

A Kitchen for Cooks and Kids

This remodeled kitchen with a 1930s look finds room for sit-down meals, cooking lessons, and homework sessions, all at the same time

BY MICHAEL PEKOVICH

We used to have a love/hate relationship with our kitchen. Our house was built in 1937, and a mid-1970s remodel added 75 sq. ft., a bank of windows, and a skylight adjacent to the kitchen. This effort created a large, light-filled space, which sold us on the house; but like many poorly planned renovations, the added space lacked purpose and efficiency. It had a small work area along one wall, with some sagging bookshelves inset between the studs over a radiator.

We filled the open space with a table and some chairs, adding an obstacle to traffic flow into and out of the house. In a display of useless redundancy, our seldom-used dining room a few feet away held another table and a set of chairs (floor plan p. 50).

When our second child arrived, we felt our house begin to shrink. We had to find a way to open the rooms to one another and create a sense of spaciousness. And we needed to make better use of the spaces we already had,

especially the sunny, underused corner by the kitchen.

Long sightlines add space without adding more room

Our first move was to open the kitchen to the dining room (photo right), creating a view that extends across the house. The once-lonely and underused dining table is now visually connected to the kitchen and serves frequently as a homework, craft, or sewing table where someone can have a little more space to work yet still partake in kitchen banter.

A new peninsula extends part-way across the opening to the dining room. Its cherry counter acts as a built-in sideboard for the dining area. The cabinet below houses table linens, place settings, napkins, and other paraphernalia, along with all of the kids' art supplies.

The peninsula countertop wraps around the opening into the kitchen and steps down to create a desk above the radiator. The family computer



The kitchen/dining connection. Opening up the wall between the kitchen and the dining room extended the views from one to the other. The countertop between the two rooms serves as a buffet for dinner parties. Like the views, the cabinet drawers open into both the kitchen and the dining room. Photos taken at A and B on floor plan.



From just OK to Internet café. A computer workstation tucked into the corner and a bar-height dining counter turned inefficient spaces into hardworking places. Photo taken at C on floor plan.

is stationed here, serving as a homework and gaming center for the kids and as handy Internet access for anyone in need of a recipe. I took out the sagging shelves, which spanned more than 5 ft., and replaced them with a combination of open shelves for cookbooks and a cabinet for enclosed storage.

Our little kitchen table was now a bigger obstacle than ever. It had to go, but we still wanted a place to sit in the kitchen for breakfast, snacks, and week-night dinners. So we extended the kitchen counter beyond the cabinets, into the previously open territory, creating a dining area. This move also extended the work area of the kitchen to almost its entire length, and made a rational pathway from the back door to the rest of the house (floor plan p. 50).

In addition to being a place for meals, the dining counter is a prime homework location where student and cook can keep each

other company. The barstools are also a favorite gathering spot for guests when we entertain.

Simple refinements for cabinets and countertops

In designing the kitchen, my aesthetic goal was to keep it consistent with the house's vintage and modest sensibility. I kept things simple, with white-painted cabinets and nickel-plated hardware. I built the cabinets myself and couldn't resist adding a few details to distinguish them from the factory-made variety. For example, I wanted the upper cabinets to extend to the ceiling, but I was worried about the tall, skinny doors that would result. To solve that problem, I added small, glass-paneled doors along the tops of the cabinets. The glass fronts also let us display our collection of '30s California pottery.

To keep the cabinets consistent with the period, I eliminated the toe kick, bringing the face frames to the floor. The excep-

tion to this detail is the arched cutout at the sink, where toe space is most appreciated.

When it came to counters, we dallied. We had intended to use manufactured stone because of the low maintenance, but it was too artificial looking. Granite and marble seemed too extravagant for our dwindling budget, so we chose soapstone, which is softer than granite yet denser and more stain resistant. Because soapstone can be worked with woodworking tools, I was able to fabricate and install the counters myself, saving a lot of money.

As much as we liked soapstone, we thought it would be too cold and uninviting for a dining surface. We used cherry for that portion of the counter instead. To protect the wood surface, I brushed on three coats of Waterlox, a tung-oil-based varnish. After extended use, the finish is holding up well.

The hate is gone from the kitchen relationship

Our kitchen is not just good-looking; it's hardworking, too. Relocating the refrigerator rewarded us with another 3 ft. of counter space and created a more efficient work triangle. Two slide-out cutting boards flanking the stove add utility and the unexpected advantage of providing a lower work surface for the kids. There is plenty of room for multiple cooks.

