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Accessible Entertaining

With a public-access TV show broadcast in 80 cities and an upcoming book, Texas cook Marie Hejl is bringing her philosophy of easy entertaining to the world.

BY KRISTIN DONNELLY

Before Marie Hejl really learned how to cook, she starred in a local Austin cooking show: The three-episode series, filmed when she was 10, continued to run while she was in college. Now the 29-year-old is known for *Cooking with Marie*, which debuted in 2005 on Austin public TV and now airs in 80 cities from Charlotte, North Carolina, to Auckland, New Zealand. And in March she will publish her first cookbook, *Cooking with Marie on Any Occasion*.

On her show and in her book, Marie focuses on simple recipes perfect for easy entertaining, like tangy chicken and cheese enchiladas. Shooting in her dad's kitchen adds to her approachable girl-next-door appeal, as does her playful style (she opened one show on a skeet-shooting range). About half the time, she invites guests to cook with her, including top Austin chefs: Alma Alcocer-Thomas of Jeffrey's showed her how to make crème fraîche, Uchi sushi maverick Tyson Cole (an F&W Best New Chef 2005) demonstrated how to fillet a fish. "Part of the show's appeal is the idea that if I can do it, so can you," Marie says.

The Kitchen

Jim Hejl designed his open kitchen with a huge island facing the living area. It's ideal for entertaining since he never has to turn his back to guests. Coincidentally, it's also the perfect space for filming Marie's show.



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Island and cooktop The extra-long 13-by-5-foot island has ample storage, prep and cleanup areas—plus, Marie can face the camera while working at the five-burner KitchenAid cooktop. \$1,030; 800-334-6889 or kitchenaid.com.

Countertop "I find big pieces of polished granite to be too shiny and assertive," Jim says. Instead he chose travertine for its warmer, more subdued tone. To help cut costs, he bought 18-inch-square tiles rather than large slabs and installed them with minimal grout lines. From \$11; 800-368-3901 or materials-marketing.com.

Sinks and faucets The island includes two Elkay Elite sinks with chrome Essex faucets by Kohler. A single 20-inch bowl sink is great for prep, a 33-inch double-bowl version for cleanup. Sinks from \$266; 630-572-3192 or elkayusa.com; faucets, \$424; 800-456-4537 or us.kohler.com.

Cabinets The painted poplar custom cabinets along the walls are just one foot deep instead of the usual two so that pots and pans are within easy reach.

Pulls and knobs The Silver Patina finish on the cabinet and drawer pulls from Emtek deepens in color as it ages. The bronze doorknobs on the three sets of French doors have the same finish. Pulls from \$9; doorknob, \$95; 800-356-2741 or emtek.com.

Floor Jim loves the concrete floor because of its industrial look and high functionality. "It's easier to maintain than wood," he says. "We just sweep the floor, and then mop it occasionally." To give it a smooth feel and a nice sheen, Jim also finished the floor with a clear Kemiko Stone Tone Wax. \$37 per gallon; 903-587-3708 or kemiko.com.