



Urbane Renewal

A bright new kitchen blooms from an inspired mix of light, space,

BY RICK PROPPE

Like many cities that grew up in the late 19th century, Chicago is covered by dense swaths of small houses squeezed onto smaller lots. Built in 1914 a few miles north of downtown, this particular brick house was not very different from its neighbors, except that it occupied a double lot. As in most houses of that era, the kitchen was located at the back of the house, a functional space at best. Although it had been remodeled about 30

years ago, the kitchen was still small (about 12 ft. square) and dim. The only light came from a few fluorescent tubes and a ceiling fan/light combo; two windows couldn't brighten the murky interior (before photo, facing page). When homeowners Monna and Gwen called my firm, it was to announce that they wanted to have a new master suite and, more important, a better kitchen.

A small addition with big results

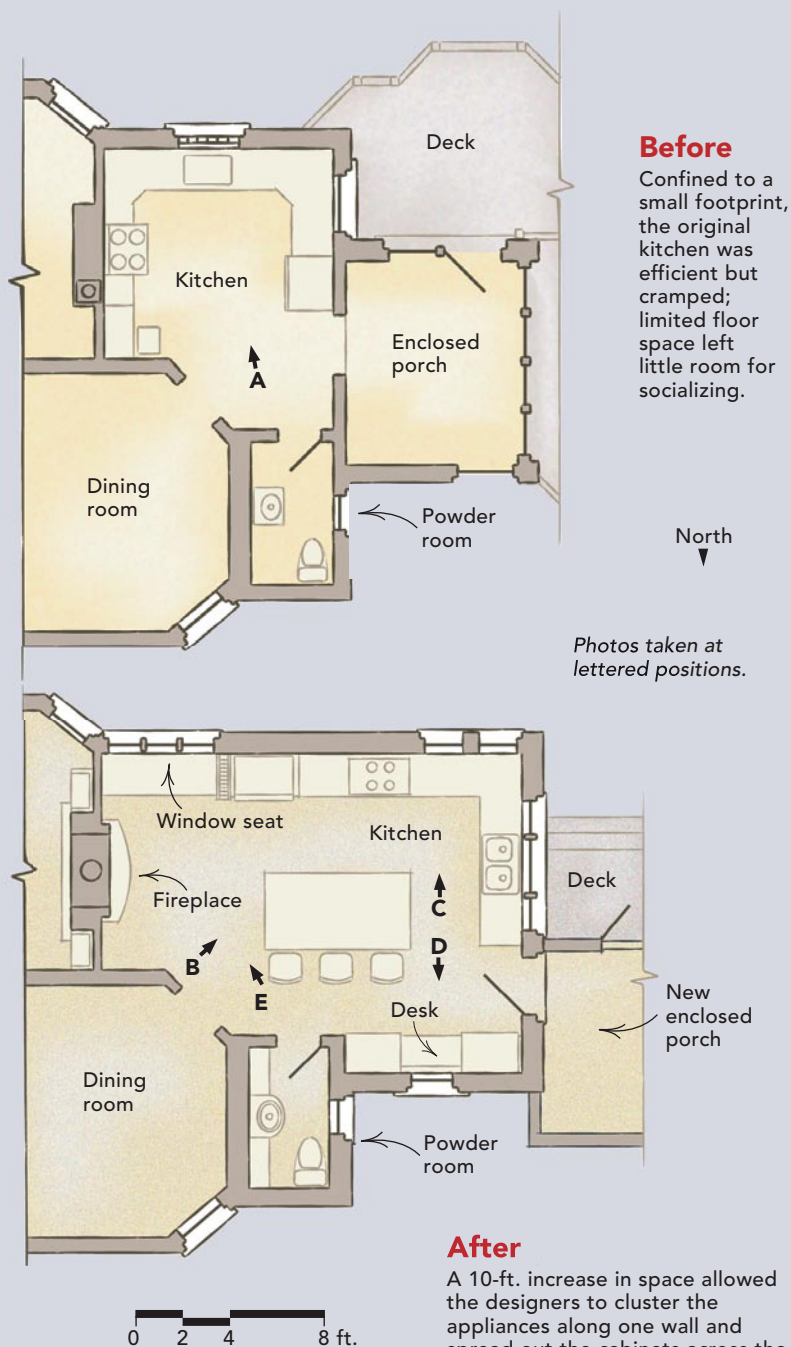
The primary goal of this remodeling project was to build an addition on the back of the

Inlays set the island apart. The island countertop was constructed of concrete inlaid with brass. An epoxy finish gives the concrete a glow that's smooth to the touch.



