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In fact, once the project was completed, we noticed a lot of the clients, who are from different ethnic backgrounds, would take turns learning how to cook dishes from other cultures. As a result of all being in one space together in light of their circumstances, it created that community and sense of togetherness.

**What can you tell us about the framed photos that adorn the main hallway?**

That was an art donation from a professional photographer who has traveled the world taking amazing photographs. She printed and framed those and donated those to us; she wanted them to make their way to one of our project sites. The folks at Apna Ghar fell in love with them and thought that there was a wide variety of ethnicities represented in all of the photos, so the photos would be more of a global statement in their space—they're representative of culture and community.

**How many rooms are in the house?**

In addition to the kitchen, there are thirteen bedrooms across three floors, and each can hold two beds or a large bed and a bunk bed, depending on the layout and needs of the space. There are also a lower-level community room, a laundry room, two bathrooms with showers, and a larger shower pod on each floor.



**Is anything at Apna Ghar intentionally designed to be oversized?**

Yes. We built the kitchen so two to three families could be cooking at once. There are two prep sinks and two dishwashers, so if you're cooking for a large group, you could make sure all the dishes are ready when needed. There's a 48-inch range, two large refrigerators, a whole pantry area, plenty of storage, and two microwaves on each end. As a result, you can prep and make your meals while being out of everybody else's way and then serve your meals along that huge island.

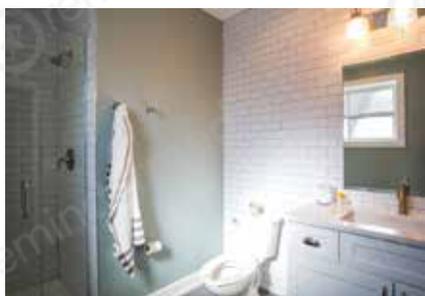
The building also has so much light in it, and that was by design. Timeless, durable finishes were vital, so they would withstand the test of time.

**Did any other changes have to be made to make it the best design possible for the residents?**

The kitchen is as large as it is because we consulted with the organization about taking away one bedroom in order to increase the kitchen size. I think that's our job as designers: to explain some of the design decisions—especially the difference between looking at something on paper versus being in the physical space—so clients understand why the changes will benefit them much more.

And they were happy with the end result, for sure. To meet with their residents and staff and to hear how they love living and working in the space is very rewarding.

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One example does stand out, though. A few years back, we renovated Boys Hope Girls Hope, a group home where at-risk, scholarship-receiving kids live on weekdays. After the work was done, one resident told me, "I've been here for three years now, and this is the first time this place has felt like a home." That just made my day. He had a scholarship to go to a private high school, but for the first time, he felt like this place was cool enough for him to invite friends from school over. He felt like this was home to him now.

It shows that, when people have an environment that exemplifies dignity, safety, and warmth, they automatically start to respect it and feel a sense of

pride—in essence, ownership of that space.

**A sense of ownership is also paramount to one of your recent projects, Apna Ghar. Tell us about it:**

We met with Apna Ghar, an organization that assists women fleeing from domestic violence, a few years back. They wanted to retrofit a single-family home, which is what they were utilizing at the time as an interim housing shelter. We looked at it, though, and knew they definitely needed a community kitchen, a counseling space on each floor for the clients, and a room for each family. We ended up creating a purpose-built shelter that creates a personal space in a peaceful