

Tearing out the old flat ceiling helps a closed-in kitchen live and breathe easier

# Cathedral Ceiling Kitchen



BEFORE

**Problem: A limited budget**

**Solution:** The homeowners saved with simple wood floors and painted cabinets, and by purchasing millwork, countertops, and appliances themselves. Reusing the old skylight and not moving windows or plumbing saved money, too.

Photos: Charles Miller, except "before" photos courtesy of Duo Dickinson.





**Problem: Oppressively low ceiling**

**Solution:** Vaulting the ceiling brightens the entire space. A soffit added around the edge provides a place to mount task lighting, and pendants over the island lighten the space even more.

**Problem: A busy entrance with no drop-off facilities**

**Solution:** Built-in closets, a bench, and a seat offer assistance to those unloading as they come in the side entry and the garage.

## "aha!" moment

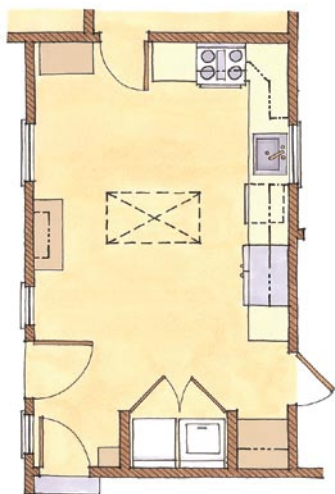
Despite the large skylight in the center, the 7-ft. 8-in. ceiling still felt oppressive. When Dickinson noticed that the ceiling was a symmetrical gable that could be completely vaulted and that the existing skylight could be worked into the design, he said, "We were all turned on." The resulting light-filled canopy creates a halo effect over the entire space.

White cabinetry and white walls had made the kitchen of this midcentury Connecticut Cape light, but it was still tight. For architect Duo Dickinson, the challenge was to break out of the mold without breaking the homeowners' small budget and without moving any walls. He did this in a most dramatic way by opening the space above with a vaulted ceiling rimmed with a thin soffit (drawing p. 77). Light fixtures above the soffit wash the ceiling, while mini can lights set in the soffit provide task lighting for workspaces below. New wall cabinets with glass fronts and sides and larger windows on both sides of the kitchen also lend the room a fresh air of transparency.

Rethinking workspaces and storage areas also meant centering the stove on its own little run of cabinets and placing an island where a table once stood. (The owners mocked up the island first to make sure it wouldn't get in the way.) Although the room's basic window and door locations were left unchanged, Dickinson was able to build in a long closet and bench/coat-hanging area on the wall between the dining area and the garage, creating a functional mudroom just steps from both the garage and kitchen entries. Under the front window, a built-in storage bench topped with spalted maple provides extra storage as well as a comfortable seat. Black granite countertops balance the bright white cabinets, while the stainless-steel finish of the appliances, stools, and hardware adds visual spark.







Before

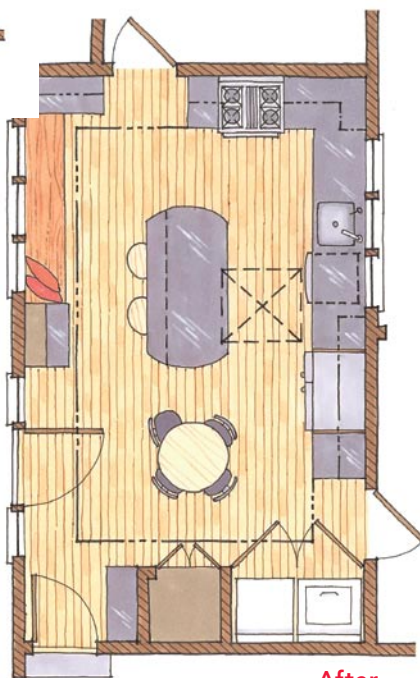


BEFORE

**Design:** Duo Dickinson, Architect, Madison, Conn.; [www.duodickinson.com](http://www.duodickinson.com)

**Construction:** The homeowners acted as general contractors

0 2 4 8 ft.



After



## Cool detail

Spalted maple left over from the architect's own kitchen project gives a distinctive look to the window bench and the display alcove above the storage cabinet.



