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# At Home With John and Jenifer Besh

*This New Orleans chef's kitchen captures the spirit of southern Louisiana*

BY LIZZIE MUNRO

“We wanted to take our time creating a place that—as our family grows—would grow with us,” says chef John Besh of the 480-square-foot kitchen in the home he shares with his wife, Jenifer, and their four sons. While the expansive layout makes the room ideal for entertaining, reclaimed materials, including bricks, cypress wood and heart pine, infuse the new construction with a sense of history and place.

Besh, a Louisiana native, has long embraced the state's culinary culture, merging traditional flavors with contemporary French fare at his flagship restaurant, August, in New Orleans. Owner of nine restaurants, Besh is also the author of three cookbooks (among them the just-published *Cooking From the Heart*, Andrews McMeel) and founder of the John Besh Foundation, which provides culinary school scholarships to inner-city minority students and microloans for local farmers.

Unsurprisingly, when it came to designing his kitchen, the chef wanted to use materials that would reflect the rich cultural heritage of the bayou, to which he's dedicated his career. In 2011, he purchased a West Indies-style cottage, built more than half a century ago and designed to mirror the historic houses that pepper the landscape of southern Louisiana. Although the Slidell, La., home required very few renovations overall, the kitchen proved too small to accommodate the couple's large extended family, most of whom live nearby.

“With my parents and a couple of siblings and kids, and [my wife's] parents and a couple of siblings and kids,” explains the chef, “every family event can easily turn into a 30-person gathering.”

To solve this problem, Besh and his wife decided to build an extension onto their home. In order to seamlessly blend the new kitchen with the original construction, the chef enlisted architect Adam Perschall, known for his work with restorations.

“Incorporating the right materials in the right ways really made all the difference, and that's what Adam Perschall is known for,” explains Besh. “Adam really gets that old-style Louisiana home; he's from the bayou originally, so this is a language that he speaks. He's a preservationist.”

Reclaimed wood, much of it sourced by Perschall during the renovation of the historic Blue Plate Mayonnaise Factory nearby, was used for flooring and overhead beams, as well as for select cabinetry. Open shelving showcases the couple's eclectic dinnerware made by local potters and artisans; they've collected the plates and bowls for two decades.

“We wanted everything [in the kitchen] to reflect our casual lifestyle, but still speak of place,” says the chef.



## BUILDING THEIR DREAM KITCHEN

Chef John Besh and his wife, Jenifer, spent nearly two years building the extension that would become the traditionally styled kitchen in their home, located just outside of New Orleans.

Not concerned only with aesthetics, Besh also wanted to ensure that the kitchen was outfitted to suit his needs. A double commercial oven, topped with six burners, a grill and a griddle, was installed, as were two electric ovens designated for baking. In addition, a four-burner stovetop sits above refrigerated drawers on the large kitchen island.

“I wanted the firepower to cook for a large number [of guests],” he explains.

Besh also wanted to make sure that he could interact with his guests, while maintaining a designated area for cooking. To achieve this balance, he began to think about the kitchen in terms of zones, designing



### LOCAL CHARACTER

Open shelving provides storage space for the couple's eclectic collection of dinnerware, made by Louisiana potters and artisans.



### BOLD FLAVORS

Besh is known for blending the cuisines of France and Germany with the rich culinary culture of southern Louisiana.



### TWO IS BETTER THAN ONE

A cobalt blue enamel oven by Viking is topped with six burners, a grill and a griddle. Alongside, two convection ovens are reserved for baking. This amount of "firepower," says the chef, can support large family gatherings.

and optimizing each zone individually to maximize functionality and avoid overlap with the entertaining space.

Nearby, in the butler's pantry, Besh keeps a large wine refrigerator and an ample collection of Riedel glassware. Having spent much of his early career in Europe, namely southern Germany and Provence, Besh says that the bulk of his wines come from Germany and France.

"[We drink], for the most part, wines from Burgundy, the Northern Rhône, Provence and a few little odds and ends from Alsace," he says. "People think of Louisiana food as being so spicy, and it really isn't; it's bold, so I want a wine that's drinkable, that will work well with bold flavors."

For his holiday table, Besh starts with a variety of simple Creole staples, including spicy shrimp remoulade and freshly shucked oysters. When it comes to the main course, the expansive kitchen has largely taken the hassle out of entertaining.

"I have everything it takes to pull off that feast, right at the tip of my fingers," he says. "This really was my opportunity to build my dream kitchen."

### THE WINE PANTRY

Besh keeps a wine refrigerator and glassware in a converted butler's pantry located just off the kitchen. Selections include wines from Burgundy, the Northern Rhône Valley, Provence and Alsace.

### KEEPING IT ORGANIZED

Refrigerated drawers, conveniently located beside the four-burner stovetop, make it easy for the chef to access ingredients. Opposite the island, ample seating lets the chef interact with family and friends while preparing a meal.

