



# Reviving a Small, Dark Kitchen

Mixing historical detail and modern design makes a cheery new space fit a Victorian-style bungalow

BY SHERRI BUFFA

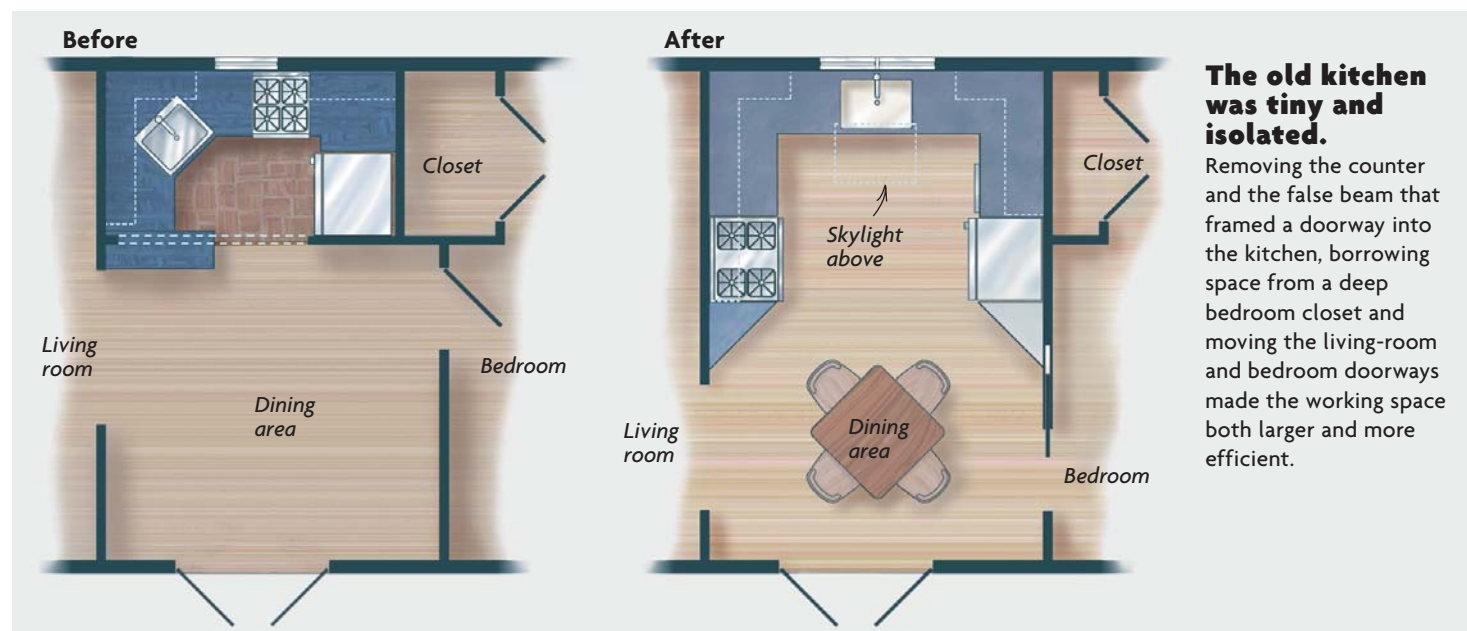
**L**inda Bryant's Berkeley, California, Victorian-style cottage always had nice living spaces: the leaded-glass windows, the coved corners where the wall meets the 9-ft. ceiling and a lovely courtyard garden just through the dining area's French doors. But the tiny (45 sq. ft., including the cabinets) kitchen (photo above) was dark and inefficiently arranged. The kitchen also suffered from badly installed cabinets, brown vinyl that covered the original fir strip flooring and undersize, leaky plumbing below the sink. Linda needed to update the kitchen, but

she also hoped to make it brighter and more consistent with the Victorian style in the rest of the house.

She had been reading about kitchens, haunting showrooms and appliance stores, and asking questions of both friends and pros as she imagined the new space. But the process really began when she attended a seminar presented by both an architect and a contractor about how to decide between remodeling and buying a new home. Linda was sure she would remodel, but the seminar allowed her to ask one of her unsettled ques-

tions: To whom do you speak first, the architect or the builder?

