



Grand Jeté

A renovation puts avid angler, adventurous chef, and gracious host, Boston Ballet's Mikko Nissinen, center stage

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Between international tours and long hours working with dancers in the studio in Boston, Mikko Nissinen, artistic director of the Boston Ballet, has little free time. When he does have a break in his schedule, the avid tuna fisherman heads out on the open ocean in his boat, *Koi*, a 30-foot Boston whaler with a custom tuna tower that he docks in Marshfield, Massachusetts. Back on dry land, his favorite way to unwind is preparing and serving his catch to guests at his home in Boston's South End.

But the kitchen where Helsinki native Nissinen, who danced with the Finnish National Ballet and served as executive director of Canada's Alberta Ballet before taking on his current role in 2001, had been cooking and entertaining for years was neither efficient nor comfortable. In what was arguably an open floor plan, the kitchen was located between the living and dining areas on the main level of his two-story unit. Dated, lacking adequate counter space and storage, and segregated by a cramped peninsula, the kitchen was confining

ARCHITECTURE JOSEPH KENNARD ARCHITECTS INC.



THE ISLAND'S RED HUE makes it the focal point of the kitchen (TOP). Cabinets are painted Urbane Bronze, a custom color mixed by Metropolitan Cabinets. Mikko Nissinen (ABOVE) sits in the living room, which now has a view to the kitchen thanks to the reorientation of space.

WHILE THE NEW kitchen is highly functional, its location in the center of the condo, open to both the living room and the dining area (LEFT), led architect Joseph Kennard to design it so it feels less utilitarian, camouflaging appliances like the refrigerator with cabinet panels. The range has an induction cooktop on which a once-reluctant Nissinen now loves to cook.

and disjointed. The constraints of the space made it difficult to cook and interact with his guests. "I'm an adventurous chef," says Nissinen. "I love to cook for people. I wanted to be able to have a dinner party and be part of the process."

To design a more functional and contemporary kitchen, Nissinen brought in Joseph Kennard of Joseph Kennard Architects Inc. in Boston. "While it was already an open space, it wasn't open experientially," says Kennard. The solution, he says, was to create a traffic pattern that would allow access into and around the kitchen from both the dining and living areas while maintaining proprietary space for the cook.

To establish an easy flow and make the space more welcoming to guests, Kennard persuaded Nissinen to take out the powder room off the entry. The entrance to the condominium was also moved a few feet, which allowed the addition of a coat closet and china cabinet and better access to the stairs leading to the lower level. "Now you can see the full width of the space," says Kennard.

A substantial 10-foot-long island — inspired by a Japanese sushi bar — anchors the new kitchen and gives Nissinen ample surface to prep some serious slabs of raw tuna. Fabricated by Metropolitan Cabinets in Norwood, Massachusetts, the hefty piece is made of Italian laminate coated in a bold red hue. It is topped with durable Caesarstone and fitted with multiple drawers and cabinets on the service side, while on the "company" side, guests can sit at a raised bar made of reclaimed white oak. "Everyone wants to watch and talk to Mikko while he's cooking, so the idea was to create a pattern that would facilitate a bar for people to hang out at," says Kennard.





Behind the island, a long wall of cabinets, also crafted and installed by Metropolitan, provides ample storage, and matching panels conceal the Sub-Zero refrigerator and Miele dishwasher. The Electrolux induction cooktop was a serendipitous selection. “I wanted to have a gas stove more than almost anything in the whole kitchen,” says Nissinen, but there were no gas lines coming into the building, and getting one would have been an exorbitant expense. “Joe had to drive me kicking and screaming to induction,” says Nissinen, “but I tried it and I’m a

GUESTS CONGREGATE AT the reclaimed white oak bar (LEFT) while Nissinen prepares food on the other side of the island (ABOVE). Inspired by a sushi bar, it is the ideal work space for slicing fresh-caught tuna. Nissinen offers up individual servings of his Tuna *Crudo* (FACING PAGE, LEFT). The dining area (FACING PAGE, RIGHT) is denoted by a distinctive white-painted brick wall. “The whole area feels so much more organic now,” says Nissinen. “With all the spaces open to one another, it’s much more comfortable; everyone can be together.”

PARTIES TO SAVOR

While tuna is the species Nissinen most enjoys pursuing, he also catches striped bass, cod, and haddock. The seasoned angler, shown here aboard his customized Boston whaler *Koi*, acknowledges that there are plenty of times when “there’s a lot of fishing but no catching.” When that’s the case, he takes pleasure in a beautiful day of boating. Days on the water were few last summer as the Boston Ballet performed an expansive repertoire in London and prepared to embrace its ambitious 50th season, which opened in September.

Nissinen’s rigorous schedule has also left little time for entertaining, so the dinner parties he is able to host are precious occasions to be planned for and savored. “I prepare three or four days ahead,” says Nissinen. “My gatherings are loose and informal but pretty serious at the same time.” Menus are conceived first and reworked many times. Portions are kept small to accommodate multiple courses. If Nissinen’s not able to prepare fish he’s caught, he opts for the freshest species at the market. “I use high-end ingredients: Japanese mushrooms, truffles, special spices from around the world that offer different flavors and experiences we can learn from.”



TUNA CRUDO

For a light, clean taste, Mikko Nissinen recommends preparing fresh raw tuna *crudo* style. “*Crudo* is an old, old Italian way of serving fish,” he says. “Italians actually ate raw fish 500 years before the Japanese did.”

Nissinen’s variation involves a blend of olive oil, ginger, and garlic. “When you mix the ingredients together, a thin paste will form,” he says. Slice the tuna into bite-size pieces and drizzle with the mixture. Coat each piece with black sea salt and serve with carrot and celery sticks and chopped Italian parsley.

“The olive oil brings a velvety quality to the forefront,” says Nissinen. “The infusion of garlic and ginger makes an incredible combination.”



believer. I love it.”

The kitchen’s tile floor was replaced with oak that was stained chocolate to match the existing floors in the adjacent spaces. All the walls were then painted with the same creamy off-white hue.

To create interest, Kennard used texture. In the dining room, he left a brick wall exposed but painted it white. He switched the flat stock trim around the two window and door walls — one in the living area, the other by the dining area — with wood

planks that add dimension. A stair bulkhead, plumbing, duct vents, and structural elements were boxed in with a dropped ceiling, which Kennard extended and covered in linen wallpaper to add visual interest.

Since more storage was an essential part of the program, the living room’s nonworking fireplace was replaced with an expansive swath of built-in cabinets to conceal the television, books, audio systems, and kitchen overflow items. “Lack of storage space was a big issue before. Now everything is so neatly tucked away,” says Nissinen, who is most impressed by how well the space lends itself to entertaining. “I can have 6 people sitting at the bar while I’m cooking, 10 or 12 people for a sit-down dinner — more if it’s buffet style — and I’m at the center of everything. It’s perfect.”