My biggest regret was not insisting on a vent routed to the outside for the stove's exhaust fan. Instead, we're stuck with a recirculating fan that practically rules out any serious grilling action on the stove. Other than that, the love/hate relationship we used to have with our kitchen is history. □

Michael Pekovich is the art director at *Fine Woodworking*. Photos by Charles Miller, except where noted.

NEW EDITION OF AN OLD ADDITION

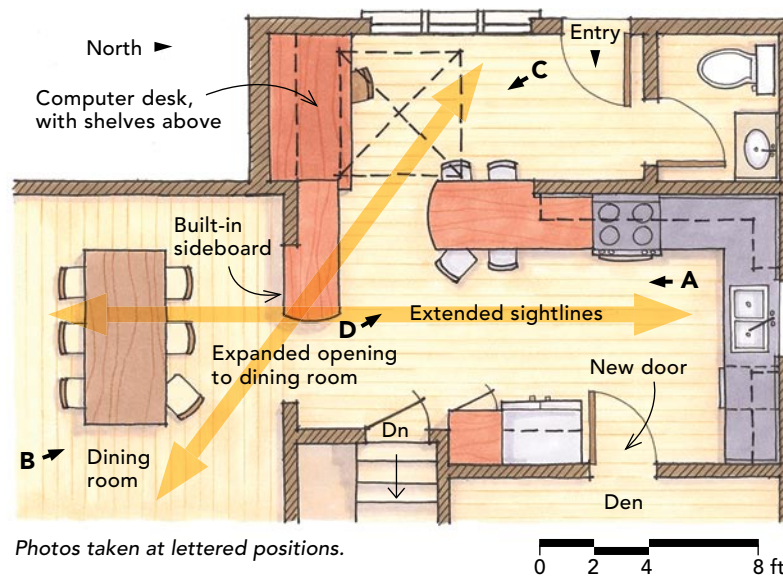
BEFORE Lost opportunity, but plenty of daylight

A long, narrow 1970s-era addition to the back of the house included a powder room, a back door leading to the garage, and a big skylight over an open space. Unfortunately, though, the space lacked purpose.



AFTER A kitchen an efficiency expert could love

Enlarging the opening between the kitchen and the dining room created long sightlines along two axes and provided room for a sideboard with drawers accessible from both sides. To streamline traffic flow, kitchen seating changed from a table to a counter; a door added to the den passageway also cut down on through-kitchen traffic. And the new storage cabinet and computer station are much more useful than the original set of sagging shelves.



Photos taken at lettered positions.



Cool stone counter, warm wood table.

Soapstone counters to the right of the stove are the primary food-prep surfaces. Because of its soft, talc-based composition, soapstone can be shaped with woodworking tools. The author sealed this counter with boiled linseed oil for a hard, lustrous finish that isn't oily to the touch. To the left of the stove, a cherry counter extends beyond the cabinets into a tabletop that's warm to the touch. Photo right taken at D on floor plan.

FineHomebuilding.com

Look for the Magazine Extras section on our home page to learn how the author made the cabinet doors.

SOURCES **Flooring:** Adura vinyl planks; Mannington, www.mannington.com
Hardware: House of Antique Hardware, www.houseofantiquehardware.com **Pendant light:** Antique pewter; Hampton Bay, www.hamptonbay.com **Stools:** 1006 Navy Counter Stool; Design Within Reach, www.dwr.com **Waterlox:** www.waterlox.com

FEEDBACK FAUX OAK FLOORING

As much as I would have loved a hardwood floor in the kitchen, it was beyond our means. Our main priority, then, was finding a floor covering that looked reasonably like hardwood and was extremely durable. We chose Adura, a vinyl plank flooring by Mannington. At \$3 per sq. ft., the 3/16-in.-thick planks have a fairly random pattern and a satin finish. We chose Essex Oak Honeytone, but a variety of wood patterns are available in multiple color options. The 5-in.-wide by 48-in.-long planks are glued to the subfloor, so seams aren't an issue. We use a damp mop to keep the floor clean. It's holding up well, and more than a few people have mistaken it for the real thing.



Nickel-plated accessories. Cupboard latches, bin pulls, and hinges are right in keeping with the style of the house ("Sources" above).