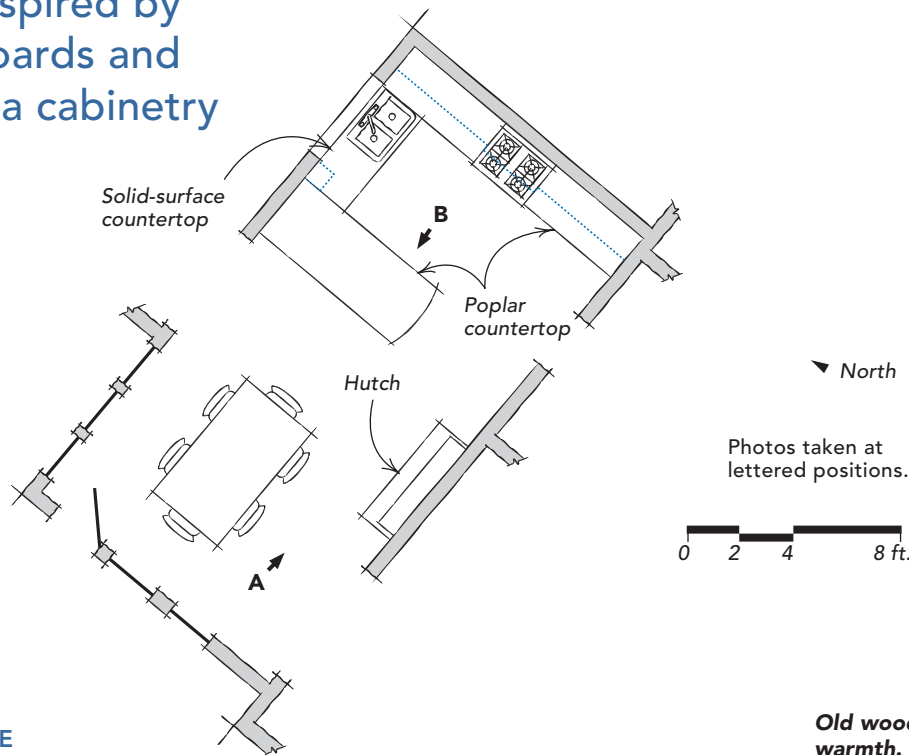


A New Kitchen From Old

An 1880s porch becomes a kitchen inspired by salvaged boards and Victorian-era cabinetry



BY SCOTT McBRIDE

My clients, Bev and Andy, lead high-pressure lives in the nation's capital, so they wanted their new homestead to be just the opposite: informal, intimate, and a bit whimsical. In rural Virginia, they found a Victorian farmhouse that fit the bill (photo bottom right). The house needed a few changes, though, and the first thing on the list was the kitchen.

The original kitchen was a small room located on the home's west side. Converting the generous back porch into a new kitchen not only created a larger kitchen but also routed traffic around the food-prep area to the rest of the house. In addition, the new kitchen's long, rectangular shape allowed for a breakfast area at the end that faces the Blue Ridge Mountains.

I was asked to build the cabinets for the new kitchen, but first, we had to decide where they should go.

Kitchen design by pantomime

Most folks want a highly personalized kitchen, but making the transition from idea to reality can be difficult. Communication is the key to success, and one of the ways that Bev communicated the layout of her new kitchen was through movement. One of her avocations is teaching yoga, so it seemed natural for her to bend, reach, and turn through her imaginary workspace while I sketched.

She envisioned a U-shaped kitchen at one end of the

Old wood adds warmth. Salvaged chestnut boards taken from another part of the house give a distinctive patina to the new cabinets. The owners annexed a porch to gain a new kitchen but preserved the informality by leaving the rafters and roof sheathing exposed. Photo taken at A on floor plan.



Chestnut



Storage and display. Instead of building a regular cabinet for this corner of the kitchen, the author created a case that keeps frequently used plates and cups right at hand. One of the porch's original columns borders it on the left.

REEDS, BEADS, AND MITERED MOLDING make up the Eastlake style



Charles Eastlake (1836-1906) was an English architect and writer whose quest for a simpler style in furniture, cabinetry, and interior design helped to fuel a reform movement during the last half of the 1800s. Reacting to the elaborately carved furniture and lavish upholstery that filled many Victorian-era homes, he advocated simpler interior design. His ideas are explained and illustrated in his book, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and Other Details* (Dover Publications, 1969).

The applied moldings and flat panels featured in this kitchen are classic details of the Eastlake style. Thin, reeded moldings emphasize vertical lines, and beaded face-frame rails create a balancing horizontal detail. Applied moldings frame the flat panels on doors and drawer fronts.



Visual interest without construction complexity

An Eastlake-style cabinet door can be made easily by joining a pair of square-edged stiles to two rails that have rabbets along their inner edges. A mitered frame of applied molding creates an inner groove that can hold a panel or a pane of glass.

room (photo, p. 91) and a breakfast area overlooking the mountains at the other end. A peninsula separating the two would politely bar guests from the cook's domain.

Eastlake styling inspires cabinets

While sifting through Bev's pile of books and magazines for a winning cabinet style, one photo caught my eye. It was of a cabinet face frame, normally a plain background element, that had been transformed into a lively accent (inset photo, below left) with reeded stiles (vertical members) butting squarely into beaded rails (horizontal members).

