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EXTRA INSIDE

Community news



After a massive update, an ambassador's residence welcomes guests in . . .

The Italian Kitchen

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Lila Castelloneta arrived at Villa Firenze, her new home at the edge of Rock Creek Park, full of grand plans for diplomatic entertaining. It was 2005, and she and her husband, Giovanni, the newly appointed Italian ambassador to the United States, were moving into the 1927 English Tudor-style estate that serves as the official ambassador's residence.

But there was a problem: The kitchen in the 37-room house dated back several decades.

Soon after, Castellonetas picked up the phone and dialed by friend Silvio Fortuna, chief executive of Arclinea, an Italian company known as the Ferraris of kitchen design. "Silvio, aiuto!" (translation: Help!) she said.

In a project that was months in the planning and six months in construction, Arclinea gutted the three rooms of the old, 568-square-foot kitchen, transforming it with cool stainless steel, black oak and amazing amenities including warming tops on the counters to keep plates toasty, four dishwashers and an indoor herb garden lit by LED lights. The challenge: to create a sleek, professional space for official entertaining as well as a cozy corner for the family to enjoy an espresso.

They finally popped the prosceno on the finished project in November 2007. "We wanted to catch the spirit and versatility of Italy in this kitchen," Lila Castelloneta says. "And we wanted a kitchen that was so beautiful we could serve a buffet in it."

The property has seen a lot of Washington history. The house was built as a private home for the family of a construction magnate. It has a three-story main hall with a balcony, timber beams, a pipe organ and a rotunda ornamented with signs of the zodiac. A library, now the ambassador's private office, has passed by 17th-century English designer Christopher Wren. The house had several occupants until it was bought

See KITCHEN, Page H1



Lila Castelloneta, wife of Ambassador Giovanni Castelloneta, puts her own touches on centerpieces at Villa Firenze.

WEB GALLERY

Get ideas about kitchens from our new photo gallery at www.washingtonpost.com/kitchens.

The Layout

1. Crystal storage
2. Two wine coolers for bottles each
3. Schottles built-in cabinet
4. Steam oven, broiler and professional oven
5. Miniature grasshopper with LED lights
6. Chef's island with fryers, grill, cook top, and warming top
7. Family eating island bar stools, sink and drawers
8. Washing area and Schottles dishwasher
9. Cookbook library storage

May 28, 2009

THE WASHINGTON



Before the update, the kitchen had not had a major update in decades.

Capturing the Spirit of Italy in the Kitchen

Page H1

For magnate Robert Gag-walle, Polly, who were lavish parties. In 1976, low sold the estate to the

"When we entertain, if it's a buffet, we set it up here because it's beautiful and very chic."

Lila Castelloneta, wife of the Italian ambassador

pull up two white bar stools to the smaller island. This island also incorporates storage and a sink. Above it, Arclinea installed a tiny indoor greenhouse with violet-col-

the kitchen was worn out and unsuited for serving the 4,000 people that an ambassador annually welcomes to reception formal dinners. It had old appliances, peeling paint, dated cabinets with layers of paint, and scuff stone had not had a major renovation in 30 years.

As a very old kitchen, ugly and dated," recalls Fortuna, whose grandfather installed Arclinea in 1925 outside Varese, whose components are used by Milanese architect Antonio Citterio. He has installed kitchens for Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston, Sting three times — for the late tenor Luciano Pavarotti. Arclinea is scheduled to install a kitchen in the White House this fall.

As a celebrity's kitchen may serve as a trophy, the kitchen at the Italian ambassador's residence is used every day. "I know myself that a kitchen is not a showroom. You don't just put it all in this stuff," she says. "It has to be used."

There is plenty of fun. Arclinea installed worktops on two islands and a long counter houses sinks and dishwashers, each with a 12-plate capacity. On the left, a wall of cabinets holds built-in crystal and chilled two 46-bottle wine coolers; then the coffee machine, refrigerator and

free machine can brew espresso, cappuccino or cafe americano. The floors are matte gray Italian ceramic tile.

"When we entertain, if it's a buffet, we set it up here because it's beautiful and very chic," says Castelloneta. "So many of our guests are surprised because nobody invites them into their kitchen."

At a dinner last week to honor contributions made for Ahuzo earthquake relief and recovery, 48 guests walked into the kitchen to pick up their Giotto dinner plates and make their way around the islands, which were layered with homemade pizza, buffalo mozzarella, squid stuffed with shrimp and vegetable risotto.

Castelloneta chose a playful black-and-white still from the 1954 movie "An American in Rome" ("Un Americano a Roma") to hang on the back wall. It shows an iconic Italian scene: the late actor Alberto Sordi savoring a plate of spaghetti.

Framed on the opposite wall are dreary "before" photos of the kitchen. Extreme makeover, Italian edition.



A photo of Alberto Sordi from the movie "Un Americano a Roma" hangs in the kitchen.



Clockwise from top: The buffet at a recent dinner at Villa Firenze is served in the kitchen; wife is set out for a dinner; chef Roberto Graziosi prepares risotto.