

New Storage Defines Kitchen Remodel

Project Case Study

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Charlotte, NC— When a kitchen cannot accommodate more than one person at a time or provide a comfortable space for eating or entertaining, it's time for a redesign. Designer Robin Dreher of Optimal Designs, LLC, based here, was tapped for the job.

Although the clients' wish list was full of the usual suspects – more storage, more space, more modern style – Dreher faced a number of obstacles in creating a design that would satisfy all of the homeowners' desires.

“When I saw the space for the first time, I was just shocked at the inefficiency of the layout,” says the designer.

The existing space had a dead-end seating area that was uncomfortable, and there was little space for family and friends to commune and spend time together.

“The family consists of two busy parents and three kids with full schedules,” notes Dreher. “They needed something more comfortable, more spacious.”

Though the 240-sq.-ft. kitchen would remain in the existing footprint, the room's new design would eliminate any formal or uncomfortable spaces, along with many of the walls that kept it closed-in and claustrophobia-inspiring.

Kitchen for One

The most obvious place to begin for Dreher was the inefficient layout, which made it difficult and uncomfortable for more than one person to be in the kitchen at a time.

“The homeowners were specifically interested in opening up the space so that, whether entertaining or just cooking dinner while the kids were doing their homework, the kitchen could act as a gathering spot,” she says. “The original space wasn't comfortable for the cook or the diners, so that, too, had to be addressed.”

Another request the homeowners had was that Dreher design a room that would include a view to the backyard.

To begin, Dreher removed the wall between the kitchen and the family room/breakfast area.

“We pushed the cooking area toward the family room so we could make more room for pantry units and the 48" Sub-Zero and Miele oven and microwave,” Dreher adds.



Photos: John Drawbaugh

Designer Robin Dreher of Optimal Designs fulfilled the clients' wishes for a more open space with better storage by removing walls and including a center island with all-around storage built in.

By arranging the sink and appliances in a pattern that made more sense for workflow during cooking, the designer was able to increase the countertop space to the left and right of the sink.

Smart Solutions

Storage was priority one for the updated kitchen.

“There was no storage to speak of in the original kitchen,” stresses Dreher. “The original storage consisted of totally inadequate 12" cabinets that weren't doing any favors for the large family.”

The lack of kitchen storage meant the clients turned to their adjacent laundry room for additional space. “They used it as a both a laundry room and makeshift pantry,” the designer explains.

Space from that room was also at a premium, as the refrigerator in the kitchen was sunk into the wall, with the cut-out jutting into the laundry room, further stealing space.

“We removed the step-in for the refrigerator to give that space back to the laundry area,” reports the designer. With the new storage areas being designed in the kitchen, the laundry room would no longer be needed for additional storage.

“We addressed the storage problems in the kitchen by incorporating many deep drawers for pots and pans, and a special area to store plastic containers,” Dreher comments.

She also added two vertical pull-out pantries that hold most of the nonperishable food storage as well as plates, glasses and other items.

“Both vertical pantries are pull-out/roll-out units, so you can get to them from both sides depending on which area you are cooking or standing in,” she explains.

Dreher also specified tray dividers for cookie sheets and cutting boards in other areas.

And, off to one side, a freestanding furniture-style unit provides additional storage. The unit, which stands on stainless steel legs, blends with the kitchen's transitional style.

Island Style

The center island provided other useful storage options. “We were able to design in storage around the entire base of the island,” the designer notes. The island, a stylish focal point and savvy combination prep/eating area, serves as the center of the space.

“We ensured that there was plenty of space for multiple people to come in and out of the kitchen while cooking was going on, but if people were gathered at the island, there was room to stand and chat,” Dreher comments.

The storage on the island is also accessible from many sides, so if guests or family members are standing around helping the cook, they are not in the way.

The island is home to the cooktop, which is situated beneath an architectural glass and steel hood from Miele.

“On the cooktop side, I put in drawers below the cooktop for pots and pans. To the left and right we used a door with pull-out drawers behind for spices, oils and other cooking items,” says Dreher.