BORROW FROM THE PORCH TO OPEN UP THE KITCHEN

The original kitchen was small and dark; a lack of windows and dark painted cabinets didn't help. Taking 150 sq. ft. of space from the porch and adding five more windows along with custom cabinetry and better storage made for a great place to eat and socialize. Photos taken at A and B on floor plan, respectively.



and materials

house. The modest 10-ft. addition created the necessary space for a larger master suite upstairs and gave us just over 150 sq. ft. of additional space to maneuver elements of the new kitchen (floor plan, right).

We moved the sink from the south wall to the new back wall of the kitchen, then grouped the range, refrigerator, and microwave along the south wall. On the north side of the new space, we created storage by installing pantry cabinets that flank a small built-in desk.

After contractor Marian Plewa installed the header that replaced the old exterior wall,

Cabinets with a view. Three small windows and a display cabinet light up an upper bank of cabinets. The backsplash windows are operable awning models. Photo taken at C on floor plan.



Built-in office with discreet distraction. Nestled between two large pantry cabinets, a small desk is a handy place to keep track of life. Photo taken at D on floor plan.

we saw that we had an opportunity to create an interesting space in the kitchen ceiling. Although the height of the new ceiling had to be lowered to conceal the structural beam, we designed a small coffered section that was centered on the header. This recess is somewhat formal, but the clean rectilinear lines go well with the rest of the kitchen. The recess's central location and two pendant light fixtures really set the stage for the new island directly below.

Using cabinets and counters as a palette

The homeowners had some specific ideas about their new kitchen and about design in general: They liked clean lines and warm colors, and they wanted us to mix things up a bit. We started with the warm tones of cherry for the cabinets and complemented them with the cooler gray-green of the granite countertops. We had fun designing the cabinet-door configuration and broke the flat slab doors and drawers into uneven banks. We even used one of the upper spaces as a display cabinet, lighted from within by a small halogen puck fixture. The tiled fireplace surround combined the colors of the granite countertops with metallic accents similar to those in the concrete countertop on the island.

Design for maximum light

Monna and Gwen had worked hard to landscape the backyard and wanted to be able to enjoy looking at it from the kitchen. To take advantage of the view, we placed a big three-lite window over the sink. The glass door that leads to the new porch has a transom that also adds extra light. We replaced the old glass-block window with a larger unit that looks out onto the side yard. Luckily, the least desirable view is to the north; a small window over the desk allows a fair amount of light and minimizes heat loss.

We also used smaller windows to punctuate the main bank of upper cabinets with natural light. Two small awning windows take the place of a backsplash between the upper and lower cabinets. The novelty of the location is reason enough to have them, but they also add daylight to the counter and keep the ventilation pumping when the weather is warm. The small round window above the microwave is fixed, but still adds an unexpected splash of light to the cabinets. (All windows for this project are from Marvin Windows and Doors; see "Sources," facing page.)

There's room for a fireplace and a reading area, too

The kitchen also benefits from the new zero-clearance fireplace and flue that we added in



The kitchen's living room. Cooks researching a new recipe or diners working off a meal can get comfy around the fireplace at the far end of the kitchen. The window seat also stores firewood beneath its lid. Photo taken at E on floor plan.

the companion wall between the living room and the kitchen. Although it originally was intended to serve only the living room, the single firebox was changed to a double that opens into the kitchen as well. The fireplace and a roomy window seat that looks out onto the side yard became the focus for a cozy sitting area. Adjacent to the fireplace, the window seat is hinged and has enough

storage space to hold a week's worth of firewood under the lid. □

Rick Proppe is a principal with Chicago-based Greene & Proppe Design Inc. (www.gpdchicago.com). Paula Flanagan handled the interior design, and Dan Ford was the project architect. Photos by Charles Bickford, except where noted.

SOURCES

Cabinets

Bertch Custom Cabinets; www.bertch.com; 319-296-2987

Concrete counter

Tom Sherrin, Fine Line Tile, Chicago
www.finelinetile.com
312-670-0300

Pendant lighting

Sonoma Lighting
www.sonomalighting.com; 707-996-6906

Windows

Marvin Windows and Doors; www.marvin.com; 888-537-7828