

# To the Studs and

Two architects rebuild their kitchen with a minimalist look  
at a minimal cost

BY LAUREN AND KYLE ZERBEY



**Ceiling the deal.** Transitions between open-plan areas were handled by varying the ceiling form. By vaulting the ceiling over the kitchen and dining area and adding new windows and a pair of skylights, the Zerbeys ensured that there would be enough natural light—even on cloudy days—that they rarely would need to turn on the lights.

**O**ur house was built in 1910, and although it was Craftsman in style, its small size and lack of custom details led us to believe that it was originally a worker's cottage. Because of its modest square footage, the kitchen was effectively the hallway of the home—with five doorways adding chaos to its inefficiency.

We lived in our home for four years before tackling the kitchen, which gave us ample time to design and redesign it until we got everything just the way we wanted. By taking the space down to the studs, we were able to move the kitchen toward the back of the house and take over an enclosed porch that was rarely used. Not only did this free up space in the rest of the house by allowing us to shuffle rooms around and squeeze in a second bedroom, but it also created a better visual and physical connection to the backyard.

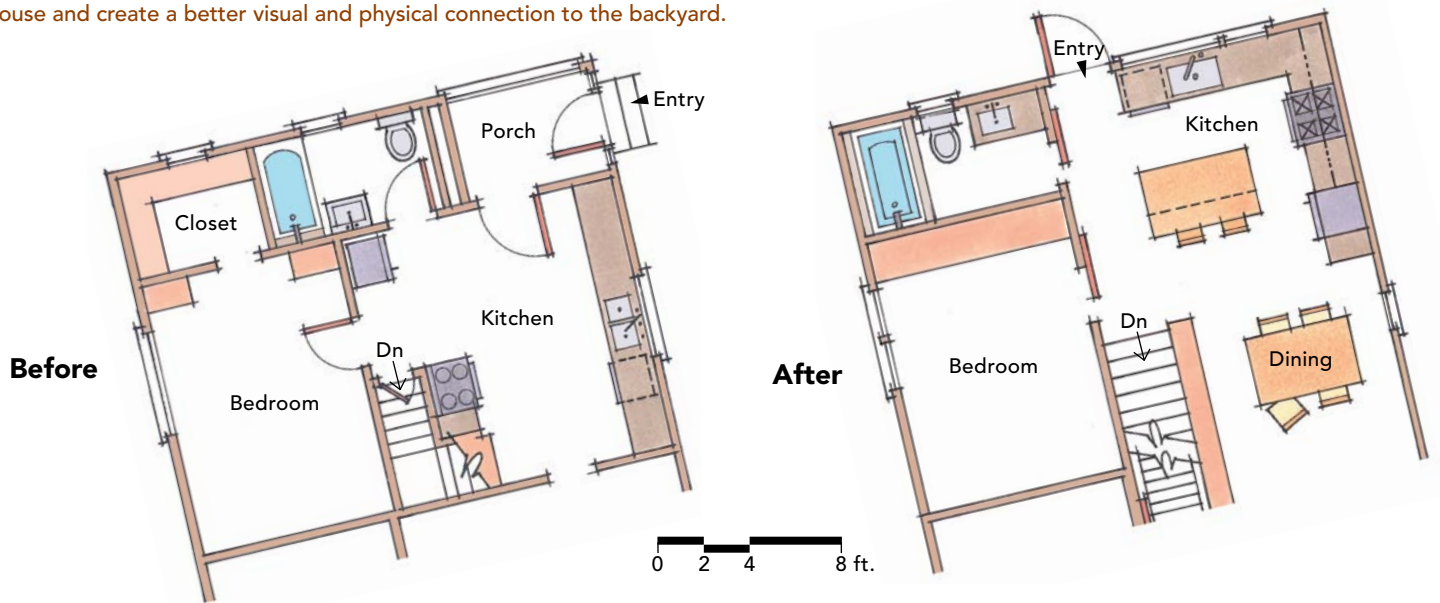
The kitchen had been “remuddled” in the 1960s. The range was placed where the original woodstove had been, and next to that was a fake cabinet that provided head clearance for a stair down to the basement. A freestanding fridge was located in another corner, and the sink was barely large enough to wash pots and pans in. Soon after moving in, we sacrificed the one bank of drawers the kitchen had to put in a dishwasher, but that was only the beginning of greater changes to come.

As architects, we chose to do most of the work ourselves. Not only was that a way to afford the remodel, but it was also an opportunity to have more hands-on experience with residential construction. Fortunately, Kyle had inherited his grandfather's tool collection, which gave us a huge boost.

