The horizontal wood-plank soffit above the range in Liz and Ray Gibbons’ Birmingham, Alabama, kitchen gently slopes outward from the ceiling, ending at the top of the vent hood and cabinets. “It reminds me of an awning in a Parisian cafe,” Liz says. “It’s so interesting. That’s my favorite thing in the whole kitchen.”

It’s not often that soffits garner such raves reviews, but the introduction of undulating lines and shapes by Birmingham designer Dana Wolter gave the Gibbonses’ new home—and especially the kitchen—the French verve they were seeking. “I saw the need for soft lines in this house,” Wolter says.

While the family room and kitchen open to one another, Wolter added curved side walls and a ceiling arch to subtly divide the two spaces. “I wanted the kitchen to open to the family room but have a more intimate feeling,” the designer says.

Liz and Ray eat most meals at the large island Wolter designed that features a curvaceous white-oak base and a marble top. Perimeter cabinets have simple inset panel doors painted white, but the designer finished the island base with a pigmented wax for a warm gray charcoal hue. The island’s cabinet doors and vertical surfaces are reeded for subtle texture and a hint of formality, Wolter says.

The marble backsplash, in a diamond pattern accented with blue dots, covers the walls behind the stainless-steel range and in the butler’s pantry. “I fell in love with that tile, especially when I saw it with the soapstone and white marble,” Liz says.

Even though the marble countertop takes some extra care to prevent stains, the soapstone is indestructible, Liz says. Every couple months, she waxes it with a soapstone sealer that produces a warm finish. “I didn’t want any shiny surfaces,” Liz says. “The wax makes the soapstone glow.”

The wide-plank French white oak floors were another love-at-first-sight choice, and they stand up to the wear and tear of the couple’s two dachshunds. “At first we were looking at really dark wood, but I started thinking about how dog hair and crumbs would show up,” Liz says. “These don’t show anything. They’re fantastic!”

Lanterns with unlaquered brass finishes hang above the island, mixing amicably with other metal finishes, including chrome faucets and hardware. “I like to mix metals,” Wolter says. “It creates an aged effect in a new space.” Such details make a new kitchen special and “not like the one next door,” she adds. “And they’re classic details that won’t be quickly outdated.”

Designer: Dana Wolter

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“The peacefulness of neutral colors allows the interiors to complement the complexion of what’s going on outside, whether its current state is the white of snow, the fiery colors that autumn lends, or the rich, luscious greens of summer,” Young says.

For the neutral base for her palette, Young chose a warm, taupey gray inspired by a finish that she and Cindy discovered on a piece of furniture during a buying trip. Knowing the home would be filled with cabinetry—not just in the kitchen but elsewhere too—the designer and homeowner opted to apply the finish everywhere, maintaining consistency in the open floor plan.

Come Christmas, the quiet and versatile color scheme proves an ideal backdrop for seasonal greens, trees, and, of course, a spirited burst of holiday red. Lighted white trees sit atop the imposing carved fireplace mantels while swags of silver garlands hang just below. Although not holiday specific, a curved white linen sofa embellished with dressmaker details that include French piping, buttons, and box pleats might bring to mind the frills on a formal Christmas party gown. The sofa takes its place in one of the two conversation areas next to a Steinway grand piano, where Cindy is happy to play favorite holiday tunes for her family and friends.

Despite its primarily gray palette, the house isn’t devoid of color. But the designer applied it judiciously. “Using color is all about intensity,” Young says. In the dining room, where a