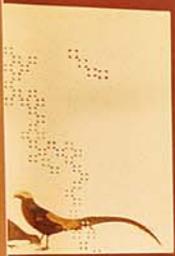


# Bright side

Turning the kitchen to the south,  
toward the family room, did more  
than improve the view



# of the room

BY DAVID & SUKIE AMORY

**L**isa and Theo's kitchen in their Queen Anne house outside Boston was a dark, unfriendly space diagonally across from the family room, where their two children spent much of their time. The kitchen counters faced away from the family room, requiring the cook to turn away from the activities of the rest of the family.

The rooms needed an about-face. Not only did the kitchen point in the wrong direction, but the family room didn't take advantage of the wonderful views toward the rear of the house. After we talked at length with Lisa and Theo, our architectural firm came up with a plan to turn the kitchen toward the family room while adding natural light to both spaces and improving the traffic flow in the downstairs of the house—all without adding to the footprint of the existing house.

## Adding an island turned the kitchen around

In the original kitchen, both the range and the sink were on the north side of the building (see floor plan, p. 30). Small windows over the sink provided the only natural light. The room was tucked into a corner and dislocated from the family room, making a distance of about 16 feet between sink and breakfast table (photo below).

Our plan moved the major work areas of the kitchen—sink and cooktop—directly across from the table. A 9-foot-long curved-front island holds the cooktop and provides lots of food-prep counter space to each side. Not only does the island make it easy for family members to walk around and through the

**ABOUT FACE** *In the old kitchen, the cook was sequestered in a corner far from the family room. Putting the cooktop and prep areas in an island allowed the cook to face the family room.*

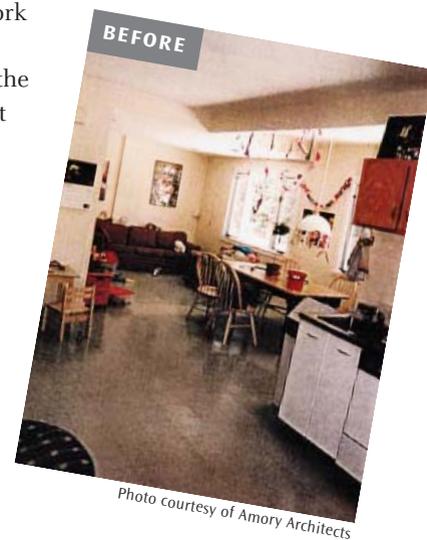


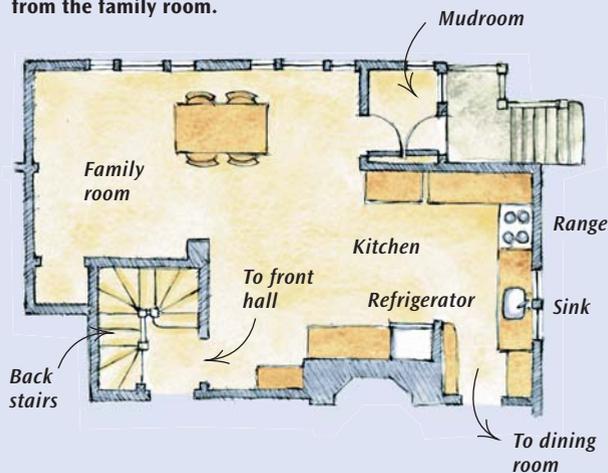
Photo courtesy of Amory Architects

# We shifted the kitchen toward the garden to bring in light and the outdoors.

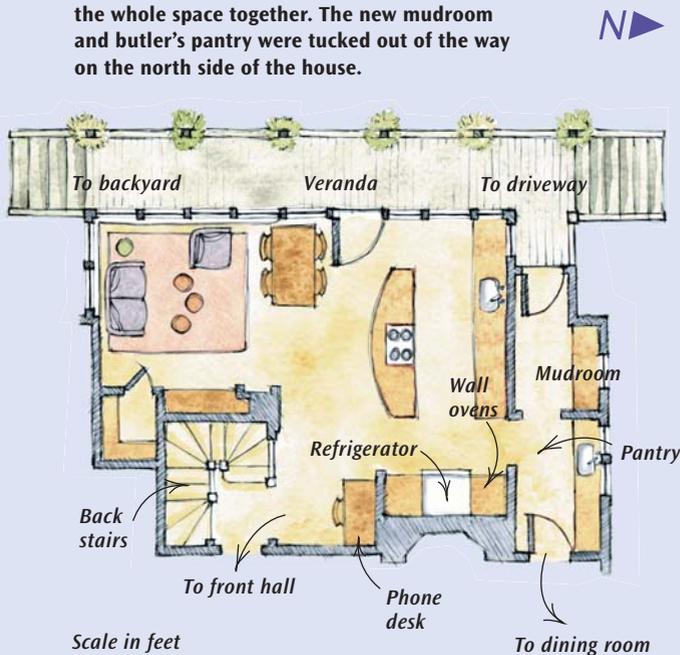
—David Amory

## MAKING BETTER USE OF THE SAME SQUARE FOOTAGE

**BEFORE** The rooms had plenty of space but were badly laid out: the kitchen work area was jammed into a dark corner and disconnected from the family room.



