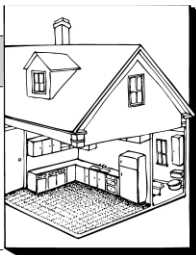


A Successful Kitchen Remodel

by Lee McGinley



My favorite kitchen remodels are those that present a design challenge, offer an opportunity to work with good materials, and have appreciative owners. A recent kitchen rehab fit this description.

Existing Conditions

The original eat-in kitchen was long and narrow (9x23) and lacked definite areas for meal preparation

and eating (see illustration, page 52). When entering the room you weren't sure whether you were in the kitchen or dining area. As a result, an adjoining room was often used for eating. There was no physical separation between eating and meal preparation areas. Cabinets were spread randomly throughout the room and storage was not related to work areas or purpose, which contributed to the

lack of definition. For example, a shallow spice cupboard was placed several feet away from the closest counter. Inadequate wiring and few outlets meant that small appliances could not be placed near appropriate work areas.

To compound problems, a half-bath tucked into a corner of the room took up valuable space. The back door, bathroom door, and an archway to an adjoining room were close together, concentrating traffic patterns in one area that interfered with cooking. Because the kitchen space was poorly laid out, the adjoining room was taken over for eating and entertaining.

The lighting was dismal: Small east-facing windows and two old overhead fluorescent light fixtures were the only sources of light, since the corner bath blocked light from the north window and door.

Design Objectives

The owners — a professional couple in their forties — were acutely aware of the kitchen's limitations and had struggled with its problems — and potential — through three or four layouts before adopting one that would meet their objectives: separate meal preparation and eating areas; seating to accommodate six to eight diners comfortably; and a large single window or grouping of windows that would make the room seem larger, let in more light, and become a focal point. The owners also wanted the room to be inviting and cozy.

With these goals in mind, and working with kitchen designer Peter Graumnitz of Scarborough, Maine, we initiated a series of changes. The outside door and the opening between the kitchen and de facto dining area were moved and the half bath eliminated, freeing 16 square feet of floor space. The north window was removed to increase space for wall cabinets.

This enlarged area would now be devoted solely to meal preparation. By concentrating the cabinets at one end of the room, an efficient layout was created with storage now close at hand. The new plan would also reduce traffic through the cooking area. We added a peninsula to separate the kitchen from the eating area.

At the other end of the room, the old windows were replaced with a box bay and window seat, which provides ready seating for gatherings of family and friends, as well as a cozy place to curl up with a book. A small bookcase built into the back side of the peninsula encourages such activity. Together, these changes freed up the adjoining room for use as a library and family room.

Lighting Important

Light was critical to the final design, not only for illumination, but also psychologically. The

kitchen faces east and with the new box bay and sink window, morning light now floods the room. Seven recessed ceiling lights were strategically placed over the work areas, and two undercabinet lights were installed to illuminate potentially dark areas. Track lighting, while not critical for dining, was placed over the dining room table to illuminate the owner's original art work.

Cabinets and flooring were chosen to create a feeling of warmth, and casings from the old windows were recycled to provide a visual link with the rest of the house (circa 1920s). The owners chose natural birch frameless cabinets. For the floor, they chose No. 2 maple strip flooring 3 1/4 inches wide. This was a slightly unusual choice, but, because of its small imperfections and blemishes, the wood floor succeeds in creating "warmth" and is less formal looking than 2 1/4-inch strip flooring.

The owners are extremely pleased with the transformation. They regularly seat six or eight people for meals, their daughter loves the "reading nook," and meal preparation is now a family affair.

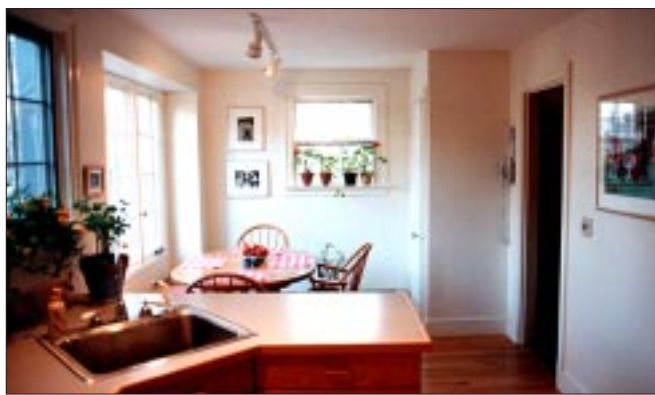
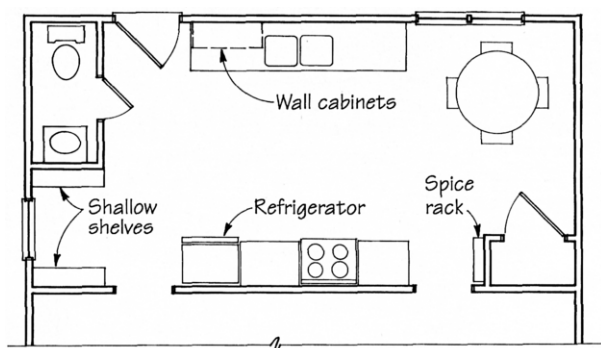
Although we had not increased the original square footage of the room, we had employed some physical and visual tricks to make the room appear larger. The most obvious one is the pushed out box-bay window. Other, smaller details are no less important. We recessed the refrigerator 3 inches into the wall to make it less intrusive. Outlets were placed where small appliances were to be used. Light switches were located to allow control as you enter or leave through any of the doors, something not possible in the old layout. The microwave, which formerly took up counter space, now hangs under a wall cabinet. The large window seat gives the dining area two functions and leaves the room uncrowded, without the extra chairs necessary to accommodate guests. We also followed our standard practice of locating recessed light fixtures after the cabinets are in place — a little extra work, but it allows us to position them precisely and with purpose in mind.

The plastic laminate countertop is a pleasing mottled green, with birch edge molding, which softens the laminate look and works as a visual transition between floor and countertop. The backsplash is also birch.

Perhaps the most important ingredient in this project was the cooperative working relationship established between the owners, kitchen designer, and myself. There was mutual respect and an openness to ideas that helped move the remodel to its successful conclusion. ■

Lee McGinley is a builder and remodeler in Casco, Maine.

Original Floor Plan



The original kitchen was long and narrow, with inadequate lighting and storage, and no definition between the preparation and eating areas (top). In the remodeled kitchen, a peninsula divides the two areas. By removing the half bath, the author made room for an efficient work triangle in the preparation area (photo, center). The dining area is framed by an original, small corner closet and a new boxed-out window, which provides seating as well as plenty of light (bottom photo).