



A busy family branches out

BY MARIA LAPIANA

Grand Central Station's got nothing on this rambling colonial-style house just outside Minneapolis. It's where Sally and Charlie Lannin, their three teenagers, and countless friends and neighbors gather for one reason or another, nearly every day of the week.

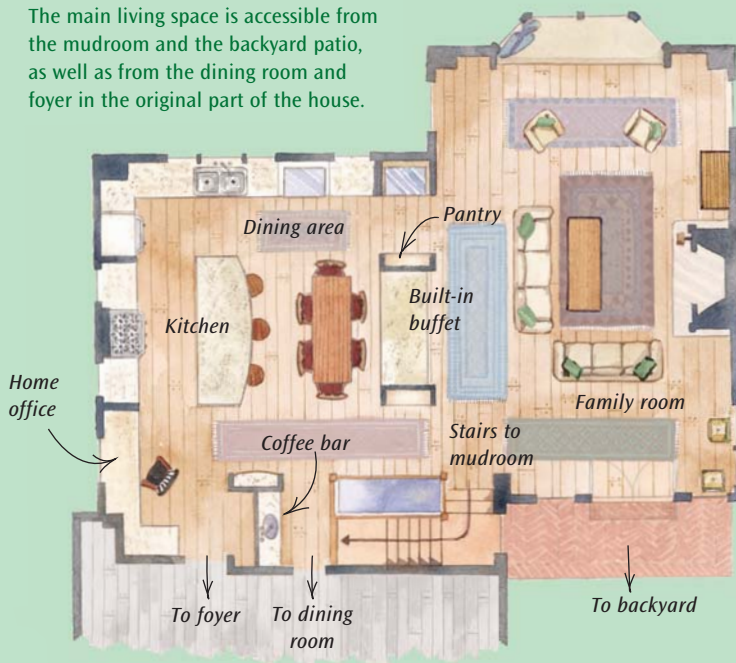
Not surprisingly, most of the activity—from sleepovers and school meetings to bridal showers and pasta parties for the football team—takes place in the home's new, wide-open kitchen and connecting family room. Which is exactly what Sally hoped would happen when they bought the house three years ago and immediately added on the new rooms.

"More than anything, we wanted the house to be welcoming, open, reasonably neat, and comfortable," says Sally, adding that it's interesting how the space reinvents itself to suit any occasion.

A sensible addition brings more to this home than a few new rooms

FIRST FLOOR

The main living space is accessible from the mudroom and the backyard patio, as well as from the dining room and foyer in the original part of the house.

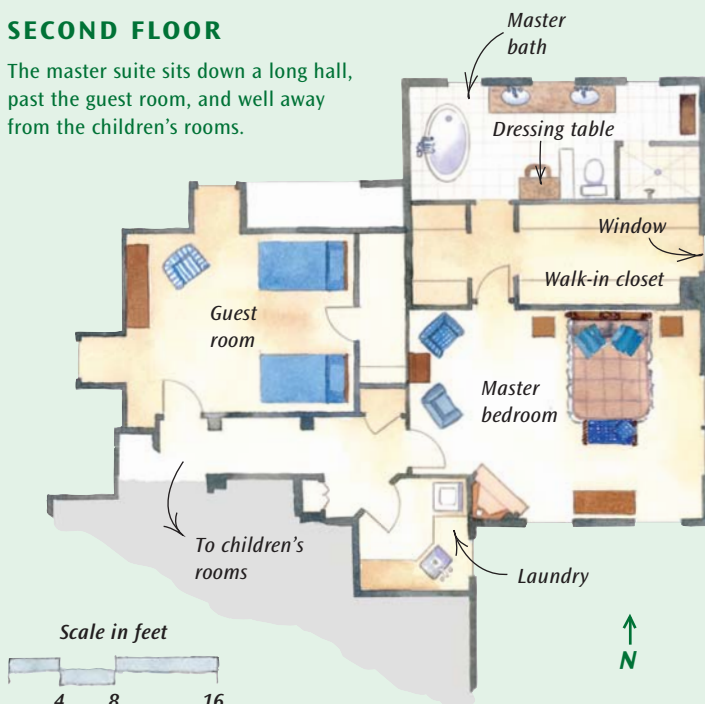


Room for the family to gather

The rooms in the original house were disconnected, and the kitchen was tiny. The homeowners knew they needed wide-open spaces in which to gather and entertain, so a kitchen and family room were added to the main floor. A master suite and guest room were added upstairs.

