

Living in Atlanta

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Living large on Lake Blue Ridge

At 12,000 square feet, this is not your average mountain getaway

A look inside the spacious Sugarloaf home of Braves center fielder Andruw Jones

Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin's favorite weekend haunts

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Chef Riccardo Ullio

Sotto Sotto | Where old meets new

THE DESIGN TEAM

Designer: Matthew D. Rao, CKD, RAO Design Studio Inc.,
www.raodesignstudio.com

General contractor: Small Carpenters At Large

When kitchen designer Matthew D. Rao, of RAO Design Studio Inc., presented his first sets of designs to Chef Riccardo Ullio, he included an island with a counter and chairs, now virtually a fait accompli of contemporary kitchens. But Ullio and his wife, MaDora Frey, with whom he co-owns Sotto Sotto and Fritti, turned to him and asked where the table would go.

"I wanted a kitchen table and wanted to eat in the kitchen; that's very Italian," said Ullio, seated at the same modern white round Knoll pedestal table designed by Eero Saarinen where his family gathered when he was growing up in Milan. His family moved to the United States in 1980 when he was 12, bringing much of their furniture along including the table and chairs, the vintage Fontana Arte hand-blown lamp hanging above and an unusual antique wooden cabinet with a carved dragon that stands next to the glass frame doors leading out to the deck.

Indeed, if Ullio's kitchen has a theme — it's old meets new. When he and his wife (they now are separated) bought the Inman Park Craftsman bungalow five years ago, he said the foundation was uneven, water gathered in the basement, the appliances were old and the present kitchen was split into two rooms, including a small and dark servants' galley. Ullio wanted to create a kitchen that preserved the home's historic character but had modern amenities and appliances.

Despite challenges, contractors Small Carpenters At Large were able to preserve and refinish the original hard pine plank floors, Frey selected a spring green paint to cheer up the walls, and Rao suggested blending white wooden cabinetry with chrome apothecary latches from the SieMatic Hudson Valley collection with stainless-steel appliances and storage areas. Two windows that once went to the floor were cut in half but the original glass retained. In-between areas were covered with 3-inch-by-6-inch subway



Top: Riccardo Ullio's kitchen preserves the home's historic character, but has modern touches such as this Viking gas range and expensive Miele dishwasher (top), and a farmhouse sink for hand-washing large pots and pans (above). **Right:** Chef Ullio sits at a pedestal table designed by Eero Saarinen.



tiles from Renaissance Tiles.

Beyond that, Ullio said he planned his home kitchen with the same goal he would apply if he was building a professional kitchen — efficiency. While he admitted he all too often ends up eating out at his own and other establishments, he enjoys entertaining and has thrown dinner parties for as many as 15 people sitting around his Saarinen table and

another low table in an adjoining sun-room. (He prefers to use his actual dining room for dancing and has a disco ball ready to mount.)

"You have to think about what you're going to do in the kitchen and how many people you're going to cook for," Ullio said. "Then you have to think about the actual motion of cooking."

The latter goal led Ullio and Rao to a

simple L-shaped linear design. From the left, the kitchen starts with a stainless-steel Sub-Zero (Model 650) refrigerator with the freezer drawer at the bottom. Next to it, a stainless-steel cupboard with a ridged door that slides upward hides pantry items, bar supplies and a microwave. Tucked into the corner is a stainless-steel prep sink.

The counter then takes a sharp right turn into a broad cutting area covered with thick maple (also SieMatic), which Ullio said is the only wood dense and solid enough for that purpose. Underneath are drawers for cutting tools and wooden spoons. "There's something about working with a wooden spoon," Ullio said. "Wood just feels good; it's a nice organic material." He added that it is "a must item if you're going to make really nice creamy risotto. A wooden spoon provides the friction you need to loosen the starch from the rice."

Ullio transfers prepared food to counter space next to a classic Viking 15,000 BTU open-burner gas range, which he said he selected after cooking on one during a demonstration. The six burners are "very hot and quick," he said, and his only regret is that their eyes are too wide for anything but professional-sized pans, making it impossible to heat up a small quantity of milk. He advised anyone choosing a range to consider the dimensions of the pans they'll be using.

The main gas convection oven works wonderfully for mixed grilling of meats, fish and vegetables, Ullio added. An 18-inch proofing oven fits half-sheets of biscuits or bread dough.

Ullio stores pots and pans to the left of the oven and plates, glasses, cups and flatware to the right where food can easily be transferred. The far right contains a farmhouse sink ample enough to hand-wash even large pots and pans. However, Ullio said he selected the Miele dishwasher so he could relax after a good meal with wine. "It's a stunning piece of equipment," he adds. "It's 30 percent more expensive than most high-end dishwashers, but it's whisper-quiet. You don't

hear it. It's like it's not even on. You can put fine china crystal in it, and they come out spotless, as if polished by hand."

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There's something about working with a wooden spoon ... Wood just feels good; it's a nice organic material.”

At the counter's end hangs a vivid painting titled "Liquid Crystal," which Ullio said he bought last year at the Art Papers Art Auction. Other design elements include original art by Frey, a section of exposed brick and a small Sharp LCD TV. Built-in speakers, painted to match the walls,

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let Ullio listen to music while he cooks. Regulars at Sotto Sotto may wonder if there's any gleam of cobalt blue in Ullio's kitchen. The answer is yes — a blue vase sits on a counter, blue flowers are hand-woven into a Polish round silk center-cloth, which belonged to Ullio's great-grandmother, and a dog's water bowl is blue. However, Ullio denied that he has any special affection for the color. Maybe the question would be better poised to his 14-year-old dog, Blue, watching his master through the glass doors.

MAKE IT AT HOME Pasta aglio, olio, e peperoncino

(Serves four)

"The following pasta is the simplest of all pasta dishes," said Sotto Sotto Chef Riccardo Ullio. "I make it at home all the time because it's simple, quick, and good. In Italy we eat this a lot late at night after coming home from going out."

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 box of imported Italian spaghetti
- 4 cloves of garlic, sliced thin
- 1/4 tsp hot pepper flakes
- 1/2 cup very high quality extra virgin olive oil
- Coarse sea salt

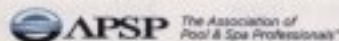
DIRECTIONS:

- ▶ Bring plenty of water to a boil, salt with sea salt and cook the pasta until "al dente." In the meantime, cook the garlic in the oil very slowly on low heat until golden.
- ▶ Turn off the heat. Add the pepper flakes and the drained pasta. Toss and eat immediately.



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