



# A POP OF MODERN

Professional chef Mark Alba gives his suburban home the modern kitchen treatment

Written by Lia Picard / Photographed by John Haigwood and Kyle Ripley, Haigwood Studios



(above) The redesigned kitchen is open and stunning with Carrera marble counter tops and two islands.

**S**OME CHEFS WOULDN'T DREAM of cooking at home on their days off. But for Mark Alba, a professional chef who has worked with companies like Legendary Events and STK Atlanta, being able to cook for and with his family was paramount.

Alba, his wife, Amy, and their four children called their house in Smyrna home for three years before deciding it was time to revamp the kitchen. "We wanted a kitchen that was a little bit more modern with more light," he says. The seed for their new kitchen was planted a year ago, and the construction took about five months.

When you drive through the Albas' neighborhood, there's a definitive pattern of traditional homes with two-car garages, two stories and shutters on the windows. But, when you step inside the Albas' newly remodeled kitchen, it's a different story.

The kitchen sits off of the dining room and is sneakily expansive. Windows and a windowed door line the walls, allowing light to flood the space during the day. At night, canned lighting offers the luminous quality the Albas were seeking.



The Alba family enjoys spending time together in the kitchen, whether it's entertaining friends or cooking a family meal.



The black-and-white marble island adds a striking contrast to the crisp white countertops and cabinets.

When approaching their renovation, the cabinets were the first order of business. Originally oak cabinets stained brown, they clashed with the Albas' modern concept. Creamy white replacements make the space look bigger while adding a contemporary edge. New gray hardwood floors offset the cabinets nicely. "I mean, the home is 17 years old," says Mark. "When we first came in, the floors needed to be re-done. And they could only be sanded one time because, I guess, they had been sanded and stained over and over again [thinning the flooring.]. We weren't able to sand and stain again. So, we decided to add new flooring on top."

On entering the kitchen, the black-and-white countertops are immediately striking. Made of Carrera marble, they run along the entire kitchen perimeter. Alba liked the clean simplicity of the marble

and how well it works with the other stone in the kitchen, which is a black-and-white marble. The contrast is visually striking and adds an element of luxury to the comfortable space.

Luxury doesn't stop at the countertops though. For Alba, it was important that the kitchen have a quality stove like the ones he uses at work. "I have been wanting that Wolf range for as long as I can remember," he explains. "I mean, I have grown up in my career cooking with professional, commercial-grade Wolf ovens." After attending a dinner cooked by the corporate chef of Sub-Zero and Wolf, the Albas were sold. The range, with six burners and a griddle is brushed stainless steel with a matching stainless-steel hood and backsplash. Next to the stove is a magnetic knife bar, making it exceedingly convenient for Alba to slice and dice while cooking.

"I use a lot of Global and Shun knives, and I sharpen them all so they're very, very sharp." He laughs, "My wife has her own set of knives. No one's really allowed to use those knives except for me."

What would a modern kitchen be without a little tech? The fridge is a Samsung Smart Refrigerator. Alba wasn't sure if they needed the bells and whistles that come with the interactive fridge, but now he's sold. "It has cameras on the inside that you can link through a Samsung app and see what's in your fridge at all times, which is really cool. We can be in the grocery store and take a peek inside our fridge to see if we need milk or eggs or butter or whatever." Next to the fridge is a built-in espresso and cappuccino machine. He says, "It's great because I'm Colombian. Amy is Dominican-Italian. We love coffee and



Mark Alba was most excited about the Wolf range, having spent his professional career using commercial-grade stoves.



One of the Alba family's favorite dishes to make is pancakes, fluffy and stacked high.

really wanted something that was efficient and easy to use.” The machine grinds the coffee beans and is hard-lined to the fridge so they never have to refill the water.

One of the best perks of their re-designed kitchen is all the space for cooking with their children. “They’re really, really interested in being in the kitchen, especially my daughter and my wife’s youngest son,” says Alba. “We often enjoy fresh-from-scratch pancakes for breakfast and brunch. Blueberry is our favorite, but you could easily create so many amazing combinations such as sweet potato; pecan pralines and sorghum syrup; or banana, honey granola and vanilla whipped cream. The fillers and toppings are endless!” Happy in his new chef-ready kitchen, Alba’s contagious enthusiasm is sure to inspire the next generation of creative cooks.

## Blueberry Buttermilk Pancakes

Recipe by Mark Alba

*Yield: 4-6 servings*

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon fine salt
- 2 whole eggs, beaten
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 4 tablespoons butter, melted
- 2–2 1/2 cups buttermilk
- 2 cups fresh blueberries
- 2 cups maple syrup

In a mixing bowl, combine flour, sugar, salt, baking powder and baking soda and mix thoroughly.

In a separate bowl, combine beaten eggs, vanilla extract, melted butter and 2 cups buttermilk. Mix thoroughly. You may use an additional 1/2 cup of buttermilk for a thinner pancake.

Slowly pour wet ingredients into dry ingredients and whisk gently until incorporated. Do not over whisk. Tiny white lumps are perfectly normal.

In a butter-greased nonstick fry pan or electric griddle on low to medium heat, pour or spoon 2-ounce portions. Place 5 to 6 blueberries onto every pancake. Flip when bubbles appear and cook other side. (See Hint.) Enjoy with your favorite maple syrup.

### TIP 1

*Knowing when to flip a pancake is critical. You will notice the center of the batter begin to gently bubble. This is when you are ready to flip your pancake. Those crispy edges are what you’re looking for! Once you have flipped the pancake it will begin to feel spongy. Your pancakes are cooked to perfection!*

### TIP 2

*To meet your desired pancake consistency just add less buttermilk for a thicker, fluffier pancake or thin out the batter by adding a touch more buttermilk for a thinner, lighter pancake.”*