

California Kitchen

A cavernous kitchen is redesigned into a bright and bold new space

BY JESSE ROZAY

My clients' kitchen was constructed in 1978. When I was called in to look at it, the redwood drawer fronts on the original cabinets were falling off. After more than 30 years of wear, the grout in the tile countertops had dissolved, and water that splashed from the sink had settled into the particleboard substrate, resulting in major rot. A vintage table from the 1920s served as a makeshift island under harsh track lights that highlighted a hardwood floor begging to be refinished. The space was dark, the layout was ill-conceived, and the fixtures and finishes were worn out. The core issue, though, was that the kitchen lacked the function and flow that homeowners Chris and Tim wanted.

With their help, I designed a new space that would be immune to clutter, provide plenty of outdoor access, and create an environment where they could develop their passion for cooking as well as relax and socialize.

Open up an open floor plan

The existing kitchen opened to the dining room and nearby living room, but the space was not used efficiently. Also, its layout didn't reflect how Tim, Chris, and their guests actually used the kitchen. Even though the dining room and kitchen shared common floor space, they ate outside most of the time. For that reason, we chose to improve the back door first.

The first item we purchased was a folding patio door made by LaCantina Doors, and we subsequently designed the kitchen around it. The massive door opens the kitchen completely to the deck and extends the indoor living space outside. You

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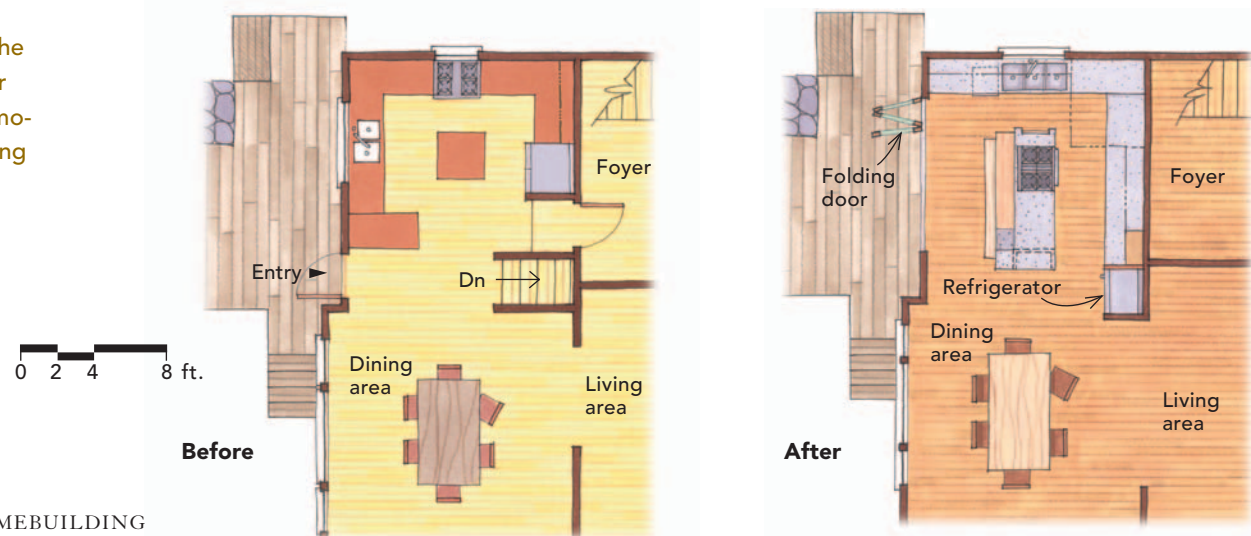
Wanting a kitchen with more storage, a better workflow, and a stronger outdoor connection, the homeowners decided to strip out elements that hindered the kitchen's potential. Removing a redundant entry from the foyer and a set of basement stairs created a long wall for more storage and prep surfaces.

The custom-built island in the center of the kitchen holds all the most-used cookware and ingredients in large pullout drawers. This allows whoever is cooking at the stove to remain at the island, freeing the periphery of the space for circulation or for secondary tasks such as dishwashing.

The island is placed before the large patio door to create an atmosphere of cooking outdoors.



The guests' side. A Douglas-fir table-height bar creates a gathering spot at the kitchen island to reinforce a casual social atmosphere. The table-height slab allows for comfortable bench seating as opposed to seating at barstools, which can be prone to tipping.



now can move between spaces effortlessly without having to juggle wineglasses and plates of food while navigating a traditional entry door, a change necessary for the open, casual living experience Chris and Tim were hoping for.

