

The return of Jeeves

A butler's pantry can organize your kitchen chaos and make entertaining a joy

by Julie Cazzin

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Gregory throws a dinner party, she decorates the tables with her best linens and finest china. She orders juicy prime rib steaks, seafood and succulent legs of lamb. And for dessert, she often wows her guests with a rich chocolate torte and petit fours.

So last year, when Gregory went shopping for a new home, her eyes lit up when she saw one kitchen aid she had never thought about—a butler's pantry. The 2-m x 3-m room is tucked between the kitchen and dining room of her new house. It gives Gregory a place to store partyware, wine and a microwave. It also offers her a convenient spot to plate food before it's served to guests. "The butler's pantry was one key reason I bought the house," says Gregory, 46, a mortgage broker. "I entertain a lot. This weekend, for instance, I'm having 35 people over to celebrate my father-in-law's birthday. The pantry makes it easy to serve everyone. It helps me stay organized."

A butler's pantry may help organize you, too. In Victorian times, these tiny rooms were a buffer zone between kitchen and dining room. Servants used the butler's pantry to prepare the plates and keep the mess of dirty dishes and



Oprah's chef has a butler's pantry for "all the stuff that doesn't fit in his kitchen"

splattered pots firmly separated from the spotless luxury of the eating area.

Butler's pantries largely disappeared with butlers themselves, but they are staging a quiet comeback. You can credit a large part of their newfound popularity to fatigue with open concept living. As attractive as it may seem to have your cooking area flow seamlessly into your dining room, just like in the design magazines, the nasty reality is that there's something a bit off-putting about trying to stage an elegant dinner party while a stack of dirty dishes and pots

are clearly visible in your kitchen.

Francesco Di Sarra, a Toronto home builder, first noticed the appeal of butler's pantries four years ago and has been incorporating them into his luxury homes ever since. When his company, Capoferro, conducted an informal survey of about 100 visitors at a recently constructed model home, 95% of them said the single feature they liked best about the house was the butler's pantry. "It was amazing to watch," says Di Sarra. "Potential buyers went in with a critical eye and came out of that room smiling." ➤



A butler's pantry can be as simple as a bit of counter space and some cupboards, separated from the dining room and kitchen by swinging doors. What it provides is the luxury of space. Foodies, in particular, love the notion of finally having a convenient spot to store all the gadgets they don't use frequently enough to have in the kitchen itself. "These days, we all have specialty pots, small appliances and kitchen gadgets that have to be stored somewhere," says Kevin Fitzsimons, a Toronto interior designer and editor of *Your Source* design magazine. He recently built a \$150,000 butler's pantry for Art Smith, Oprah Winfrey's personal chef, that included rolling racks for flatware, gallery shelves for 150 pots, a washer/dryer for favorite linens, a specialty dishwasher for stemware, espresso and cappuccino makers, wine fridge and an ice-cream maker. "All the stuff that didn't fit in his kitchen is in his pantry," says Fitzsimons.

If you think your home could use a butler's pantry, consider:

WHERE TO PUT IT: You don't need to put in a new addition to make room for a butler's pantry. You can convert a mudroom or laundry room into a pantry, or you can add swinging doors and counters to a small hallway, turning a wasted space into something useful. "The smallest one I've done is five feet along just one wall,"



Easy-slide drawers keep flatware organized, while every pot, bowl and espresso maker has its place

windows. "Lights in the cabinets can cascade down and create a nice effect," says Russell. "It sets a nice mood."

HOW TO PLAN: Do you entertain a lot? Then you may want a second set of cutlery, good china and stemware. Make sure to have extra drawers put in specifically for these items. "It's amazing how much space a butler's pantry can save," says Gregory. "I was going to buy a dining room set but realized that with the butler's pantry, I didn't really need a complete set. I could store crystal, stemware, linen and flatware in the butler's pantry. So that gave me the opportunity to get a bigger table in the dining room—I didn't need a buffet hutch at all."

says Pam Vanderbraak, a kitchen designer with Deslaurier Custom Cabinets in Ottawa, who says some of her clients have even converted main floor closets into butler's pantries. Of course, more is more, but even a modest 2-m x 2.5-m space offers plenty of potential. "You can fit a lot into that," says Lorin Russell, a kitchen designer with Muskoka Cabinet Co. in Ottawa. "Cabinets, sink, small wine cooler, an under-the-counter fridge, warming drawer for dinner dishes and maybe even a dishwasher drawer for easy clean-up."

WHAT TO PAY: A modest 1.5-m pantry along one side of a small hallway will cost \$6,000. That includes four upper cabinets with glass doors for stemware and china, as well as six under-the-counter easy-slide drawers for flatware, linen and small appliance storage.

A larger 1.5-m x 3-m pantry will set you back at least \$10,000. Extras such as fine walnut cabinets, crown molding, a sink, wine fridge, and various kitchen gadgets can boost the total to \$15,000 or more. One tip: make sure to budget for adequate lighting (\$500 and up) since pantries are often situated in areas where there aren't any

WHY NOT? You may want to consider specialized appliances such as a small under-the-counter refrigerator drawer to store the overflow of fruits and vegetables from the kitchen on party night. Also useful is a fancy cappuccino maker. As a general rule, you should always get the longest countertop you can to give you maximum room for food and beverage preparation. "Remember," says Russell, "the butler's pantry is a landing point where you can stage up a lot of really nice food and drinks. It's often the secret to a very successful party." ■

Gregory was sold on her home's pantry (far right). Even a 1.5-m space (left) pays off big



Photography by Stacey Brandford (top)