouds saying *mangia* (and *salute!*) with family.

“I’m really happy with how they finished this,” says the homeowner. “Even the staff at Ulrich who came here and worked. It was like having family every morning.”



The kitchen and breakfast areas now work together as one room with newfound space for both guests and amenities, such as a coffee station. (It wouldn't be breakfast without it.)

