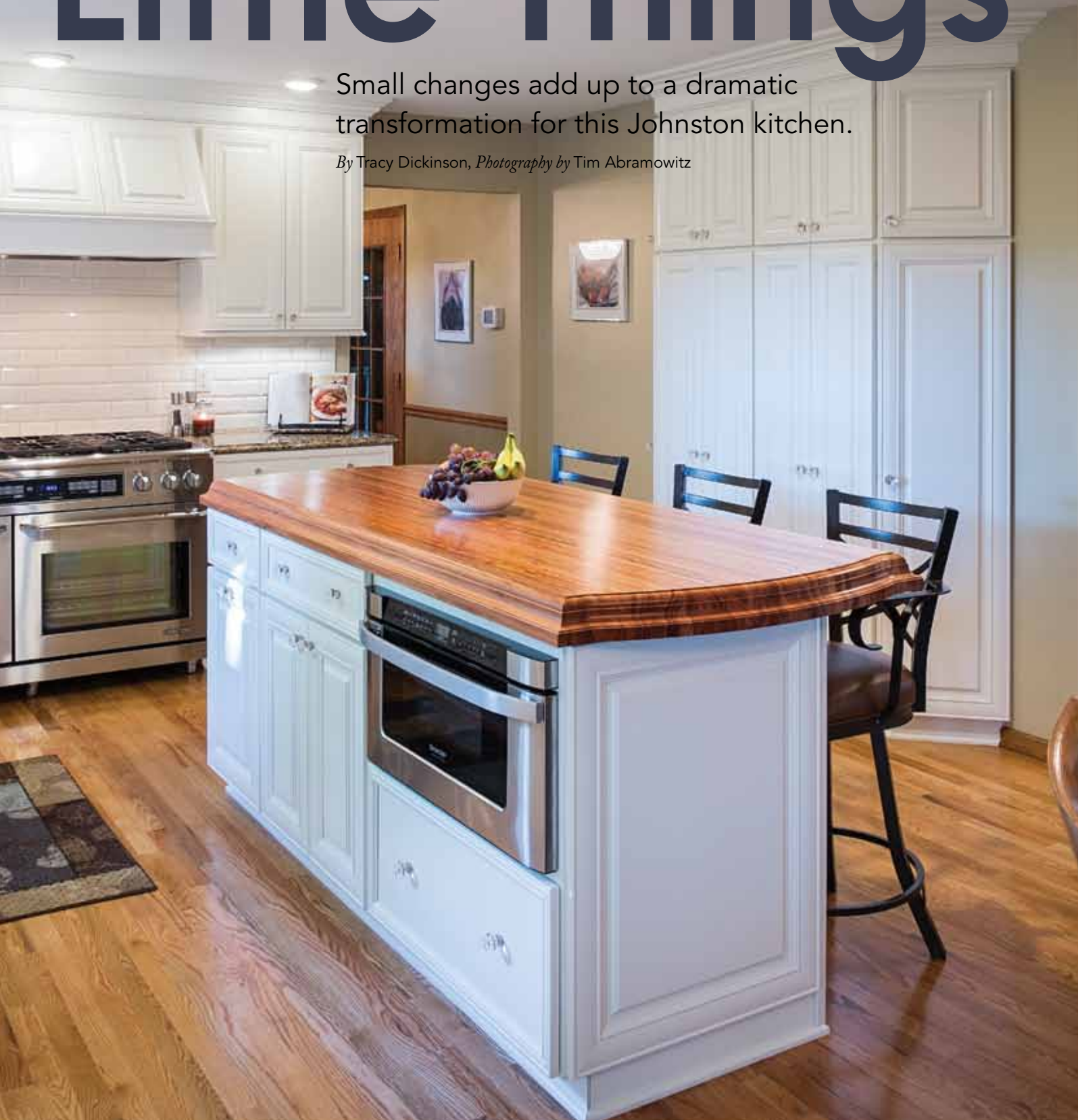


It's the Little Things

Small changes add up to a dramatic transformation for this Johnston kitchen.