Mixing molding profiles is typical of the Eastlake furniture style, and I thought it would look good on the cabinets of this late-19th-century home. Without appearing overly busy, the Eastlake style (sidebar left) pleases the eye with molding details: reeded lines in face-frame stiles, beaded face-frame rails, and mitered frames in doors and drawers.

In addition to mixing molding profiles, we decided on a few other details that would reinforce the Victorian flavor: inset doors hung on ball-tipped brass hinges and flat panels on cabinet doors. Inset doors require tedious fitting and hinge-mortising compared with overlay doors, but the old-fashioned look justifies the extra labor. As for the flat panels on the base-cabinet doors, I think that they look more authentic in a farmhouse than do raised panels. The upper doors have glass inserts (photo left).

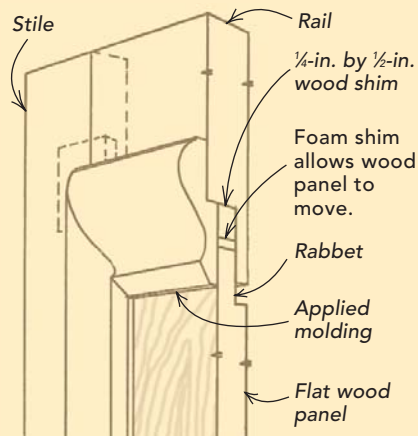
Salvaged chestnut gives the new kitchen an antique look

Around the time that Bev and I were working out kitchen details, their builder, Richard Brown, was raising a large shed dormer in the attic. During demolition, he uncovered thick, random-width sheathing boards that seemed too pretty to toss. Richard suggested recycling them into cabinetry, and I agreed to give it a shot. The sheathing turned out to be mostly chestnut with some poplar mixed in.

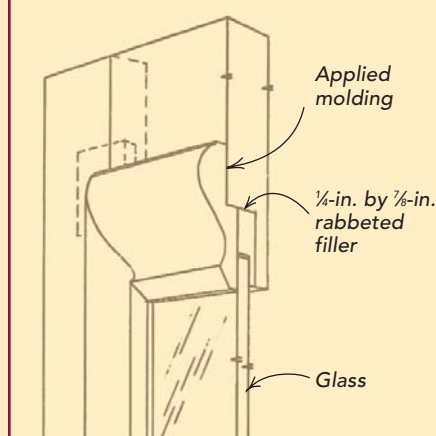
We were fortunate that the sheathing had been covered with tin, which is fastened only at the seams. A shingle roof would have damaged the wood excessively. As I milled the parts for Bev's cabinets, I allowed just a few of the rust-stained nail holes—beauty marks from an earlier time—to remain.

Using chestnut for the cabinets ties in nicely with the home's 19th-century pedigree because much of the Victorian woodwork that shows up at salvage yards or junk shops

Applied moldings frame flat wood panels



Only a slight change for glass doors



is either oak or chestnut. Although the grain of the two species is similar, chestnut's antique quality stems from having been unavailable for so long. It became scarce after a blight wiped out the American chestnut in the early 1900s.

I used a hand-rubbed oil finish on the cabinet exteriors, applying the final coats of oil with 400-grit wet/dry sandpaper to make them silky smooth. I like the way oil finishes mellow with age. Film finishes, especially sprayed lacquer, have a dipped-in-plastic look that seems out of place in an old house. The cabinet interiors were painted.

Exposed storage creates informal elegance

To befit a country retreat, we kept the woodwork simple yet tasteful. One way we did this

was through a continuous plate rail, which runs above the doors and windows and displays Bev's china. We took the exposed-china theme one step farther by adding a plate rack (photos p. 91) to the left of the pass-through between the great room and the kitchen. The plate rack's close proximity to the sink provides a convenient storage location for the everyday china within. A free-standing hutch that was built by local furnituremaker Mark Pace supplements the built-in cabinetry.

Also contributing to the old-house feel are the exposed porch columns that now are doubling as interior-design elements. The breakfast area features doors and windows with wide beaded casing and beaded wainscot that runs to chair-rail height. In addition

to its farm-kitchen look, the wainscot stands up well to Lindy and Clover, the Chesapeake retrievers that crash through the kitchen now and then.

Although Bev loves to cook, we decided to downplay the kitchen appliances as best we could, choosing to recess the refrigerator in a closet located beneath the stairs and stowing the microwave on the cook's side of the peninsula beneath the countertop. The range hood was clad with some unstained fir beadboard. □

Scott McBride, a contributing editor to *Fine Homebuilding*, lives in Sperryville, Va. He is the author of *Build Like a Pro: Windows and Doors* (The Taunton Press, 2002). Photos by Chris Green.



FEEDBACK

How well do wooden counters hold up?

In addition to chestnut, some of the salvaged roof boards were poplar. The old-growth poplar heartwood boards had a deep olive tone laced with dramatic purple streaks, so we used them for countertops. I ripped the poplar into 5-in.-wide boards to minimize cracks from shrinkage, jointed the edges, and screwed the boards to a plywood subcounter from beneath. I sanded the tops and finished them with several coats of oil-base polyurethane.

The sink was mounted in a solid-surface counter (the sink cutout became a cutting board), but wood counters were used everywhere else.

I was skeptical about using wood for kitchen counters, but the homeowner is still happy with them after eight years. (The secret is to use the cutting board, not the counters, when the knives come out.) The varnished surface wipes down about as easily as laminate, and as for the cracks, well, that's just what boards do. Photo taken at B on floor plan.