

## Brinkmans' unique kitchen is 'so them'

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By **TOM JOHNSTON** Staff Writer

Bob and Amy Brinkman love to welcome and entertain people in their warm North Barrington home.

So when their friends say their kitchen is "so them," it makes sense that the Brinkmans took what would normally adorn the exterior of a home and brought them inside lest those fixtures be left out of the fun.

The cornice of a Victorian home frames the stainless-steel stove; antique pine porch posts hold up that cornice; and old leaded windows make the doors of cabinets which showcase dinnerware.

Meanwhile, the cabinets are accented by other acquisitions like curving wooden brackets, banisters and metal fireplace corbels.

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**Amy and Robert Brinkman of North Barrington enjoy their kitchen, which won a national "Most Beautiful Kitchen Contest" for its uniqueness.**

*Brian Valentini/For Pioneer Press*

Brinkman said he wanted to incorporate the "heavier" details because they're what set the kitchen apart from others.

### Nobody else

"Nobody really does it like this," he said, explaining the normal route is looking in a milling catalog and picking out small furniture.

More the result of an eclectic evolution than a set design, the Brinkmans' kitchen blends rustic charm -- seen in the imperfections of distressed wood -- with classic

elegance -- sparkling from crystal knobs and small chandeliers.

Jaime Laurita, a neighbor and professional personal chef whose client list includes Aerosmith lead singer Steven Tyler, said the Brinkmans are "whimsical and romantic," and their kitchen shows it.

The odd mix of elements are like the unpredictable words that come out of Amy Brinkman's mouth; her husband carved their initials into one of the porch posts, he notes as examples.

"It's so them," Laurita says with a smile, rendering him unable to describe it any other way. "My kitchen is unique to me, but this is so Amy and Bob. Everything about it is both of them. It works not only for their needs but who they are as people."

And their kitchen had all the ingredients of a winner in the eyes of Gurnee-based Weiman Home Care Products, which anointed the Brinkmans as owners of "America's Most Beautiful Kitchen."

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## Going to Italy

For that they've received a grand prize of a six-night, seven-day culinary excursion to Il Falconiere Cooking School in the Tuscan countryside town of Cortona, Italy. They leave Oct. 14.

The contest, which looked for homeowners who take exceptional pride in their kitchens, ultimately involved more than 200 hopefuls. Participation included submitting as many as three 5-by-7 photographs of each one's kitchen with a 300-word essay on how its design fits the family's personality and lifestyle.

"Although its beauty is apparent, what I love the most about our kitchen is that it will forever gather our large family back home for good food, laughter and love," Amy Brinkman wrote.

She said a friend read about the contest in a newspaper and suggested the Brinkmans go for it. Backed by friends who commonly comment about how nice their kitchen is, the Brinkmans entered during the last week of the competition.

"The family's elegant kitchen radiates with crystal chandeliers, antique architectural scrollwork and vintage design elements, all the while remaining a welcoming and cozy space perfect for the eight-member Brinkman family," Weiman officials said.

Bob and Amy Brinkman, who own and operate Artifactual Furniture and Design in Barrington, recreated their old kitchen themselves, doubling it in size. At the same time, it became a longer, narrower room, which called for clever modifications to make it surprisingly spacious and user-friendly.

## No set width

The marble countertop does not run the wall at one set width. The main sink, more a small, porcelain wash tub, juts out from it. Another small sink sits farther down the line, where perhaps the cook or the cook's assistant can wash vegetables.

In the middle of it all is an island made of antique pine and topped with marble. Adjacent to the island is an old butcher's block, in which a microwave sits snugly. Nearby is the stainless-steel refrigerator which swings open just enough to take out the sandwich makings and set them conveniently on top of the butcher's block.

"I love to cook in this kitchen," Laurita said. "A kitchen is designed well if it's a kitchen that's easy to cook in. As a cook, I can do two or three things at once, or have people helping me do those things and not get in each other's way."

Bob Brinkman said the design of the kitchen, which feeds into a family room featuring an eight-seat "pub," lends itself well to having six children.

"When we have all our family and friends over, it all flows pretty nicely," he said.

The Brinkmans' kitchen experience has them thinking about adding another facet to their existing business. One of their customers got a glimpse of their kitchen and immediately asked for their services over the high-end designer he had already hired.

"We should do kitchens," Bob Brinkman said.