The main objective for remodeling our home was to maximize its space and to create functional and inviting areas with plenty of natural light. One way we handled transitions between these areas was to vary the ceiling form. Over the living area, we exposed the original joists; over the kitchen and dining area, we vaulted the ceiling. New

# Back

**BACK ON TRACK** Before the remodel, the kitchen was effectively the hallway, and its five doorways bottlenecked the space. The Zerbey's vision was to open up the living spaces to each other. By surrendering a rarely used enclosed porch, they were able to move the kitchen to the back of the house and create a better visual and physical connection to the backyard.



windows and a pair of skylights ensure that we rarely need to turn the lights on, even on the cloudiest of Seattle days.

The kitchen is the workhorse of our house, and the materials and products we chose reflect that. We call our aesthetic *natural modernism*—warm woods, bright whites, cool grays—a style that's minimal without being overly austere or impractical. We were able to stay within budget and distinguish our space by modifying a number readily available items.

Although we used Ikea cabinets, we incorporated our own open shelving for a more customized look. Fir plywood wraps the side and top of one wall of cabinets to create a stronger composition and to better define that zone. The island is a pair of Ikea drawer units with a custom shelf. The cavity under the island serves as a plenum for heating using a toe-kick register.

We wanted to use butcher block on the island but found that a slab in the size we needed would have been cost-prohibitive. Instead, we butted two standard counter-depth pieces together to create one larger piece on which the seam is barely visible.

Behind the range, we created a simple backsplash with back-painted glass and aluminum channel trim on the exposed sides. A metal picture ledge above it works as shallow storage for everyday items. Under the sink, four pullout bins serve as receptacles for trash, recycling, compost, and dog food.

Opening up the spaces dramatically transformed the feel and flow of the home. By sticking to a neutral theme, with a focus on the architecture itself, we used art, accessories, and paint to add color and texture—a move that allows us to change the mood of the space easily.

Our strategy with our own home, as with the homes of many of our clients, was to strike a balance between design and value. In hindsight, we would have done few things differently. □

Lauren and Kyle Zerbey run Studio Zerbey, an architecture and design firm in Seattle. Photos by Lauren Zerbey.



**Budget custom.** Ikea cabinets were integrated with open shelving the Zerbey's built to create a more customized look. Fir plywood on the side and top of one wall of cabinets helps to define that zone.



**Clever island assembly.** The butcher-block island top was made by butting together two counter-depth pieces. The base is made from a pair of Ikea drawer units. Custom shelves at one end hold the microwave and bowls for the dog's food and water.



**Warm and simple.**  
The Zerbeys describe their design aesthetic as natural modernism, a style that's clean, practical, and simple, but not too stark.

## DETAILS

**Cabinets** Ikea Akurum with Abstrakt fronts, [ikea.com](http://ikea.com)

**Drawer and door pulls**  
Reveal Designs Washington, [reveal-designs.com](http://reveal-designs.com)

**Flooring** Capri cork  
Mediterra Dark, [capricork.com](http://capricork.com)

**Counters** Silestone quartz  
White North, [silestoneusa.com](http://silestoneusa.com)

**Island counter** Lyptus,  
[crosscuthardwoods.com](http://crosscuthardwoods.com)

**Sink** Kräus stainless-steel  
single basin, [kraususa.com](http://kraususa.com)

**Faucet** Grohe Minta in  
SuperSteel, [grohe.com](http://grohe.com)

**Light fixtures** Wall,  
Purity Reach, [resoluteonline.com](http://resoluteonline.com); island, Bruck V/A Linear Chandelier, [brucklighting.com](http://brucklighting.com); undercabinet, ET2 LED tape lights, [et2online.com](http://et2online.com)

**Range** GE Cafe 30-in. dual  
fuel, [geappliances.com](http://geappliances.com)

**Dishwasher** Bosch SHX46L,  
[bosch-home.com](http://bosch-home.com)

**Refrigerator** 30-in. Liebherr,  
[liebherr-appliances.com](http://liebherr-appliances.com)

**Microwave** GE Spacemaker II,  
[geappliances.com](http://geappliances.com)

**Range hood** Vent-A-Hood  
PRH9230, [ventahood.com](http://ventahood.com)

**Barstools** Ikea Sebastian,  
[ikea.com](http://ikea.com)

**Metal ledge** West Elm,  
[westelm.com](http://westelm.com)

**Location** Seattle **Architects and builders** Lauren and Kyle Zerbey