

## At Home With Doug and Janet Fletcher

Food and wine are central to the Napa couple's lifestyle

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Doug and Janet Fletcher, a winemaker and food writer couple, created their dream gastronomic home in Napa, Calif., with a half-acre garden and expanded open kitchen.

*It's a match* made in gastronomic heaven: a winemaker and a food writer. For Doug and Janet Fletcher, of Napa, a kitchen renovation was a small price to pay for the rewards they reap daily from a life of food and wine.

Appropriately, the couple first met over dinner. At the time, in 1981, Doug worked at Martin Ray winery in Santa Rosa; Janet cooked at Chez Panisse and moonlighted as a restaurant critic. The occasion of their meeting was a double date—but Janet and Doug were on the date with other people. Doug fondly recalls the early days of their courtship: He would stop by Chez Panisse, and Janet would cook for him.

They married in 1984. As Janet transitioned to full-time food writing, she found that she could work from anywhere. Meanwhile, Doug was commuting daily from Oakland to Napa, where in 1985 he had joined Chimney Rock Winery. (In 2004, Chimney Rock was acquired by the Terlato Wine Group, of which Doug is now vice president of winemaking; Janet continues to write



The couple chose the hanging German light fixtures, freestanding shelves, visible drawer storage and a cherrywood hutch that Doug designed to contribute to the kitchen's sense of openness.

cookbooks, articles and the e-newsletter, Planet Cheese, along with teaching cheese classes at Silverado Cooking School.)

In 1998, after deciding it was time to move to wine country, the Fletchers purchased a home in Napa's historic Stonecrest neighborhood, across the street from Dorothy Tchelistcheff, widow of legendary Napa winemaker André. John Kongsgaard's the Judge Chardonnay vineyard sits a few blocks away. Longtime city dwellers, the Fletchers had pined for a garden during their years in San Francisco's East Bay and now finally had a half-acre of land to plant to their hearts' content. There was just one problem: "The kitchen was a little galley space," says Janet.

The couple wanted—needed—a kitchen large enough for cooking and entertaining together in harmony. Of their original redesign plan, Janet says, "We ran it by a kitchen designer at one point. She thought it was too big. She said, 'You're going to need roller skates in there.'" But they insisted on expansion. "We put [in] big cardboard boxes to mimic where the counter would be," Doug says, "and we kept moving [them] apart until we could walk by and not bump butts."

They broadened the kitchen in both directions, connecting it to the dining room with a large archway. "Now, from the dining room, you can look through the kitchen to the garden," says Doug. "Our fountain is a focal point that you can see all the way through." The garage, which was adjacent to the kitchen, became Janet's home office, and the bathroom off the pantry became a wine cellar.

The result of the remodeling is a wide, expansive and inviting space, crackling with light and bursting with Doug and Janet's personalities.

"Originally, Janet had the idea of having just a big French antique farm table in the kitchen," Doug recalls. "We started down that path,



Satin nickel finish decorates the drawer pulls, light fixtures, Emeco chairs and both of the kitchen's sinks. Janet likens the sleek dulled-brass coating to jewelry and says it gives the space some style.



but we wanted a sink, and there was just no good way to put a sink in an old farm table without having the plumbing show." Instead, Doug designed a 12-foot-long island, made of big cherry planks, with a small utility sink in the middle. It's solid on one side, to hide the pipes, and has legs on the other.



Janet spends about 10 hours gardening every weekend, while Doug pitches in trellising and pruning (he's a winemaker, after all). The garden has five live oaks, 20 rose bushes and 22 fruit trees including peach, persimmon, fig, pomegranate, grapefruit and oro blanco.

He often comes home for lunch, and they eat together outdoors. Cooking dinner "is our evening's entertainment," says Janet. Garden produce, wine and a cheese course are nightly staples, and her recipe tests frequently furnish their evening meal. "When she was doing her pasta books, we had pasta every night for a year and a half," remembers Doug. "I never got tired of it!"

"Over the years, Janet's cooking, and recipe development, has affected how I view wine," Doug goes on. "It is part of the table. At work, I make everyone take blending [trials] home and try them with dinner. It's surprising how that will change the way we tweak the wine, if we blend more Cabernet Franc, for example. It's focused on the table."

"We have a living room," says Janet, "but I'm not sure why we do."

Open shelving supplements the storage space provided by a large cherrywood hutch, also designed by Doug. "We like to look at our stuff," says Janet of the shelves. A decanter collection sits next to an assortment of mortars and pestles, acquired on trips to India, Greece, Vietnam and Mexico. "They remind us of places we've been, of good meals," she continues.

And the good meals keep coming. Janet and Doug insistently practice the lost art of a leisurely breakfast, typically fruit from their garden (this year, a large crop of blood oranges meant lots of juice) and bread that Doug bakes.



The couple's half-acre garden is an extension of their kitchen. They enjoy most of their meals, including leisurely breakfasts, outside surrounded by edible plants and granite paths.