

A Narrow Kitchen Opens Up

Increased access and creative cabinetry let a small kitchen live big

BY JEAN STOFFER

Jeff and Catherine Cappel's 1930s brick Georgian was built in the days when many households had a cook to prepare the meals. As such, the kitchen was designed as a private service space. The room was small, narrow, and closed off visually from the rooms used most. And, with little natural light, it contrasted starkly with the large, light-filled rooms in the rest of the house. Cooking was a lonely and difficult chore for Jeff and Catherine, especially with three young children. Adding to the frustration, the old kitchen had limited countertop space, deteriorating cabinets, inadequate storage, and broken-down appliances.

As a stopgap measure, the Cappels refinished the wood floor, painted the cabinets, and replaced the countertops. They also added a small mudroom to the west end of the kitchen to replace a cramped hallway. These improvements helped, but the reality was that the cabinetry and appliances were on their last legs, and something needed to be done.

Getting the most from a difficult space

When the Cappels came to our interior design firm, they told us they wanted their new kitchen to be open to the adjacent breakfast room to make the whole space conducive to gathering as a family. They requested that it have adequate storage in the right places, high-

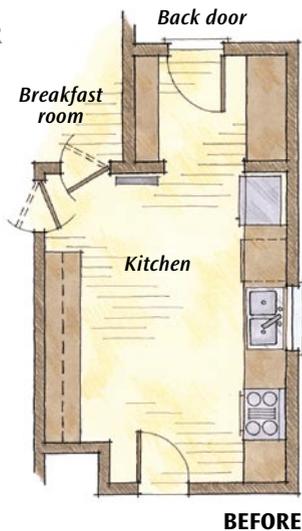




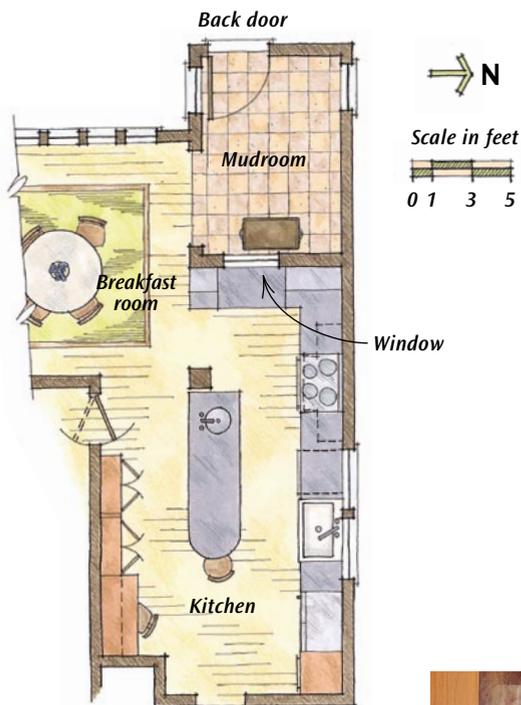
FROM SERVICE KITCHEN TO SOCIAL KITCHEN
By removing walls to the breakfast room and expanding the mudroom, this narrow kitchen gains natural light and an open floor plan.

TWO ROOMS WORK TOGETHER

Before the remodel, the small, narrow kitchen kept the cook secluded and, with only one source of natural light, in the dark. Adding a mudroom and removing a wall let the kitchen borrow both light and space. An island and efficient placement of appliances created better flow and made room for more storage.



BEFORE



AFTER

THE PLACEMENT of the hutch (see photo, p. 53) made the countertop area to the right a potential dead spot. Apothecary-style drawers fill the void and are perfect for recipe cards, birthday candles, elastic bands, and scissors.

A **SLENDER ISLAND** fits into the narrow space and helps direct traffic through the room while providing an essential area for food prep, storage, and even seating. A towel bar designed right into the island cabinetry makes every inch count.



performance appliances, more natural light, and an island for food preparation, storage, and seating.

At less than 12 feet wide, the narrow space would not easily accommodate an island along with the necessary storage and appliances. Set-back rules and the desire to keep the symmetry of the exterior intact kept us from widening the kitchen. We had to make the most of the light and space that was already there. So, we replaced the single north-facing window above the sink with a double window. And we gained 5 feet on the length of the kitchen by expanding the mudroom toward the garage.

The greatest impact, though, came from removing the wall between the kitchen and the breakfast room. "It was inconvenient having a separate breakfast room. Our youngest child was two when we moved here—the others were six and nine—so there was a lot of running between the two rooms," said Catherine. Removing the wall brought in light, visually enlarged the kitchen, and let the two rooms function as one.