Deborah Lane, the architect hosting the seminar, usually works on bigger projects than a kitchen remodel; but she liked Linda and was charmed by the house. Deborah drew a plan that enlarged the kitchen while making it match the styling of the rest of the house and bringing in more light. She suggested James Thomson as the builder and me as the kitchen designer. Linda moved herself and her two cats into her converted garage; and James prepared the site by beefing up the old





**Open space, a bigger window, a well-designed skylight and white paint. The open layout and brighter color free people and light to circulate unobstructed, making a more efficient and more pleasant kitchen.**



2x4 ceiling joists and rafters with stouter lumber, replacing the plumbing from faucet to sewer line and rerouting the gas for a new range.

### **A little extra space and wider door openings make all the difference**

Deborah's plan enlarged the kitchen from 45 sq. ft. to 91 sq. ft. (floor plans, p. 105). The plan made the kitchen wider by taking 18 in. from an adjacent bedroom closet and deeper by removing the counter that divided the kitchen from the dining area and the nonbearing wall. To improve traffic flow further, Deborah's plan also moved the living-room and bedroom doors away from the kitchen, which allowed extra cabinets to extend the depth of the kitchen by 3 ft. These new cabinets were angled to enlarge the opening to the kitchen and thus the working floor space (photo facing page).

At James's suggestion, the new 48-in. opening between the dining area and living room was arched. This detail opened the sight lines and the circulation of light. James also left the plaster arch bare, without any wood trim, to enhance the open design.

### **More light and more efficient layout make the space seem even larger**

The space would be brightened with the addition of a new, energy-efficient window that tripled the size of the old steel one. At the risk of disrupting the historical continuity of the space, Linda and Deborah agreed to install a skylight as well. The skylight opening flares out to admit more light and to make the space feel larger. The flared opening also helps to define the new kitchen perimeter because its inside edge aligns with the end of the new angled cabinets, and its sides align with the enlarged window above the sink.

We replaced the mismatched brown cabinets with white ones and painted the walls a



**Undermount sinks make cleaning easier. This Surell sink by Formica is made of the same material as the solid-surface counter, allowing a seamless transition.**



**Glass cabinet doors match the windows. A local artist fabricated the leaded-glass cabinet doors to match the period details of older windows throughout the house.**

butter yellow. This combination allowed more and softer light. To reflect that light, Linda had chosen white tile for the backsplash, with enough blue detail to define the workspace and to complement the dark solid-surface countertops. For ease of cleaning, she chose a white undermount sink (photo left).

### **Details tie the house together**

The new window and the cabinets on each side of it were custom-designed to match the leaded-glass windows elsewhere in the house. A window company fabricated the window, and a local artist made the leaded glass for the cabinet doors (photo above). White bead-board cabinets with crown molding and tile backsplashes are typical of the era.

While reframing the ceiling, James coved the edges to match the living-room ceiling. Besides making the kitchen match the rest of the house, the curved transition to the high ceilings softens shadows and adds an elegance that makes working and eating in the space a pleasure. James accomplished the coving by plastering over a flexible expanded metal lath.

These soft transitions are echoed by bullnose edges around the skylight opening.

Fortunately, the linoleum had preserved the existing fir flooring so that it could be restored to match the rest of the house, and the entire floor was refinished at the end of the project.

Linda chose to install an ultra-efficient CFC-free Vestfrost refrigerator and added a dishwasher where there had been none. The Vestfrost (since renamed the ConServ) uses about 0.5kwh a day at 70°F and has two compressors: one for the refrigerator and one for the freezer. This design minimizes the energy needed for recooling spaces once doors have been opened. The compressors and cooling tubes are wrapped inside the walls, which improves energy performance and makes it quiet. ConServ refrigerators are made in Denmark and are distributed by Golden Genesis Global Distribution (800-544-6466). (For more on the Vestfrost, see *FHB* #127, p. 118.) □

Sherri Buffa, a certified kitchen designer, owns Capstone Cabinetry and Design in Oakland, California. Photos by Charles Miller, except where noted.