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I NEEDED A SMALL, EFFICIENT SPACE WHERE I CAN CLOSE THE DOOR, COOK AND THEN BRING THE FOOD UP TO THE MAIN KITCHEN. I FOUND IF I AM COOKING IN THE KITCHEN, WHICH IS OPEN CONCEPT, I'M ALSO DISRUPTING OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS. — NINA SANDHU

SECOND KITCHENS 'MAKE SENSE'

IRIS BENAROIA

Turmeric leaves a trail: It stains skin and clothes. And, though it is revered “as an antiseptic that will even heal a cut,” as the godmother of Indian cooking Madhur Jaffrey rhapsodizes over the neon-bright staple of her culture’s cuisine, it does not play nice with white quartz countertops like Nina Sandhu’s.

“For 15 years, I had to be very, very careful about staining,” says Sandhu, who would gingerly fry her ginger and turmeric, wet cloth in hand to swipe splatters.

So she set out to create a second, durable kitchen in the 4,800-square-foot home in Oakville she shares with her husband, Jas, their two children and her in-laws.

“I needed a small, efficient space where I can close the door, cook and then bring the food up to the main kitchen,” Sandhu says. “I found if I am cooking in the kitchen, which is open concept, I’m also disrupting other family members.”

Those who often fry fish at home can relate to yet another of Sandhu’s complaints. “My children would say, ‘Please don’t cook while we’re in the house, because we don’t want to smell like Indian food.’”

So she hired Mississauga-based Georgian Custom Renovations to build her “spice kitchen,” as she lovingly describes her subterranean sanctuary in the basement where the turmeric is free to spill (in the cupboards) and the smells to waft. As it turns out, Sandhu opted for white Caesarstone countertops because they looked sharp against the dark wood cabinets. (Go figure.)

Shaker doors, stainless appliances and other conveniences make the hours she spends here a true luxury. There’s an oven and a microwave, both a regular and a wine fridge (everything tastes better when the cook hits the chardonnay), spacious cupboards, a pantry and excellent ventilation.

Georgian’s founder Gene Maida has noticed second kitchens are slowly becoming more popular, especially in ethnic households.

“We’re doing a custom home right now for a family from China who do a lot of wok cooking,” Maida says. “It’s a 5,000-square-foot house and we’re using a stainless steel surround around the oven to catch oil spills and make it easy to clean.”

He’s also including a powerful ventilation system not unlike what you would find in a restaurant, which is key in such cases — but always use a professional for installation, he says.

“As soon as you introduce high-volume ventilation fans you can cause a back draft of carbon dioxide gases, which is very dangerous,” Maida points out. “You need a mechanical engineer.”

In the conception stages for Sandhu’s spice kitchen, the designer suggested foregoing the door so the family could have the option of entertaining downstairs, too.

“Why would I do that when I have a big, nice open-concept kitchen upstairs?” Sandhu says of the kitchen that Georgian also designed.

Besides, the spice kitchen is akin to a writer’s room of one’s own: a place to indulge in making a messy pot of masoor dal, the family’s fa-

vourite lentil stew. Cooking over a lazy afternoon is one of Sandhu’s small pleasures. It’s much more enjoyable compared to jockeying for space in her main kitchen.

“I think a lot of people nowadays can relate (to how I felt), she says. “Many of us live in multi-generational families, so the kitchen is a busy zone you’re always having to navigate.”

Whether you call it a spice kitchen or a grease (or wok) kitchen as they’re sometimes known, secondary cooking zones are practical, convenient and bring peace of mind. They’re as helpful as having a door you can close on a house office when you have to keep prying children at bay.

“Second kitchens once seemed like a wild idea to me, but they make sense,” Maida says of “the new market segment that is evolving.”

Amy Dillon, a designer from AyA Kitchens in Toronto’s Castlefield design district had never created one until she got a request for “a grease kitchen,” as it was described to her last year. While the Sher family, who live in Don Mills with their two teenage daughters, don’t come from a background where Indian or Chinese food is regularly on the menu, they had similar reasoning for wanting one.

“They’re avid entertainers and when they tore down their house to build one tailored to their tastes, they wanted a spot where they can cook greasier foods,” Dillon says. “They wanted to contain the smell and the mess.”

The counter space in the grease kitchen she ended up designing may only be six feet in length, but the kitchen has everything needed to crank out batches of trendy fried chicken, including a full-size four-burner cooktop and a warming drawer. A pantry is across from the oven and a stainless steel backsplash stands up to hot oil. Because it’s open to the main kitchen that Dillon also designed, the countertops are quartz for continuity.

Jon Sher is happy he and his wife Angela went for the cute cooking nook. “We use it all the time,” the two chime in. “One of our daughters is vegetarian, so while we’re cooking our food she’s able to cook hers next door. As a family of four, it just allows us that extra little space.”

The Shers got the idea to incorporate a grease kitchen after seeing one in a house their builder had designed for someone from China.

“We want, we have to have that,” says Jon, relaying a conversation he had with Angela.

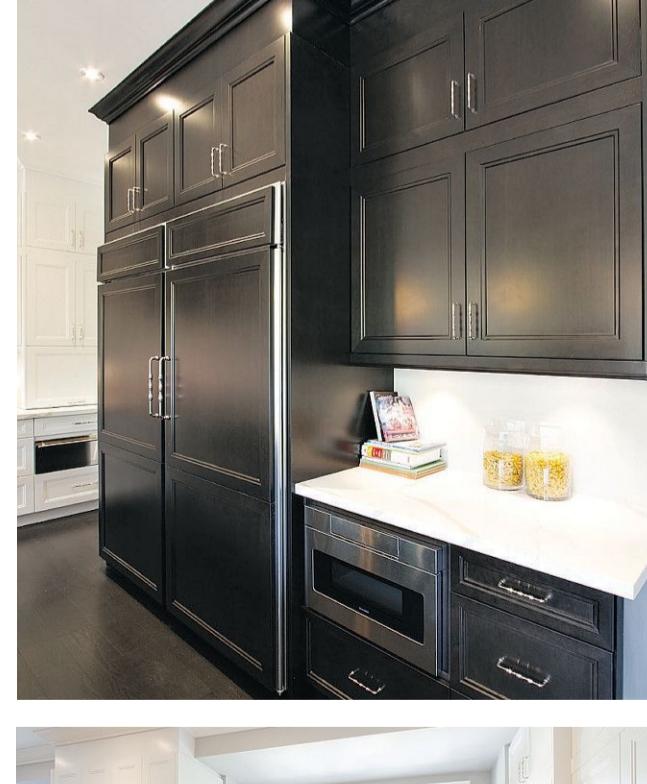
The kitchen — the quintessential gathering hub in most people’s homes — had always been a priority in the design for their new-build.

“You realize that you miss out on half the conversations because you’re in different rooms, so we created a grand room where the living/dining and kitchen intersect,” Jon says. “We’re not formal people and we entertain a lot, so it just made sense.”

The downside of one giant space is that it can quickly turn into a jumble of dishes and clutter in general. That’s where the Shers’ sliver of a second kitchen rules. It functions like a restaurant’s boisterous back of house, where “we prepare food in advance and keep it in the warming drawers, until the guests arrive.”

The only thing you need to do is smile and pour drinks.

Special to National Post



The Sher family kitchens designed by Amy Dillon of AyA Kitchens.