

inspired by fire

When the first floor of a Sparta home burned, it was the homeowners' cue to invest in a party-friendly redesign with "sparkle."

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Hawthorne-based interior designer Susan Barbieri transformed a Sparta family's kitchen, dining room and playroom into one large, more livable open space. She infused the design with plenty of light, lots of seating and a touch of sparkly glamour.



This page, top: The four-seater island made of low-maintenance quartz is just one seating area among many in this revamped, open-concept dining room and kitchen. This page, bottom: The last step in the design process was accessorizing. Barbieri went with yellow and green décor such as vases, plants and fruit to add a pop of sunny color to the neutral-toned room. Opposite page: Double doors that now open from the kitchen to the pool and backyard make entertaining a breeze. “Guests can come in and grab drinks out of the beverage fridge,” the designer says. “It’s set up for easy entertaining and lots of crowds.”

“If life hands you a lemon, make lemonade,” they say, but that’s easier said than done. For a family of five in Sparta who had to move out of their home when a mid-winter electrical fire destroyed its first floor, the process brought some inconvenience. Still, they came to see the disaster as an opportunity to redo the main level of their large colonial—with an old friend’s help.

“The homeowner and I grew up together; our backyards were next to each other,” says interior designer Susan Barbieri, who owns an eponymous Hawthorne firm. “I hadn’t spoken with him in years, but we got back in contact through Facebook, and then I met his wife and family.” Thus a friendship was renewed, and a collaboration was born.

The designer says the original layout comprised three separate areas: a kitchen, a dining room and a playroom. But Barbieri and her contractor, J. Spina Construction of Boonton, knocked down some walls and redesigned the main floor as one large, open space. “They like to entertain,”

says Barbieri of the owners. “They have three sons in their teens and 20s at home, and they always have people in the kitchen. They wanted it to be a functional space for lots of guests to come in and out.”

The clients envisioned something “clean and modern with a little bit of sparkle,” which inspired a warm, neutral palette. The sparkle came via a duo of Lamps Plus crystal fixtures hanging above the oversized island. Barbieri also had an artist refinish the couple’s existing corner cabinet, changing it from green to metallic silver for an extra dose of glamour.

Barbieri made sure to accommodate the family’s needs in the kitchen as well. Next to the fridge is a beverage station with a large pantry. The island is extra-large to accommodate both seating and food prep, and the Teltos quartz is durable and easy to maintain.

But ease wasn’t always priority one. Barbieri also went with all-wood flooring per the client’s request, with an area rug only under the dining room table. “As long as you wipe up spills quickly, it shouldn’t be too prob-



This page, left: The designer's favorite part of this project? "I love that you can have family or children's friends over," she says. "I love the openness and cleanliness of the end result that we achieved together." Opposite page: Sixteen square mirrors and a crystal light fixture found online add shimmer to the dining room. Throw pillows on the window bench pick up the yellow in the upholstery.

lematic," the designer says of this higher-maintenance choice.

A standout feature in the kitchen is surely the Native Trails concrete farmhouse sink. It does require some maintenance and needs to be sealed, the pro says, but it adds an urban, rustic feel to this otherwise transitional design. "It contrasts with the crystal and works with the gray veining in the countertops too," she notes.

Natural light was also important, and the team achieved that by enlarging an existing kitchen window, adding an arched window over the sink and creating a second back door that leads out to the pool area, so that entertaining could go swimmingly.

Seating is as abundant here as the sunlight: There are a kitchen table and chairs by Safavieh in the dining nook; a dining table by Legacy Classic Furniture; island stools from Wayfair; a window bench seat from Homesense that adds "a bit of coziness," as well as the opportunity to pull up some chairs at the peninsula.

The homeowners worked closely with Barbieri throughout the almost one-year-long process of selecting paint colors, finishes, moldings and tiles. They also showed the designer a number of photos they liked and were inspired by, many of which featured lemons and bits of yellow here and there. "When we went in at the end to accessorize," says Barbieri, "I thought bits of yellow and green would be nice as accents to give a pop of color." (Lemonade, anyone?)

The entire project was done before the pandemic; finishing touches were completed in the nick of time before all the stores in New Jersey started to close. But Barbieri is hopeful that once things return to normal, she can resume work with these clients on their great room, living room and master suite.

"It was a long process, and I know it was difficult for them, having to relocate during all of this," she concludes. "But in the end they got a beautiful, personalized kitchen and dining space."