

DARLENE BALLWEG: The personal story behind her professional triumph

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Laurel Brown's
magnificent
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A Room with a View

Laurel Brown's country manor kitchen

Some designers love starting with a blank slate—new construction or a stark room—while others relish in making the most out of a difficult existing space. In the home she shares with husband Steve, Laurel Brown found a happy mix of both.

"We gutted and remodeled about 60 percent of [the home]," she says. Leaning on the skills she developed while working at an architecture firm before starting Brownhouse Designs nine years ago, she re-imagined the floor plan while staying true to its English Tudor exterior and the rolling Fitchburg countryside it sits upon. But no room reflects the couple's personalities as much as the expansive kitchen.

"We pretty much live in the kitchen," Brown says of the space that was once three small rooms with little natural light. "My husband and I sit in the two chairs [by the fireplace] and talk and when we do informal entertaining we're all in here. I think there are months where I don't see the rest of the house," she adds, laughing.

To reflect her timeless aesthetic, Brown installed walls of windows that look onto wooded hills and added English charm with painted cabinetry, a stone fireplace and limestone flooring. To add a richness she is known for creating, Brown worked in warm colors and textures along with detailed moldings, reflected near the fireplace and on the cabinetry.

"This kitchen is nine years old," Brown says, "and I still love it as much today as when it was completed."



Above her state-of-the-art cooktop, Brown created her own mosaic backsplash. "I always think of the backsplash as an exclamation point to a kitchen," she says. "You can't overlook it."



Brown warms her spaces with bright fabrics and comfortable furniture.



A butcher-block island anchors the cooking space, allowing Brown to spread out when she cooks, while still interacting with family and friends gathered around the granite-topped bar.



"I [love] large scale, gothic-looking fireplaces," Brown says of the room's massive wood-burning fireplace. "In winter we have a fire in there almost every night."