By Tracy Dickinson, Photography by Tim Abramowitz



Mary Rose Stone and Duane Weiland didn't want a total home renovation; they just wanted a kitchen that would fit their extended family. But they feel like their house got a whole new life.

The couple originally looked into moving or building a new home, but they loved their current home's location. "We came home, after looking at lots and houses, and said, 'What would it take to stay here?'" explains Mary Rose. Because both of them are retired, they also wanted to plan for the possibility that they might need to adapt the home for single-level living at some point.

Mary Rose has been a longtime subscriber to *Welcome Home* magazine, so she had a general idea what she did and didn't want. She started by contacting AIM Kitchen & Bath in Beaverdale, whose projects she had admired in the magazine.

Says Duane, "We met with them, thinking this would be the first of maybe half a dozen interviews with different businesses, but when we left, we knew they were the right partner."

Designer Alex Marske came out to the home to spend some time talking with the couple about their needs and to see the space. "That's so important," he says. "Not only does it give us a sense of the existing space and the opportunity to see what we're working with, but it allows me to get a feel for the homeowners themselves and their taste and lifestyle."



This spread: The center island, though smaller than the original, provides more usable work and dining space at the gorgeous Lyptus counter, as well as storage and a tuck-under microwave.

Adding just a few inches to the dining area allowed AIM to create a beautiful buffet and display area.



Marske took Mary Rose and Duane's broad criteria—they wanted a wider door for the main-floor bath, a more convenient laundry space, and more room for the family to eat together—and created a design that surpassed their expectations.

"We told him we didn't want something sleek and modern," says Duane. "We wanted it to fit us and the house because we plan to be here for a long time to come." Mary Rose also requested white cabinetry and a kitchen "that looks like Grandma's."

The finished result is a beautifully updated space that opens the kitchen to the rest of the main-floor living areas while still providing the sense of homeyness that Mary Rose desired.

Marske's design didn't require a major overhaul of the room's floor plan, but strategic small shifts in the layout transformed the kitchen's appearance as well as its livability. The new six-burner stove anchors one wall and leaves the island free for prep work or dining. And the refrigerator completes the work triangle at one end of the counter. Before, the refrigerator had been on the opposite wall, with the stove top in the island and double ovens to the left of the sink.

"I had reservations about the layout at first," says Mary Rose. "I wasn't sure I wanted the refrigerator to be the first thing you saw as you came in the door. But with the matching panels, it just blends with the rest of the cabinetry, and it's beautiful."

Marske also recommended trimming the size of the island, which seemed counterintuitive to the couple initially. But by eliminating the separate stove top and ovens, the island can better serve as a work and dining area, taking center stage in the new

layout and actually increasing the work space. Its 4-inch-thick Lyptus surface provides a gorgeous focal point and complements the white cabinetry.

To make the room more suitable for the couple's regular family gatherings, Marske suggested opening up the wall between the family room and the dining area and then adding a bar area in place of an existing closet. Though opening the wall added just inches to the dining area's floor space, it increased the livability of the room immeasurably.

"Our little dining table has eight leaves in it when we have everybody over," laughs Mary Rose, "and we can fit half of our 32 family members around the table now and still get around the ends." With the new open layout, she says it feels like everyone is eating together, even when they have to set up extra tables in the family room.