SECOND FLOOR

The master suite sits down a long hall, past the guest room, and well away from the children's rooms.



Sally loves how the new themselves to suit

Since the renovation, “the kitchen has become the center of our universe; the place where you can most likely find a note from mom on the counter, your misplaced math book, or a video waiting to be returned to Blockbuster,” says Sally.

“We use it—all of it—every day. And we’re very happy with the way it came together.”

The addition transformed the house

On paper, the house had everything, including the perfect location in a lovely older neighborhood. Built in 1940, it had architectural integrity, classic colonial bones, and more than enough bedrooms and baths. What it didn’t have was a big kitchen and the kind of common room the family required for the way they like to live and entertain.

The first-floor kitchen and family room is only part of the transformation designed by architect Jean Rehkamp Larson of Minneapolis. On the lowest level, the Lannins added another garage, a mudroom, and an open stairwell, which makes for a smooth transition into the bustling kitchen. On the second floor, they reconfigured a small guest room and added a laundry room and master suite (see sidebar, p. 75).

“As with most projects, this one was pared down from the original proposed design,” says Rehkamp Larson. “Sally and Charlie found the comfort level between value and cost and decided to focus on the classic kitchen and family room. The important thing was that the new rooms on all three floors appear seamless.”

While they were at it, they raised the front foyer doorways to 7 feet (“We are a family of Amazons,” says Sally, whose son Charlie, at 15, is already 6 foot 3). To fully integrate the new space, they matched all the flooring on the main level to the pegged wide-plank oak in the new space.

The family had quite a wish list, remembers Sally. “My husband and I were very involved in expressing what we wanted as an end product, although neither of us is at all blessed with architectural tendencies. As a result, Jean had to take our vague ramblings like ‘lots of light,’ ‘kids with big feet,’ ‘lots of dirty dishes’ and interpret them into numbers of windows, deep cubbies, and two dishwashers.”

rooms can reinvent
any occasion.



STEPS FROM THE KITCHEN The multipurpose family room is the spot for watching TV (hidden in the armoire), lounging by the fire, or reading on the window seat. The two easy chairs swivel toward the hearth or the large screen.

For years, Sally had saved pictures from magazines. “Remarkably, that old file I’d kept for 20 years was really used to express many of our ideas. I also went over to friends’ houses with a camera and opened their cupboards and took pictures, which I gave to Jean. She was great about listening and, voilà, the ideas appeared on the drawings.”

An open floor plan and lots of light

The traffic pattern throughout the rooms allows for movement and for a wide array of activities to take place at the same time. The kitchen island is huge—almost 10 feet by 4 feet—and highly functional (photo, p. 74). An arched, open buffet both divides and connects the rooms (photo right). “It lets you see the fireplace in the family room while you’re chopping lettuce on the island,” says Sally.



A SEE-THROUGH VIEW The arched pass-through buffet allows anyone working in the kitchen to see others in the family room beyond. Cabinets open on both sides for storage.

There are things they asked for—a good-size desk in the kitchen (bottom photo, p. 77)—and things they didn't know they needed—ceiling beams that scale down the open space and delineate the central seating area around the hearth in the family room (top photo, p. 73).

There are windows everywhere. “There’s symmetry to them. They were carefully placed so that from the outside, the addition would look as though it had always been there,” says Rehkamp Larson. Sally elaborates: “I didn’t want anyone to drive up and say ‘Look! They’ve added on a shoebox.’”

The bay window in the family room, whose sprawling seat sleeps two, provides a bird’s-eye view of arrivals and departures in the driveway, while the window over Sally’s desk is low enough to allow her to see the school bus pulling up while she works.

The kitchen cabinets and the bookcases in the family room were inspired by those in the library of the original house. Built-ins blend the two rooms (see sidebar, p. 76), although Sally says they really are distinct.