### Problem: Lackluster details

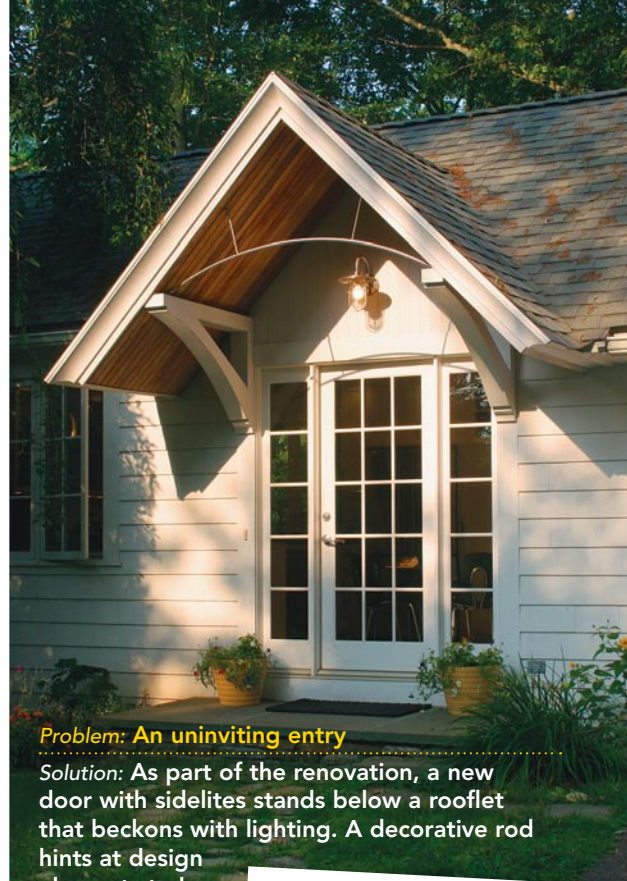
**Solution:** Small details, such as the decorative feet on the cabinetry and the use of surplus spalted maple as an accent material, lend the kitchen an element of surprise. The light-industrial style of the tie-rods, ceiling fan, stools, and cabinet hardware gives the space an unexpectedly techie edge.





**Problem: Too little storage and counter space**

**Solution:** Custom cabinets maximize both by making use of every inch of space. Additional storage is provided by a bench beneath the window, a large built-in beside the door, and tall wall cabinets. An island offers extra countertop area.

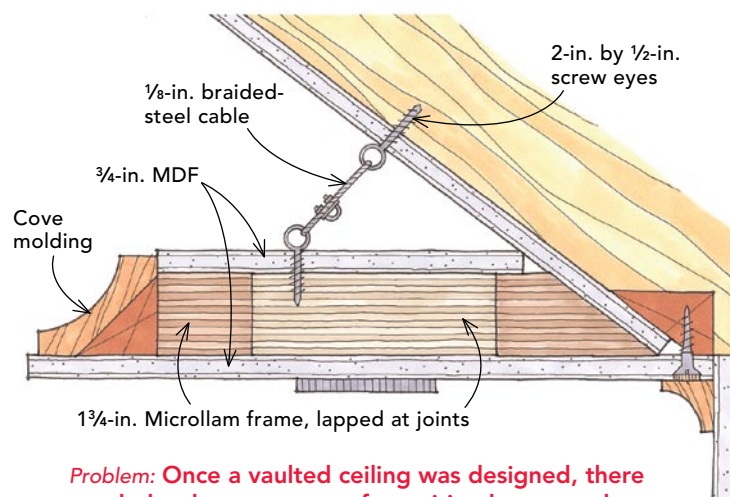


**Problem: An uninviting entry**

**Solution:** As part of the renovation, a new door with sidelites stands below a rooflet that beckons with lighting. A decorative rod hints at design elements to be found inside.



**BEFORE**



**Problem: Once a vaulted ceiling was designed, there needed to be some sort of transition between the top of the wall cabinets and the angled plane of the ceiling.**

**Solution:** The architect devised a hanging three-dimensional valance—like a soffit—that would top off the cabinets as well as provide a place to mount light fixtures to illuminate the countertops.