

Greening an



BEFORE

Its charm is in the details. To maintain a modest budget, the plumbing, the windows, and the floor plan remained mostly undisturbed. The red-painted island, the blue glass-tile backsplash, and the coved plaster ceiling have a big impact on this little kitchen. Photos taken at A on floor plan.



What makes it green?

- Recycled maple flooring
- Sustainably harvested Douglas-fir bar
- Formaldehyde-free cabinets
- Energy-efficient and water-conserving appliances
- Economy of space and waste
- Built durably for a long life span

Outdated Kitchen

Smart use of space and materials made a small kitchen family and environmentally friendly

BY TRISH PUCKETT

When the Simonsons purchased their 1955 home six years ago, they knew that they wanted to raise their children there. The house is well built, warm, and light, with a large yard and a location near good schools and great friends. The outdated kitchen, however, was not family friendly.

Because the kitchen was adjacent to the main entry, guests were greeted with a muffled hello from behind the open front door, which blocked traffic between the foyer and the kitchen. As if awkward doors were a design theme, opening the foyer's coat-closet doors threatened to push guests down the basement stairs.

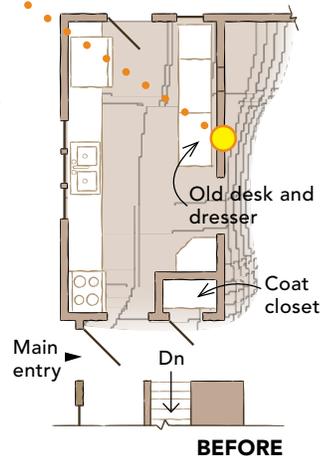
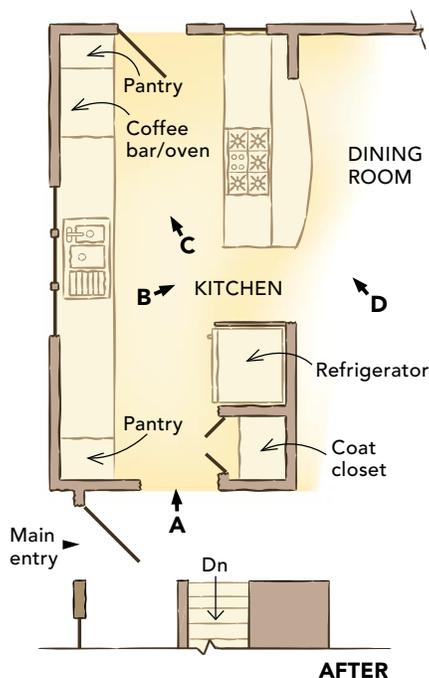
The kitchen also suffered from a wall that blocked the dining room and the views of the backyard. Due to an overwhelming lack of cabinetry along that wall, the Simonsons were using an old desk and dresser as storage and counter space. With two school-age kids and two working parents using the kitchen as home base, the family felt destined to be buried under a mountain of homework, mail, and shoes. If they were going to stay in their house, they knew the kitchen had to change.

My husband and I met the Simonsons through our children's preschool. Although working with friends can be a risky proposition, the Simonsons' design and environmental sensibilities coincided with our own, creating a comfortable working relationship. When we first started discussing how to update



ONE WALL HAD TO GO

To save money and to retain the exterior character of the house, the kitchen's footprint remained largely intact. The obstructive wall between the kitchen and the dining room, however, had to go. Rearranging the position of the coat closet widened the entry to the kitchen, improving traffic flow. Photo above taken at B on floor plan.



North ▶

Photos taken at lettered positions.

0 2 4 8 ft.

"Before" photos: Heather Simonson. Drawings: Paul Perreault.

their kitchen, we agreed not to make the house any larger or incongruous with the 50-year-old neighborhood.