On the other side of the cooktop, the designer installed a trash/recycling unit. Incorporating an idea from the client, a round space in the countertop was cut so that the users do not have to open the

cabinet when their hands are wet or when they are preparing and cooking food – they can simply drop the refuse in the hole from above.

“This has been a very big convenience for them and they absolutely love it,” she notes.

Convenience was also a factor with regard to a beverage refrigerator that was installed in the island. With it, the children in the home could get drinks when they want, and have the unit at their level. An additional cabinet was added here for miscellaneous items.

The island incorporates seating for five – three on the main side of the island and two ‘sometimes’ seats for get-togethers. The main seating area features three more cabinets for occasionally used items. The as-needed seating area features two 15" cabinets for small appliances and other miscellaneous items.

Design Details

The room itself makes a dramatic statement with its bold, transitional style. A combination of woods and stainless steel accents, as well as a subtle, complementary lighting scheme, makes the kitchen a warm, minimalist-inspired family haven.

“The aim of the design is simple: a warm, clean kitchen. The contrast of the stainless steel, the horizontal lines of the pulls and surfaces combined with the grain of the cherry finish gives the clean, linear look we wanted without being too sterile,” says the designer. “The cabinets we used had a horizontal grain that we carried throughout the whole kitchen, which helped it retain a Euro/contemporary feel.”

To help the wood cabinets contrast against the wood floor, a stainless steel toe kick was added to break up the space. “It really makes the cabinetry pop,” comments Dreher.

To complement the toe kick as well as the stainless appliances, the designer accented one complete wall – from the countertop to the ceiling – with a stainless steel tile with a random pattern.

Dreher also incorporated 3.5"-thick cantilevered shelving on the wall to the right of the window, and included accent lighting.

Glass was also added to the vertical pantries to break up the lines and add visual interest.

“Black granite countertops were chosen to blend in and not make a big splash since the cabinets were to be the main focus,” notes Dreher.

As previously noted, the freestanding furniture-style piece repeats the elements of the cabinetry’s cherry look and the stainless elements in the space, the marriage of which Dreher feels is integral to the design.

“The freestanding piece is definitely a boon to the new storage – it helped us use every nook and cranny that we could while still keeping the minimal look,” she notes. “Sometimes, it’s hard to achieve the look you want when you need to create a lot of storage, but keeping the style consistent between the cabinets and the furniture helped us do that.”

Dreher and her team worked with lighting consultant Linda Lewis to bring another layer to the design.

“The lighting scheme played a huge part in what we were trying to achieve,” she offers. “We started by installing modern recessed cans that had a frosted glass halo so that they could be dimmed to give a nice transition on the ceiling. We also added cantilevered lights above all of the cabinets on the refrigerator wall.”

It was decided to keep the window wall more fluid, since the stainless steel covers the wall surrounding the window itself. “We needed something that would give off a good amount of light without detracting from the stainless steel, so we used three glass and screen pendants,” she states.

“Above the freestanding furniture piece, we decided to use a Lutron GRAFIK Eye, which is used for preset lighting and has six controls on one panel,” reports Dreher. It easily changes the ambience of the room via the lighting with the touch of a button. “That was a huge convenience for the clients,” because it allows them to create a kitchen that suits their every mood.

Project Highlights

- The owners of this Charlotte, NC home – parents of three children with a busy social calendar – needed their 240-sq.-ft. kitchen to have a better workflow, more prep room and dramatically increased storage space. They enlisted Optimal Design’s Robin Dreher to design a transitional space with myriad storage options, a central island with seating and a comfortable design for the family and their guests while maintaining the existing footprint.
- Storage is key: Space was reclaimed for the laundry room, which had once split duties as a pantry. Two tall roll-out pantries now serve that function, with spice pull-outs and racks integrated for increased function. The center island is home to all-around storage, as well as a trash/recycling center, an undercounter drinks refrigerator, cooktop and glass and stainless steel hood.
- Products include appliances from Miele, Sub-Zero and GE Monogram. The cabinetry is cherry wood.

For more about this project, [click here](#).

More Project Spotlight

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