**AFTER** Turning the kitchen around brought the whole space together. The new mudroom and butler's pantry were tucked out of the way on the north side of the house.



kitchen, but it also orients the cook toward the family room to the south. The wall ovens and refrigerator are close at hand to the side of the island.

Another important design strategy was to minimize the number of cabinets to keep the room full of light. Using fewer upper cabinets—there are none along exterior walls or hanging between the kitchen and the eating area—helps to maximize natural light and makes the room feel larger. Space planning is crucial when you have fewer cabinets, but Lisa and Theo were willing to limit their number because we put extra kitchen storage nearby in the butler's pantry and in several deep cabinets around the refrigerator.

## New windows improve the view

With the orientation of the kitchen shifted toward the family room, our next move was to fill the south- and west-facing rooms with light. A bank of new windows runs the length of the room and wraps around the south end. A French door with 10 lights also lets in sunshine. While the top sash of the double-hung windows has nine divided lights, the bottom of each is unobstructed by muntins (photo, p. 28).

Since we had done so much to make the windows a focal point, we didn't want to block them with furniture. So we helped Lisa and Theo find wood-and-cane furniture for the sitting area that is no higher than the window sills. This makes the space feel taller and lets the view to the outdoors command attention.

## Circulation improves with a new floor plan

The big turnaround in the layout of the kitchen opened up an area for the mudroom and butler's pantry along the north side of the house, just steps from the driveway and garage. Muddy boots and armloads of packages have a place of their own and don't clutter the kitchen or family room.

The old kitchen felt isolated, so when we designed the new one, it was important that the space connect to the backyard, to the dining room, to the spacious front hall, and to the back stairs. There is now access to the outdoors through doors in the kitchen and the mudroom, and access to the dining room through the butler's pantry.

The main entry into the kitchen from the rest of the house—a passageway to the front hall—has been enhanced

Photos except where noted: Greg Premru; floor plans, Christine Erikson



**MAPLE CABINETS AND FLOORS KEEP THE KITCHEN BRIGHT** and reflect light from a bank of windows. Curves in the island and built-in desk temper the otherwise rectangular spaces.

## REMEMBER THE CEILING— DESIGN GOES BEYOND THE FLOORS AND WALLS

**IN MANY OF OUR PROJECTS** we urge clients to consider doing something special with the ceiling, which is often neglected. In this project, we played off the load-bearing beams to define the kitchen. Structurally, we needed only two beams running perpendicular to each other, but that would have looked unbalanced. So we added five decorative beams to give the ceiling more visual interest and to define the cooking area.

In the rest of the room, we added battens, or wooden strips, to the ceiling (photo, p. 28). By lining the battens up with the cabinets and windows, this design feature creates continuity and harmony in the space.

—D.A.



**DEEP CABINETS AROUND THE FRIDGE** eliminate the need for upper cabinets and make room for more windows.



**EXTRA-DEEP SILLS** frame the windows, adding visual weight (and space for treasures) to the wall of windows.



**COLORS AND MATERIALS REPEAT**  
A limited palette of colors and materials makes the room feel uncluttered. Welsh quarry tiles and red granite counters are the same hue, and similar wood tones were chosen for the cabinets, furniture, and floors.

by taking down a wall that closed in the back stairs and by adding a built-in telephone desk.

To allow for the more open plan and support the floors above, the addition needed new framing with two new structural beams overhead. We used this structural requirement as an opportunity to create an interesting ceiling treatment that defines areas of activity in the open space (see sidebar, p. 31).

### A veranda opens the kitchen to the backyard

We put a lot of thought into the transition between the house and the yard. Rather than create a large porch and stairs that would consume the garden and play area, we designed a veranda built on piers that runs the length of the kitchen and family room, with steps at the north and the south ends.

Instead of using a solid roof, we topped the veranda with an arbor planted with akebia and clematis vines that shade the rooms during the summer. In winter, the vines die back and allow the low afternoon sun to pour in, filling the room with warmth and light. The veranda and arbor create a comfortable transition from inside to outside, and the vines provide a privacy screen between the house and the neighbors.

Throughout the project, indoors and out, our challenge was to use craftsmanship and scale to design spaces that feel big. Lisa and Theo were willing to invest in rich details, like windows with deep sills and custom cabinetry, instead of the most expensive appliances. This room proves that big isn't always best and that details really do matter. Balance and proportion—and good natural light—in a smaller, well-designed space can make a room feel open and spacious. **▣**

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*See Resources on page 94.*



**ACCESS TO THE OUTDOORS**  
*The pantry and mudroom are built into a back hall with a door to the veranda, which keeps traffic out of the kitchen.*

## OUR SMALL GREAT ROOM

**OUR NEW KITCHEN** is really the focus of our house. It's a place that attracts everyone. The light is beautiful at all times of the day and in every season. Low winter light fills the room on sunny afternoons, and in the summer, the vine-covered arbor over the veranda softens the harsh sunlight. The veranda does a wonderful job of linking the kitchen with the backyard. I think this may be my favorite design feature.

Our kitchen is smaller than many, but our architect designed it to feel large. It's roomy and intimate at the same time, which is perfect for one person or a party. Although our formal dining room is right next door, it doesn't get much use. The kitchen is set up for the kind of casual entertaining we do with friends and family, so that I can be in the middle of everything while I'm cooking.

—Lisa, homeowner