Architect Thomas Bair, AIA, determined the proper support where walls were removed, and designed the extension to the mudroom. Removing walls required support beams and a post in the middle of the kitchen, for which we designed cherry paneling to match the island and hutch cabinetry.

Efficient planning makes it all fit

To make this tight space work, careful alignment of cabinetry and appliances was essential. In the original





DESIGN A KITCHEN TO MEET YOUR NEEDS

The key to a successful kitchen design is assessing your specific needs. When I meet with clients, I typically go through a lengthy questionnaire to determine their preferences on a range of topics that will influence the overall design. All kitchens have common requirements, but every family's needs are unique. There are basic questions to answer when thinking about a kitchen remodel, such as how many burners you require, how many sinks you need, and how many people you want your island to seat. But the most telling questions are those that require a narrative response. Once I have all the answers to these questions, I am equipped to put together a plan that meets my clients' needs. Not only is it satisfying for me, it also gives the clients a design that fits their lifestyle. Here are some questions that will encourage a design that's right for you.

- How do you want your kitchen to feel?
- What colors are you drawn to?
- How do you hope to use your kitchen when you have friends or family visiting?
- How often do you like to grocery shop?
- Do you have any hobbies that require you to store special equipment in the kitchen—for instance, baking or candy making?
- Do you need a spot for homework?
- Do you need a TV? If so, who will be watching it, the cook or the kids at the breakfast counter?
- Do you like music in the kitchen?
- Do you have any collections you would like to display?
- What kind of maintenance are you comfortable with?
- How do you feel about age marks and patina?
- Do you like your often-used items out and at the ready, or do you prefer to put everything away?

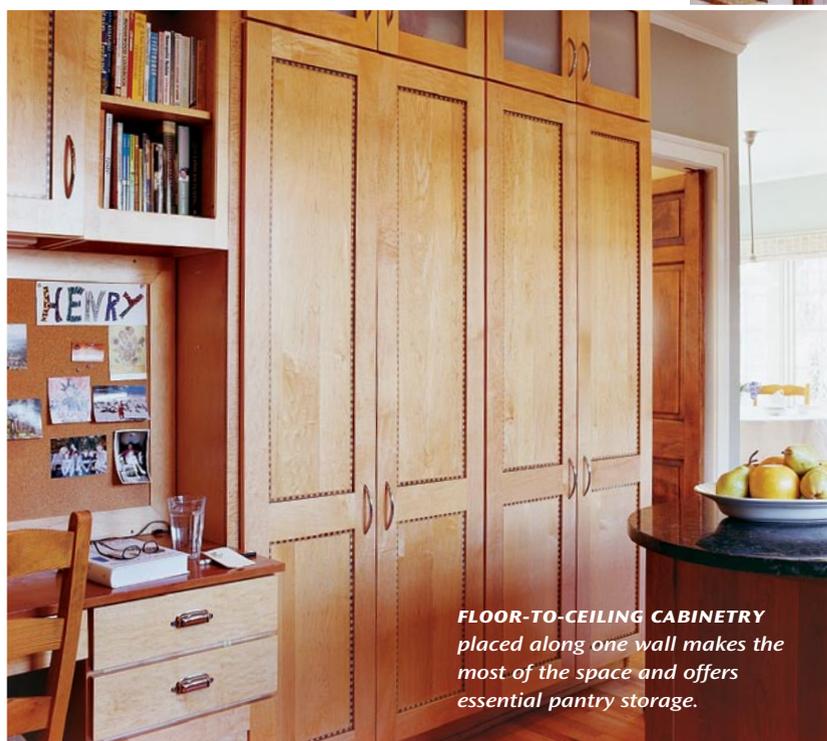
kitchen, poor placement made the small space even more difficult. Not only did opening the refrigerator block entry from the backdoor, but the layout of appliances and cabinetry along perimeter walls left an inconvenient 7-foot aisle in between. This put vital prep-work countertop space too far away from the sink, stove, and refrigerator. To deal with the gap and to make the cooking area efficient we lined up the range top, range hood, under-cabinet microwave, sink, dishwasher, refrigerator, and two ovens (all requiring 24 inches of depth) along the same wall. Keeping appliances together left the opposite wall free for 12-inch-deep, floor-to-ceiling pantry storage and saved valuable space for the island.

At a slender 27 inches, the island provides an ample prep surface a step away from the sink, refrigerator, and stove, and directs traffic toward the food pantry, protecting the

CHANGING THE ENTRY
The mudroom to the left deflects traffic coming into the home to the breakfast room instead of disturbing the busy kitchen workspace.

