



mis en place

Cooking at home with Jean-Georges Vongerichten

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVE FREIHON





BREAKING FAST
Marja and Jean-Georges have plenty of space to prepare a country breakfast in the kitchen designed for family living.



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he recipe for an architectural masterpiece is much like that of four-star meal at one of Jean-Georges Vongerichten's 26 restaurants around the world. The ingredients should be simple and superior. The execution must be flawless.

The inspiration for creating this delicious *piece de resistance* in Waccabuc came when award-winning architect Michael DeCandia discovered a 1970s flat-top, lakeside contemporary that had been floundering on the market for well over a year. He immediately had a vision for an elegant stone and shingled home that might stand in its place. DeCandia, who has architectural offices in Katonah and New York and is also a licensed real estate sales professional, had been looking for a project that he could design, build, and sell from start to finish. "The appeal for me was the setting—four acres, a pond, a stream, and a cottage, in addition to a workable main house," explains DeCandia who quickly set to work on writing his recipe for renovation.

"Knowing that traditional architecture sells best in this area, I completely redesigned the exterior, adding shingle siding, gables, porches, and dormers as well as two upper floors. I chose to keep the contemporary, open flow of the original house inside, as it is so conducive to the way that families live today," he continues. Next, DeCandia needed a sous-chef—or rather, a skilled and innovative partner, and he found a generous team player in Joe Cusato, a South Salem-based construction manager.

Together, DeCandia and Cusato took the dated contemporary down to its skeletal frame and raised a 21st-century luxury home that is worthy of its sumptuous setting. The ground and first floors were reconfigured, and two additional floors were added.



AU NATUREL
Marja's organic decor allows the martquetry image (left) of the view outdoors to dominate the living room.



Before listing the property for sale, DeCandia thought a lot about how he would market it. First, he did some proactive research, as he anticipated that potential buyers would ask him what additional improvements might be possible. He identified a pool site and had it approved. Then he drew up plans that would transform a small onsite cottage into a guesthouse adjacent to the pool site. Finally, DeCandia staged the lake view in the back yard by building a dock and buying an antique rowboat to use as an inviting prop. With the execution complete and garnish in place, prospective homeowners with an appetite for adding their own seasonings and side dishes came to look.

"This was the very first house I saw," recalls Marja Vongerichten, a former actress and wife of world-renowned chef and restaurateur, Jean-Georges Vongerichten. "My husband was looking for a weekend house in the Hamptons, and we saw a photo of this house in a real-estate ad. The stone and shingles immediately called to me, and I came up to see it right away. My heart started beating as we were driving down Mead Street, and as soon as we pulled in the driveway, I knew this was it."



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Marja, who trained under famed restaurant designer David Rockwell for several years in the fields of design and decorating, found the house move-in ready. “The kitchen was perfect with a wood-burning fireplace to warm things up,” she says. “The exterior, the entry way, everything felt so good.”

Before the couple closed on the house, they brought in a feng shui expert to inspect the master bedroom. DeCandia was anxious. “If the orientation was off by 5 percent, he might have nixed it,” remembers the architect. “But, thankfully, the expert liked the orientation—when you wake up you’re facing south—and everything about the house had good feng shui.” Finally, it was Marja’s turn to spice things up.

While the couple’s Manhattan home décor is ultra modern—as befits its Richard Meyer-designed glass structure—Marja took a different approach to decorating their country house. Now the proprietor of her own business, MV Designs, LLC, she has filled the home with one of a kind pieces from ABC Home, Anthropologie, special finds from little boutiques in Brooklyn and their Manhattan neighborhood, as well as souvenirs from travels.

DeCandia’s design is family-friendly with clean, classic lines. The gracious entry hall is ample and serves as a central hub. The kitchen, to the left, includes an oversized island that is perfectly suited to cooking for large crowds. Together, Jean-Georges, who grew up in Alsace, France, and Marja, who is a stunning blend of



SUITE DREAMS
The master suite (left) has good feng shui. Chloe's collection of curiosities (below); The sun-drenched second floor landing (bottom).





Korean, Native American, and African-American heritage, have three children. Their daughter Chloe is always with them, and Jean-Georges's grown children, Cedric and Louise, are frequent visitors. With cousins and friends joining them every weekend, the guest rooms are always full, and seats at the kitchen table are highly coveted. Jean-Georges typically cooks the weekend meals, however Marja's Korean delicacies are rumored to be peerless, and her homemade macaroni and cheese is so popular that her husband put it on the menu at his Mercer Kitchen restaurant.

Since the Vongerichtens eat where they cook, they repurposed the dining room as their "room of curiosity" where nine-year-old Chloe keeps her collection of all things animal- and bug-related. The adjacent living room is hard to resist, thanks to the endless views of the lake and woods that are framed by floor-to-ceiling windows. One interior wall is dominated by an oversized marquetry image of the trees outside, painstakingly crafted by Jean-Georges's cousin, Charles Spindler, a third generation Alsatian marquetry artist. Marja used natural materials like petrified wood, antlers, and stone in this room to create a neutral backdrop to highlight the marquetry and the vibrant vistas. A guest suite and sun porch complete the first floor.

SLEEPING QUARTERS While Jean-Georges prefers to nap on the sleeping porch (left), nine year-old Chloe prefers the Amish-made princess bed (below) in her second floor suite.





TETE A TETE

Architect Michael DeCandia and Chloe enjoy a fireside chat in the kitchen (above). Decandia's design added light, volume, and charm. Jean-Georges added the vintage orange pick up (below).

The new second floor boasts a master suite with access to a vast sleeping porch where Jean-Georges loves to nap. There are two additional bedroom suites, one which has become Chloe's two-story aerie outfitted with her Amish-made canopy bed, sparkling chandeliers, and fluffy area rugs. A second open staircase leads from the second to the third floor that provides sorely needed storage space, since the ground floor now houses the media room, office, and laundry room. A window, strategically located at the top landing, allows light to cascade down two flights of stairs.

Once the Vongerichtens took possession of the property, they quickly called DeCandia about those "side dishes"—the pool and guesthouse. "Michael had it all figured out. We loved his plan, so we only had to make some decorative decisions, like what type of backsplash to use in the guest house kitchen," says Jean-Georges.

Asked if they anticipate moving here full time, Marja doesn't hesitate. "We both need the city and the country. It's energizing to be in the city, but here we can relax—take a nap or go out in the boat, and just be a family. That is something we really appreciate." It seems DeCandia's recipe hit the spot. ■

