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A&E
ISSUE

FABRIC ART
INSTALLATION

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WILSON STREET
MERCANTILE

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BOOKS
COMING
TO **LIFE**

A Q&A with local
illustrator Tom
Lichtenheld,
whose 30+
children's books
include "Yes Day!"
and "Duck! Rabbit!"

a fresh take



LESS IS MORE

5 WAYS TO REFRESH YOUR KITCHEN AND UNLEASH NEWFOUND COOKING INSPIRATION

With Katie McCall, owner of Two Wild Seeds bakery

Springtime naturally beckons a sense of rebirth and renewal: longer days of sunlight, a fresh breeze, plants stretching their arms after months of hibernation, the calming sound of rain pitter-pattering on the roof. And for me, like many, this time of year also marks the annual cleaning and purging ritual.

Yet, thanks to decluttering wizards like Marie Kondo, we're set on autopilot to head straight for the closet, basement and garage — completely dismissing the kitchen, which is often considered the center of the household. It's where we congregate for morning chats and cups of coffee, prepare our meals, craft with our kiddos, share stories from the day — and if you're anything like me, it's also the home office.

So why is the kitchen left out? Countless

conversations with customers, clients, family and friends have revealed the same answer: They just don't know where to start.

As a home cook turned professional chef, I've spent the past 10-plus years cooking my way through every size kitchen imaginable, researching and learning firsthand how to make any space functional, efficient and (dare I say) enjoyable. My approach to preparing food is echoed throughout my entire home: Keep it simple. With a few tips to refresh your space and mindset, cooking can become less of a chore and more of a rewarding pastime.

■ **RESET AND REORGANIZE.** Start with a quick walk-through of your kitchen and ask if it makes sense. Are the spices within reach of the stove, or are you making trips across the room? Mindlessly digging through cabinets and drawers to summon

utensils is wasted time and energy that could otherwise be spent appreciating the meditative moments of chopping fresh herbs or stirring a simmering pot of tomato sauce.

■ **DITCH GIZMOS AND GADGETS.** When creating an arsenal of tools, it's all about quality over quantity. A good set of knives and cutting board, sturdy mixing bowls, wooden spoons, a wire whisk, Dutch oven, baking sheets, solid cookware and high-speed blender set the foundation for basic cooking. Forget the goofy gadgets like a strawberry husker and egg separator — a paring knife and your own two hands work just fine.

■ **STOCK THE SHELVES.** We not only eat with our eyes, but we also cook with them. A daily visual of the ingredients in your kitchen will inspire and motivate you to try new recipes. A well-stocked pantry (oils, vinegars, dried pasta, grains, canned

beans, vegetable stock, etc.) is essential for any level cook; bonus if they're displayed in clear, labeled containers or aesthetically pleasing glass jars.

■ **STRIVE FOR SUSTAINABILITY.**

Cooking without a game plan can be quite wasteful — and leads to monotonous meals. Sit down with your favorite cookbooks (or Pinterest account), create a weekly menu plan and shop accordingly. Other small changes like composting food scraps help create a sense of mindfulness in the kitchen that will, in turn, foster a deeper connection and

appreciation to the act of preparing food.

■ **SHOP SEASONALLY AND LOCALLY.** If all else fails, drop everything and head to your local farmers market. There is no greater pleasure than touching, seeing and smelling products grown or raised just miles from your home. You'll not only support your local agriculture system, but also enjoy the most delicious (often organic) produce at their peak of freshness. Weekend warrior project: Try your hand at pickling or canning vegetables to be enjoyed throughout the winter months.

■ Katie McCall is a bona fide Midwestern girl. Raised on four acres of rural property in Yorkville, she was taught to respect nature and all of its bounty. From foraging morel mushrooms in the woods to picking wild raspberries for homemade jam, Katie feels most at home when in nature and preparing food for others. When she's not running the downtown St. Charles bakery Two Wild Seeds, she can be found nose-deep in cookbooks, exploring the outdoors with her family — and eating ... always eating. Photo by Victoria C Photos.



PICKLED VEGETABLES

This recipe is adapted and inspired by one of my food idols, Alice Waters. It combines my love of seasonal produce, kitchen sustainability and support of the local farmers market. The vegetables listed below can be interchanged to your liking, and the pickling liquid can be made by itself and kept in the refrigerator (and reheated) to pickle vegetables at the ready.

Makes about 3 cups of pickling liquid

- 1-1/2 cups white or red wine vinegar
- 1-1/2 cups water
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1-1/2 teaspoons sea salt
- 1 teaspoon coriander seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon whole allspice
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 whole cloves
- Sprinkle of red pepper flakes
- 3 garlic cloves, cut in half
- Fresh thyme or dill sprigs
- Assortment of fresh vegetables cut into wedges or small pieces: radishes, carrots, cauliflower, peppers, green beans, cucumbers, asparagus, onions, green beans, etc.



Combine all of the ingredients (except the vegetables) in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Add the vegetables in small amounts and cook a minute or two — depending on the size and thickness — until slightly cooked but still crisp. Remove the veggies with a slotted spoon and allow to cool at room temperature. Once all the vegetables are cooked and cooled, allow the pickling liquid to cool, as well. Then, transfer the veggies to jars (or covered containers), cover with the pickling brine and refrigerate.

These make a wonderful, healthy snack or zesty addition to any meal!