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More Square Footage for a Shoeless Cook



When Ina Garten, a.k.a. “the Barefoot Contessa,” needed a kitchen large enough for herself and an assistant to test recipes, she decided the solution was to build an entirely new kitchen. Credit...Béatrice de Géa for The New York Times

By Jacob Bernstein

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SOME people search far and wide to find their dream house. Ina Garten barely made it down the street.

In the mid '90s, on her second career (her first was working as a budget analyst handling nuclear policy in the Carter administration), running a gourmet foods store in

East Hampton, N.Y., she found herself spilling out of her house. So she called a friend, Frank Newbold, a real estate broker in the Hamptons who later became her business partner, and said: “I don’t know what to do. I can’t expand this.”



Ms. Garten's home in East Hampton, N.Y. Credit...Béatrice de Géa for The New York Times

“Well,” Mr. Newbold said, “Why don’t you just buy the property up the street?”

So she did, building a larger version of her shingle-style farmhouse. It was a perfect solution until 1999, when she wrote “The Barefoot Contessa Cookbook,” sold more than a million copies, and became, once again, a woman running out of space. A problem worth having? No doubt, but nevertheless a real one, since Ms. Garten needed a kitchen large enough for herself and an assistant to test recipes.



The kitchen houses everything Ms. Garten needs including a tall 17th-century Italian cabinet for china and glassware. Credit...Béatrice de Géa for The New York Times

She decided the solution was to build an entirely new kitchen. But that would mean expanding onto the lot next door, which wasn't for sale.

“Every year,” Ms. Garten said, “I used to call the guy who owned the property next door. And every year, he'd send me a note back saying ‘no.’” This went on for about 10 years. “And one year I wrote to him and he didn't write back, and I said, ‘Did he forget?’ A couple of months later, he called me and said, ‘Let's talk after the New Year.’”



Credit...Béatrice de Géa for The New York Times

After working out a deal to buy the land in 2006, Ms. Garten and her architect, [Frank Greenwald](#) of East Hampton, started from scratch, taking a year to build a streamlined kitchen in a rustic barn with soaring ceilings. There she housed everything she needed: two Sub-Zero refrigerators, an eight-burner Viking stove, two ovens, Belgian stone countertops, open shelves, a tall 17th-century Italian cabinet for china and glassware, and a long antique Swiss pine dining table for friends she invites over to try new dishes. “Because it's new construction,” she said, “I didn't want it to look brand-spanking-new. I wanted it to feel like it had patina.”



Ms. Garten put in a little bit of art (like a painting of the Namib Desert by April Gornik) to give the kitchen some life. Credit... Béatrice de Géa for The New York Times

For the record, Ms. Garten's husband, Jeffrey Garten, a former official in the Clinton administration, did almost nothing to help. As Ms. Garten sees it, this is exactly as it should be. "He's the best husband. He says, 'Do whatever you'd like.' And when it's done, he says, 'That's the most fantastic thing I've ever seen.' He's very good at that."

Ms. Garten put in a little bit of art (like a painting of the Namib Desert by April Gornik) to give the kitchen some life, but there's nothing terribly fancy about it. "I hate design that tries too hard," she said. "Anything that looks like design, that says, 'Aren't I fabulous,' is totally without style. It needs to fit in, it needs to be appropriate, it needs to be comfortable."

Perhaps most important, she didn't want her work space to look anything like a set, even if her show for the Food Network is filmed there. "I didn't do it for TV," she said. "I did it for books. And if it looks like a set, it doesn't feel real." Her latest book, "Barefoot Contessa Foolproof: Recipes You Can Trust," comes out at the end of this month.

Could anyone or anything persuade her to move? "I can't imagine how," she said, as workmen hammered and sawed away on yet another addition, this time for a cookbook library and sitting room. "I can't believe I get to live here."

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