The Simonsons' philosophy is that bigger is not better. Also, their roof was only two years old, and the expense of opening the outside of the house would sacrifice the budget and any finer details. With these thoughts in mind, we set some goals. We knew that we had to create a more fluid transition from the front entry into the kitchen, to increase the amount of storage space, and to update appliances. The kitchen and dining room begged for a better connection, and the details had to retain the house's original character while reflecting the family's personality.

A new and improved entry

The front door opens into a hallway; the kitchen is to the left, bedrooms to the right. Changing the swing direction of the door would have cleared the way for those headed to the kitchen—and created a new obstacle for those headed to the bedrooms. To make the open front door less of a blockade, I widened the kitchen entry (floor plans, p. 83) by 6 in. by turning the coat closet to face into the kitchen. This slight change also solved the problem of the dangerous closet doors: Now it is possible to come in the front door, see the person who opened it, and hang your coat without peril.

Across from the closet are a recycling area and a pantry. The recycling center is a 24-in.-wide cabinet with plastic bins. Its location near the entry keeps the bins out of the kitchen's working area. The adjacent pantry, and another at the far end of the kitchen, has 15-in.-wide pullout shelves for easy access.

Rearranging the coat closet also created a better location for the fridge. Built into a cabinet with a magnetic blackboard on the side, the refrigerator blends well into the renovated kitchen.

The island solved problems

Open floor plans weren't popular when this house was built 50 years

The kitchen and the dining room



Coffee and the cook. Raising the oven made it easy for the tall homeowners to bake and broil, and created space for a wide drawer to store large pans. The raised counter and the cabinet arrangement above form a nook for the coffee bar. Photos taken at C on floor plan.

begged for a better visual connection, so we opened the wall and added an island.

ago, which explains the intrusive wall along the back of the original kitchen. The real mystery was the absence of cabinetry along the kitchen side of that wall. The 6½-ft.-wide area was hardly big enough for a table, and with the range, sink, and refrigerator all sharing the south-facing exterior wall, storage space was at a deficit.

The solution was obvious: We would open the wall and add an island. Beyond much-needed storage, the island with its bilevel countertop provides a great spot to sit and eat or visit with the cooks. Removing the wall also admitted sunlight from the kitchen into the dining room and opened views of the backyard.

To create a better working arrangement in the kitchen, the cooktop is in the island (a hood fan hides in the cabinets above). Including the sink, refrigerator, cooktop, and oven, the Simonsons' kitchen is a variation on the common work triangle: It's a trapezoid, with the oven area doubling as a coffee bar.

The homeowners are tall, so raising the oven made it easier to use. A wide drawer beneath the oven stores large pans, and the raised counter defines the coffee bar. Great coffee is a way of life in British Columbia, and the Simonsons requested a special place for their cappuccino machine.

Saving money for finer details

The cappuccino machine wasn't the only kitchen appliance to get special attention. Each one was selected for either energy or water efficiency.

Throughout the project, we made many other choices that fit with our shared environmental views. We replaced the vinyl floor with a reclaimed maple gym floor salvaged from a local school, and we used sustainably harvested Douglas fir for the island bar. All the custom cabinets were made from formaldehyde-

free materials; stronger dovetailed drawers ensure their longevity.

While building the Simonsons' new kitchen, we worked hard to minimize the amount of waste created. To save money, I kept the plumbing and the windows in their existing locations and used laminate for most of the countertops. However, the one detail that was worth every penny, and also the one that has the greatest impact, is the coved ceiling. Without the built-up plaster coves—an original finishing detail found throughout the house—the kitchen would have screamed “renovation.” □

Trish Puckett is the designer for Puckett Design and Construction in Victoria, British Columbia. Photos by Brian Pontolilo, except where noted.



ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

This remodel has made the kitchen more convenient and more fun not only for the homeowners and cooks, but also for the guests. Unlike the original plan, in which an intrusive wall separated the kitchen from the dining room, the new kitchen has an island with a raised counter, where guests can sit comfortably on the dining-room side and watch the cooks in action. Removable panels on the back of the island offer access to wiring for the lights and to gas lines for the cooktop. Photos taken at D on floor plan.