“We use the kitchen for everything from meals to office space and a meeting place,” she says. “I volunteer quite a bit at our kids’ school and in any given week may have anywhere from two to five meetings here. The family room, although attached, feels like a separate space. The kitchen is a sit-down-spread-out-your-papers spot, while the family room is a talk-by-the-fire, watch-a-DVD, read-a-book spot.”

Warm and welcoming finishes

The Lannins like things simple, so Sally says they chose materials that work well together, without looking as though they came from the same mold.

“We chose granite based on its warmth, a preference for a taupe color palette, and whatever was most unlike the white ceramic kitchen floor and countertop we had in our previous house, which had to be cleaned hourly,” she says. At 38 inches, the countertops are slightly higher than average to accommodate her taller-than-average family.

The color for the base of the kitchen island was inspired by a Restoration Hardware shopping bag Sally brought home one day. “I ripped open the bag and taped it to a wall, then took it to the paint store and had them blend a color close to it,” she remembers. “We also opted for a slightly distressed paint finish on all the cabinetry, knowing that we’d be distressing the cabinets naturally in no time, as soon as the first carload of teenage boys rolled in for an after-school snack.”



BIG KITCHEN FOR A TALL FAMILY
Counters are 38 inches high—2 more than standard—for the tall family that lives here. Teenage kids and their frequent guests can all find space at the island and dining table.

More than anything, we wanted the open, reasonably neat,



house to be welcoming,
and comfortable.

—Sally Lannin, homeowner



CREATURE COMFORTS
Two sinks, a tub, a shower (behind partition, top photo), and a dressing table across from the vanity complete the deluxe master bath.

A large closet and bath allow for a bedroom's smaller size

OUR MASTER SUITE is private; it's situated down a long hall and not in the path of any kid traffic. That gives us the ability to "check into our hotel room" when we are off duty in the evening. It's not vast, like some suites you see today, because I found that by planning the bathroom and closet well, we really didn't need a huge room.

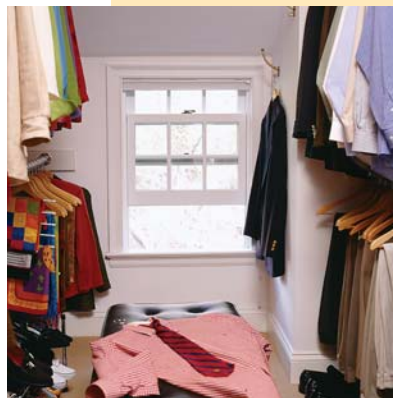
The walk-in closet allows me to see what I own all in one fell

swoop, instead of going to the attic to haul down the wool pants every year. I love having a little window in the closet, and I thank Jean, our architect, for that. It allows for air circulation, and the natural light makes matching colors a breeze.

The bathroom with twin sinks gives us plenty of room to function independently. The overhead fans in the bath and bedroom were a good idea, and being able to sit at the dressing table (across from the sinks) to put on make-up is a real luxury.

Another plus is the laundry room adjoining the master suite. I can switch loads before I go to sleep. My husband didn't understand at first, but multitasking is important when you're as busy as we are.

—S.L.



CLOTHES QUARTERS
A window at the end of the walk-in closet (upper left) ventilates, and the natural light makes it easy to match outfits. The bedroom (lower left) is relatively small, but comfortable.

Storage and built-ins keep our family organized

A FRIEND ONCE TOLD ME that you have to be organized to be spontaneous, and thankfully, our new space allows me to live like that. I have enough room in the cupboards to store all my things; my mother, in California, loves to bestow “fabulous estate-sale finds” on me, which I love to receive. I can now find my silver tray and candelabra in 30 seconds instead of previously needing to go to the basement and track them down. Everything is “put away,” but I’m able to find what I need in an instant.

First stop: coffee bar

I wanted a second sink, so a wet bar made sense, but we’re not the kind of couple that has a cocktail every night. So we just reinvented the notion of a wet bar and translated it into something we would really use every day: a coffee bar. Every morning, it is the first place I go, blindly brewing the morning’s first pot and padding over in my robe and slippers to my desk to check email.