A TEMPORARY KITCHEN CAN SAVE YOUR SANITY

Living through a kitchen remodel can be difficult—physically, emotionally, and mentally. One recommendation I always make is to set up a temporary kitchen in an area of the house that won't be affected by the dirt of remodeling, for example in the dining room or the basement. Living out of a microwave and laundry tub is difficult—an average kitchen remodel takes three to six months. The burden of renovating a room, combined with potential nutrition problems and the inability to properly sanitize dishes can lead to emotional turmoil. Spend the extra money (it's cheaper than therapy) and have your contractor set up a stove, refrigerator, sink, and if at all possible, a dishwasher in a temporary location. You'll feel better physically, you'll eat better, you won't transmit germs as easily, and you probably won't gain weight. A temporary kitchen is a smart investment. A typical set up costs about \$2,000, not including appliances, which can be taken from the old kitchen.



FLOOR-TO-CEILING CABINERY placed along one wall makes the most of the space and offers essential pantry storage.

cooking area from being disturbed. With a smaller island, however, there wasn't enough room for storage and seating for three, as originally intended. We compromised with a little less storage and room for two stools.

Independent cabinetry stands out

With the necessary equipment and storage taken care of, I was able to design some cabinetry for the wall between the kitchen and the mudroom. The homeowners suggested putting a window into this supporting wall so that light and views would not be blocked (see My

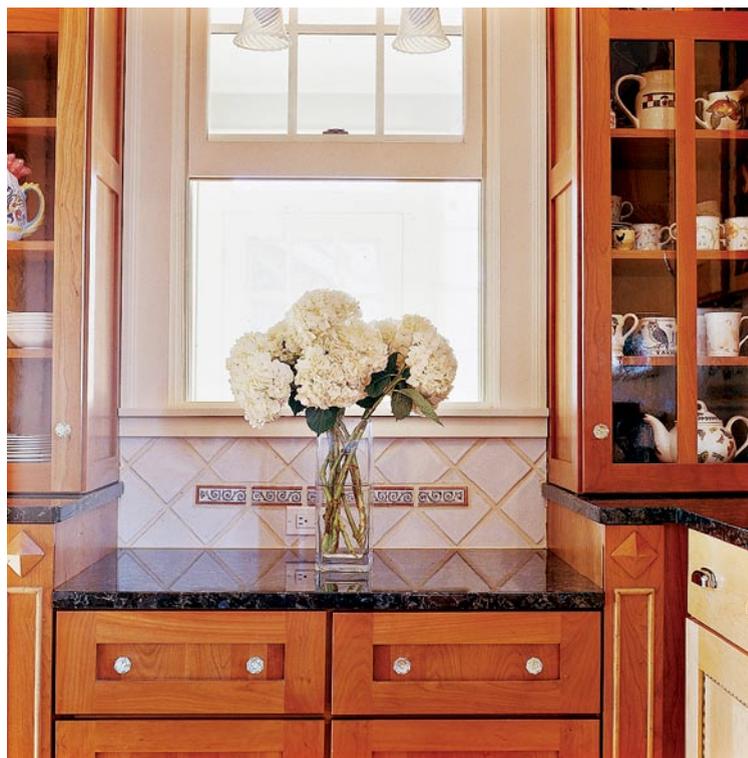


COMBINED SPACES The once dark, enclosed kitchen now has access to light and views from the breakfast room, and the cooking and eating spaces have become one. The island's work space is enhanced by a prep sink with an additional faucet for filtered water.



STORAGE DETAILS, like this pull-out column for brooms, make efficient use of extra space. Similar columns to house spices and baking ingredients and even containers for trash and recyclables were built in elsewhere.

THE CHERRY USED FOR THE CABINETRY surrounding the window between the mudroom and kitchen makes it stand out against the natural maple cabinetry used on the long wall and for the pantry.



Inspiration, p. 90). To surround the window and draw attention to this focal point, I designed a built-in hutch in cherry. The cherry is a nice foil for the natural maple wood used for the pantry and other cabinetry.

Although all the cabinetry is built-in, the mix of woods in the kitchen makes it appear freestanding. The built-in cabinets offer more storage space and are easier to maintain, while their independent look breaks up the space and makes the room appear larger.

The Cappels' kitchen, although still narrow, is now an efficient space that lives larger than it is. All three areas—mudroom, breakfast room, and kitchen—work

together to meet the Cappels' needs for a bright, functional space for cooking, eating, and living. "Sometimes I think it would be nice to have one of those massive kitchens with a big family room attached, but I like our kitchen the way it is because I feel as though we've kept the integrity of the house," says Catherine. 

Jean Stoffer is an interior designer specializing in kitchen and bath design. She lives and works in the Chicago area.

For more information, see Resources, page 86.