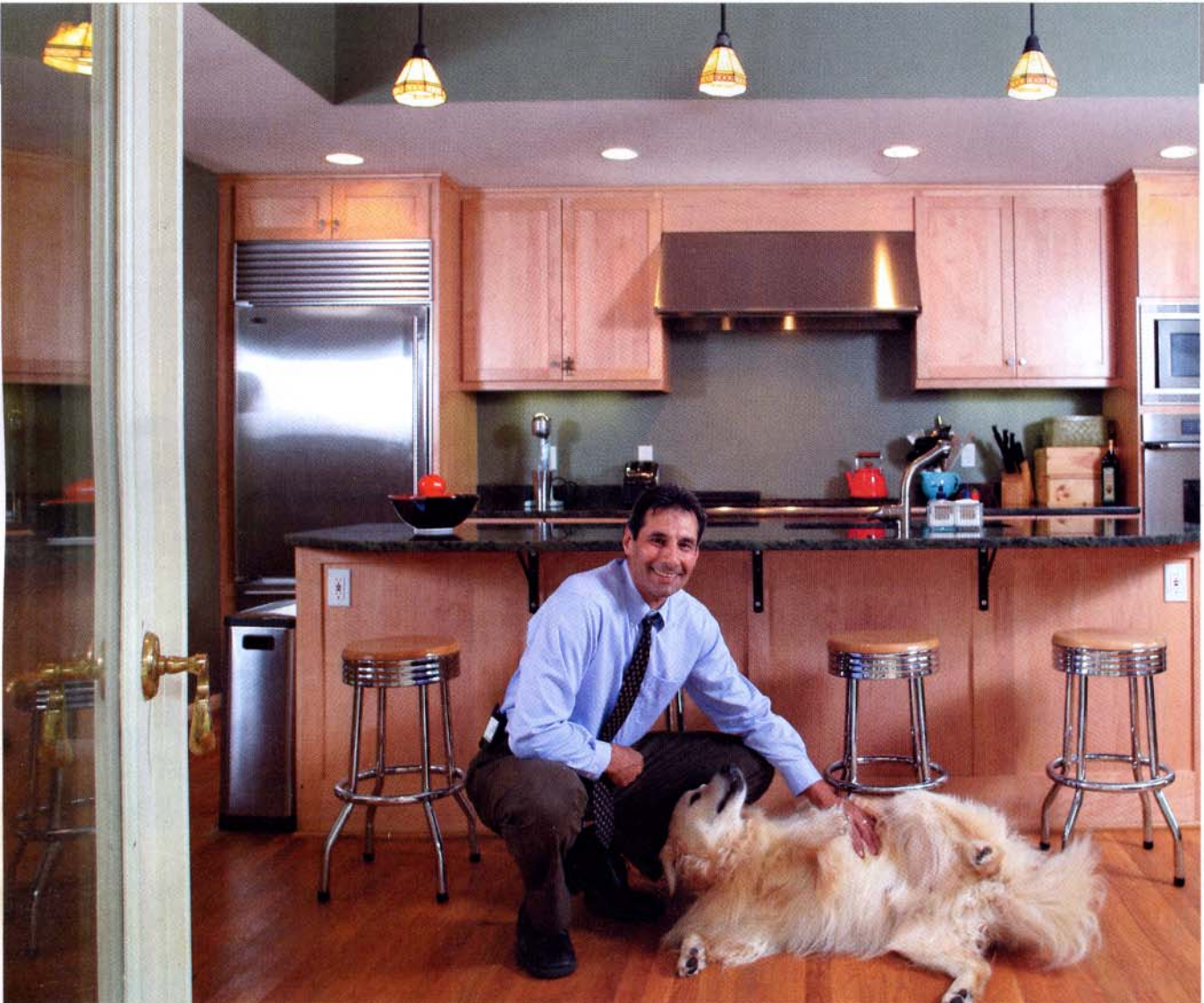


Jerry Levine, The Levine Group



An elementary school teacher turned kitchen

designer, Jerry Levine can boil down the complicated and pricey process of a kitchen renovation into an easy to understand lesson: function rules. Leaning on his granite-topped, 9-foot-long kitchen island, Levine says his personal remodeling project is an illustration of the importance of focusing on function first when renovating.

"This kitchen saved our house," says Levine, owner of The Levine Group, a design/build company in Silver Spring. "It changed the way we live."

Like a lot of homeowners in his Chevy Chase neighborhood off East-West Highway, Levine's split-level foyer home had a cramped and outdated 1960s kitchen. Levine has been renovating kitchens in Montgomery County since 1987, but it wasn't until 2002 that he demolished his own and started over. The kitchen, part of a two-story addition, is now an airy, light-filled space with a vaulted ceiling and an open, circular floor plan that is great for family meals and entertaining.

The cabinets are blond maple and new hardwood floors match the original wood floors in the rest of the home. There's

a Sub-Zero refrigerator as well as an under-the-counter wine refrigerator in a bar area near the original living room. Levine also added an unexpected twist to the bar space. Its countertop is made from a piece of refurbished bowling alley floor Levine salvaged years ago.

Levine and his wife, Lucinda, like to cook meals together and the kitchen was designed with that in mind. The centerpiece of the space is the 9-foot-long by 31/2-foot-wide island, with an extra deep sink to handle large pasta pots. Four bar stools line one side of the island, facing a Dacor commercial-style gas stove on the opposite wall.

The kitchen has a comfortable feel and that's the way Levine likes it. Under the stove are four deep pull out drawers without doors, so Levine can quickly see and grab what he needs. "This isn't a museum. We don't have to hide anything," he says.

This experienced builder says he likes to remind his clients to spend time concentrating on how they really will use their remodeled kitchens. "First, think about how you cook and how you live in the space," he says. "Don't get seduced by all the great kitchen products out there. Think function first."