On the inside, we added headers to open up the spaces between the kitchen, living area, and dining area even more. We eliminated a redundant entry from the foyer and removed a set of stairs to the basement, which is also accessed from outside. This created a greater opportunity for storage in the kitchen, increased the perceived size of the space, and improved sightlines throughout the main floor and to the outside gardens.

Cabinetry for cooks

Chris and Tim cook to relax. They brew beer, make batches of mead, and bake large loaves of bread—all process-intensive projects that require lots of equipment. Parking the equipment on the countertop wasn't an option, and standard countertop heights are not optimal for Chris's petite stature.

To avoid common kitchen clutter, I created lower cabinets with large drawers to hold pots, pans, cooking ingredients, tools, and utensils. Within the large bank of upper cabinets, I included a unit that extends down to the countertop to house larger cooking appliances when not in use. Having a cabinet directly on the countertop makes accessing larger items easier and safer, because you don't have to bend or strain to lift them into lower or taller cabinets.

While kneading dough on the dining-room table one day, Chris realized that the table was the perfect height for the task. She requested that a lower section of countertop be added to the design, so a 30-in.-high section of concrete countertop now extends across the kitchen's longest wall. Beyond improving the kitchen's functionality, the variability in countertop height makes the space more interesting.

All the cabinets are made of vertical-grain Douglas fir, and the door and drawer fronts are grain-matched for a clean, crisp look. Most of the upper cabinets have lift-style doors that are short and wide in proportion, allowing us to accent the horizontal nature of the space. This also simplified lining up upper cabinets with lower drawers to yield the clean, modern aesthetic we were after.

The cabinetry arrangement was made slightly more difficult by a set of stairs that

CUSTOM DETAILS, ENHANCED DESIGN

The trick in making a kitchen an extraordinary space lies in the details of its design. While functionality should be a driving force, achieving practical results in creative ways personalizes the space and makes it truly special.



Triple sink. A deep stainless-steel sink sits beneath an articulating faucet and a custom concrete countertop with integrated drain board. The sink has three compartments for maximum utility, with one bowl directing gray water into the garden.



Cohesive cabinetry. Custom cabinets with lift-style doors and smooth-operating Blum hardware have a modern flair. Their horizontal proportion creates a linear grid of functional storage that complements the clean lines of the kitchen.



A better towel bar. Integrating ordinary storage solutions into a concrete countertop makes even a towel bar seem unique and interesting.



Elegant transitions. The sweeping concrete curve linking the island top to the Douglas-fir bar highlights the creativity in the design and construction of the kitchen.

CREATING AN OUTDOOR VIBE INSIDE

The kitchen's design responds to an idyllic climate with a 9-ft. folding patio door that connects the interior space to the back deck. At nearly \$7000, the LaCantina Doors unit seemed expensive. However, it cost significantly less than similar products on the market, and it was easy to install. Of all the elements in the new kitchen, the door has the strongest influence on how the space feels, making it a wise investment.



***The chef's side.** Heavy-duty drawers, with drawer-front cutouts that create simple pulls, are placed at arm's length from the stove and hold cutlery, ingredients, and common cookware. The island is positioned to present anyone centered at the stove with an uninterrupted view of the deck and garden.*

interrupted the ceiling plane in the corner of the kitchen. Instead of hiding the intrusion with a box-shaped soffit or partition walls, I wrapped the stairs with drywall, creating a cheese-shaped wedge into which the cabinetry could die. The approach might be awkward elsewhere, but not in this style kitchen.

A custom island makes the space

In the heart of the kitchen, I built an island that is as sculptural as it is functional. I set

the 2-in.-thick custom concrete countertop we made on a vertical-grain Douglas-fir base cabinet that matches the surrounding cabinetry. Chris, Tim, and I collaborated on the design, which features an outside edge that gives way to a Douglas-fir bar where guests can hang out and talk with whoever is cooking. On the working side of the island, large drawers organize the most frequently used cookware. The range, which is set beneath a 36-in. Zephyr Napoli range hood, makes

the space a highly efficient and comfortable cooking zone.

The kitchen is a social center, but when just the two of them are working together and the doors are open, Chris and Tim feel as if they're cooking outdoors in a bold environment suited to their creative lifestyles. □

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Notable elements

Cabinet hardware: Blum, Blum.com • **Stove:** Thermador Pro Harmony, Thermador.com • **Range hood:** Zephyr Napoli, ZephyrOnline.com
Dishwasher: Thermador with Professional handle • **Refrigerator:** Counter-depth Summit Pro, SummitAppliance.com
Sink: Blanco Precision, BlancoAmerica.com • **Faucet:** Chicago Faucet, ChicagoFaucet.com • **Patio door:** LaCantina Doors, LaCantinaDoors.com
Backsplash tile: Maniscalco, ManiscalcoStone.com