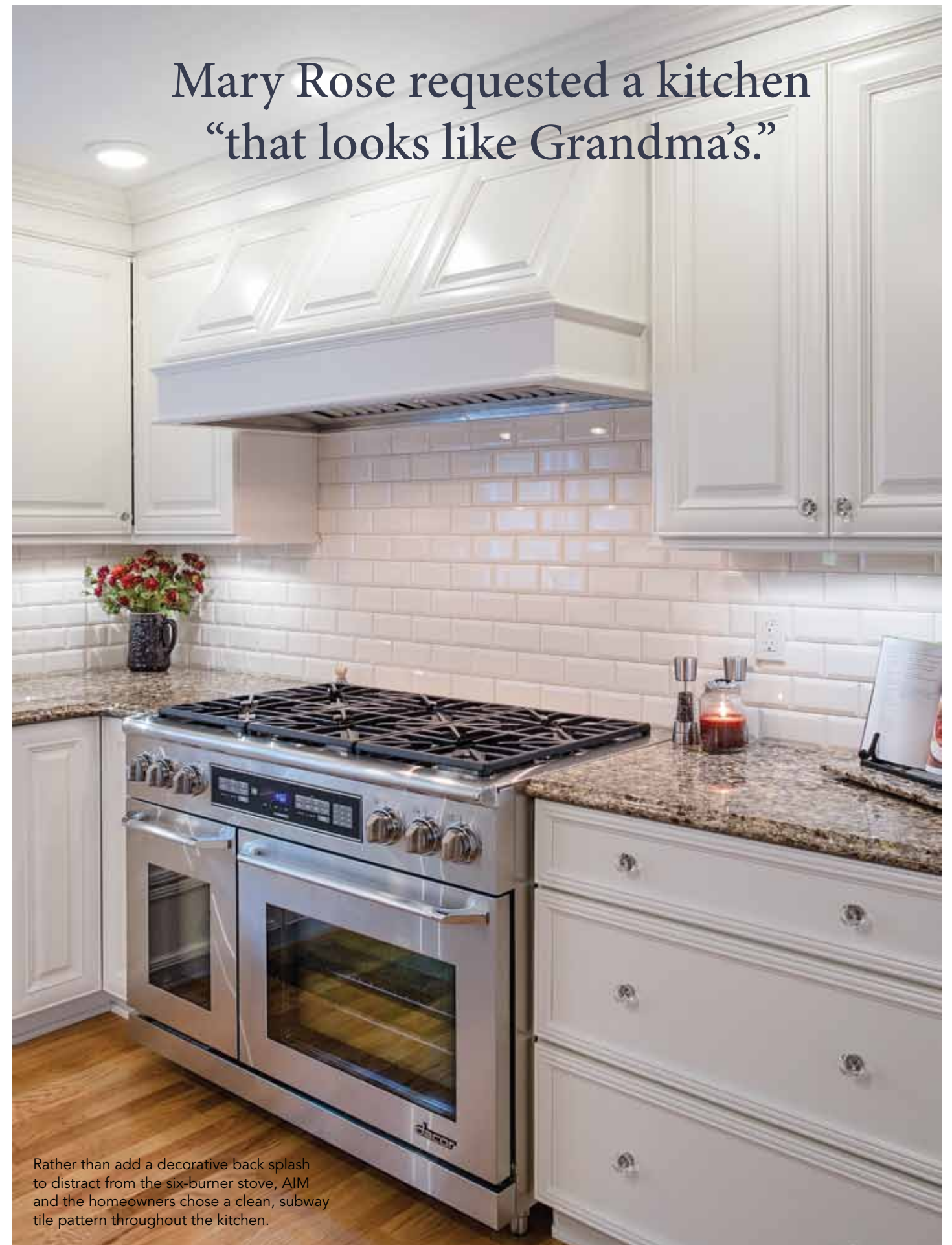
Not only that, between the bar area and the new kitchen design, the room is ideally set up for buffet-style dining.

Marske says, "Our ultimate goal is always to create a room that is both beautiful and livable for that particular homeowner. And when I see this finished project, I can't think of a single thing I would do differently."

Mary Rose and Duane agree. The new window over the sink, the shift in the work triangle, the subway tile backsplash—all of those small changes add up to a lot more life for this home.

"We love the entire thing," says Duane, "but it's the little things that have made the biggest difference. We're not going anywhere now." ■

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Rather than add a decorative back splash to distract from the six-burner stove, AIM and the homeowners chose a clean, subway tile pattern throughout the kitchen.