Command central

I can’t say enough about my office area—I call it “command central.” I can see everything from there. Command central allows me to run a home business, fill out school forms, check emails, monitor the cake in the oven, change the printer cartridge, and answer a homework question all at the same time. Floor-to-ceiling cupboards across from the desk house the printer, extra paper, files, the school directory, and phone books. We had the cabinet wired for phone, fax, cable (for high-speed Internet), and made sure there were enough outlets, plus room for all those cords.

A nook for messages

When we walk up from the mudroom into the kitchen, the telephone shelf (not shown) is the first thing we see. With three teenagers, it’s important to know who has called, and when. We all can check messages immediately if the caller ID light is blinking.

Dry goods pantry

Because the kitchen doesn’t have many upper cabinets, I wanted a single storage space to hold the myriad cans and boxes of food we go through. On one end of the buffet built-in, full-height double doors cover deep shelves that hold our dry goods. Above the doors is a separate, lighted display shelf.

Bridging the two rooms

I love the granite-top buffet and all the wonderful storage under the archway between the kitchen and the family room (photos left and bottom p. 73). The side facing the kitchen is the

land of place mats, napkins, and silverware, and the side facing the family room holds games and knick-knacks. My husband is a very neat and tidy guy who is always putting things away, so this works for both of us.

A mudroom that makes sense

Requiring the kids to walk through the lower-level mudroom (not shown), which has a designated place for shoes, coats, and backpacks, has changed my life. In Minnesota, most people remove their shoes when they come into a house in the winter, so having a place for all of the winter accessories and footwear is key.

The cubbies are really fabulous; I like that they are open so whatever is in them can “breathe.” Our girls are swimmers, and they used to leave wet towels marinating in their swim bags on the floor. Now, the cubby hooks stare right at my daughters when they walk in the door and say, “Hey, why don’t you hang up that wet towel?”

I am confident that my life will be extended by at least a full year because I no longer nag daily. —S.L.

STORAGE BUFFET



COFFEE BAR



PANTRY





COMMAND CENTRAL



FAVORITE SPOT
Flanked by floor-to-ceiling bookcases, the window seat is the perfect place for reading, and it's wide enough to sleep two.

The hard-working kitchen includes a coffee bar, a Sub-Zero refrigerator and separate freezer, and Thermador ovens that Sally insisted be large enough to hold a jumbo turkey. The Wolf cooktop was selected for “the red knobs and the red knobs alone,” says Sally.

Comfort is first and foremost

The rooms are fairly large, so the Lannins needed furniture that was appropriate in scale. For the family room, Sally chose twin overstuffed Henredon sofas in a neutral cream and accented them with jewel-tone pillows. A distressed pine farmhouse table was cut down to 17½ inches high and given new life as a coffee table, while bright carpets in a variety of patterns and colors cover the high-traffic areas throughout the rooms. At every turn, Sally displays original artwork and treasures from the family’s travels abroad.

The television is hidden in an armoire, next to an antique planter. Two club chairs were originally arranged to face the center of the room, but Sally later had them mounted on swivels so friends and family could chat or turn toward the television in total comfort.

That kind of flexibility was a critical consideration. Sally loves the chameleonic quality of the space, and how it allows her to shift gears instantly, depending on how the rooms are being used. She calls it “putting away the bamboo-lap-tray look and bringing out the silver tray/candelabra/rose petals-sprinkled-on-the-island look.” And she did just that not long ago, the day after a teenage sleepover, when she hosted a bridal shower for 24.

What do the Lannins like best about the renovation? Sara, 16, is pleased “that the kitchen is big enough for all of us.” Suzanne, 13, favors the window seat in the family room—complete with a Harry Potter book. Husband Charlie enjoys “being in the family room all together, with a fire in the fireplace,” while son Charlie appreciates the fact that “the refrigerator and freezer hold a lot of food.”

As for Sally: “I like being able to survey the terra firma, knowing simultaneously if the pizza is done, if the teakettle is boiling, if there are any more emails, or if the bus is pulling up—all the while answering a phone request to host the football team’s carbo load tonight with a resounding ‘Sure, come on over!’” **H**

Maria LaPiana is an associate editor.

See Resources on page 94.