

May We Help You?



Cora (left) shows Baird how to spice up her kitchen.

## “My Kitchen Is In Chaos!”

When a Los Angeles family moves into a larger house, more space means more mess—especially in the kitchen. Chef *Cat Cora* finds a way to tame the disarray. **BY KATE ROCKWOOD**

→ **THE 5 O’CLOCK QUESTION** “What’s for dinner?” may stir dread in most working moms, but for Ali Baird, 39, there’s an additional hurdle: finding her favorite spatula. “Sometimes it’s here,” she says, opening a drawer bursting with everything from meat pounders and ladles to corkscrews and can openers. “But sometimes it’s somewhere else, because my husband is in charge of breakfast and our babysitter prepares the kids’ dinner.” Circling the kitchen, she opens a second and then a third mixed-up drawer.

Cat Cora surveys the sunny space and quickly identifies Baird’s Achilles’ heel: “Everything needs a designated place, or it becomes chaos,” says Cora, cohost of the cooking competition show *Around the World in 80 Plates*, who has come to help the family get organized. “It’s not about rigidity; it’s (continued on page 86)

### Create a Breakfast Station

“My husband often brews coffee and makes breakfast with one hand, holding our daughter on his hip with the other,” Baird says. All the supplies are scattered about: coffee beans in the pantry, filters and sugar in separate cabinets. Cora moves the essentials into cabinets above the coffee machine, then relocates the toaster oven to the same area. Now he can make the entire meal without taking a step.



## Simplify Snacks

Baird's pantry is a riot of open raisin boxes, rubber-banded pretzel bags, and almost-empty cracker packets. Cora moves it all onto one shelf after transferring the snacks to glass containers. "Food will stay fresher, and you'll be able to see how much you have," she says. (Fido by Bormioli Rocco glass jars, from \$6; organize.com)

Before



Ben helps sort snacks

After



about empowering you." Despite the swirl of activity around Baird—1-year-old Winnie is asking for dried apricots, 4-year-old Ben is playing with a cell phone at Baird's feet—Cora's comment seems to instantly relax her. "I know I need help," she says. "Hunting for things can tack on 20 minutes to making a meal."

Baird, who's studying to be a therapist; her husband, Jon, a writer; and their kids moved into this spacious home last year, and their attempts to settle in never went beyond unpacking boxes. "After decades of tiny galley kitchens, I feel like a brat for complaining about finally having a bit of space!" Baird says. But once she had the additional cabinets she'd always dreamed of, she didn't know what to do with them. Figuring out where to put the pots always seemed to take a backseat to, say, coordinating schedules. "Most evenings that I cook, I've got just enough time to pull together pasta or bake some fish," she says. She'd begun to worry that the clutter was becoming permanent.

Cora encourages Baird to start at the stove: "It's at the heart of every meal, so think of the space surrounding it in concentric circles—things that you use often should be accessible, while special-occasion items can be farther away." That means the food mill hogging top-drawer space gets demoted to lesser real estate, while spices move to within arm's reach of the stove. "Spending half a day setting up your kitchen will make you more relaxed in the long run," she says. "It's not you versus the kitchen—it's your kitchen." 

## Streamline Spices

"I want my spices to be more accessible, but I don't want to clutter the counters," Baird says of the mismatched jars crowded onto a deep pantry shelf. Cora suggests adding a drawer insert to keep spices visible near the stove. "When you refill a jar, pop a label on the bottom with the date," she adds. "After six months, ground spices can lose much of their flavor." (Rev-a-Shelf insert, \$65; rev-a-shelf.com. Spice jars, from \$2 each; penzeys.com)





### Keep Herbs Fresh

“Eating healthy is important for my family, but I shy away from fresh herbs,” says Baird, who hates feeling like it’s a race against the clock to use up bunches of cilantro or basil. Cora explains that proper storage is key: Unbundle the herbs, rinse them, then wrap loosely in a damp paper towel and store in an airtight container in the fridge. “And if you don’t get to the herbs before they start to look a little limp or discolored, pulse them in a food processor with some olive oil,” Cora says. “Rosemary oil or cilantro oil tastes great drizzled on fish or salads, and the oils will last in your fridge for another week or two.”

### Divide Your Drawers

Store small implements in drawers closest to where they’ll get used. Cora corrals all the prep items (lemon press, measuring spoons) into a drawer in the kitchen island and all the cooking items (spatulas, tongs, basting brush) into one by the stove. Bamboo dividers keep things organized. (From \$24; organize.com)

Before



After



### Think Slots, Not Stacks

Baird admits that some evenings she avoids using her baking sheets and heavy roasting pans simply because the hassle of pulling the right one from the jumbled pile is too daunting. Cora suggests eliminating the piles altogether by removing the under-counter cabinet’s horizontal shelf and outfitting the space with vertical racks instead. Now Baird can quickly grab any pan she needs without fear of everything else toppling onto her toes. (Four-sort dividers, from \$4 each; containerstore.com)

Before



After

