



An Arts and Crafts Kitchen Remodel

A modern kitchen draws inspiration from materials and methods popular at the beginning of the century

by Robert Orr

Older houses have built-in character, but sometimes it takes a tornado to help uncover it. The tornado in this case didn't damage the house, which was built in the 1920s in Hamden, Connecticut, but it did uproot several large trees that had obscured the view of its somewhat plain facade. Dismayed by the loss of the trees, the home's owners asked us to design new porches and a pergola to dress up the newly exposed exterior. This initial encounter, inspired by a natural disaster, eventually led us back into the cramped and dark kitchen.

Our original work on the house had introduced us to its Arts and Crafts elements, including an exquisite copper roof and an interior with handsome wood detailing. But as is often the case, the service section, including the kitchen, was cramped, dark and far less gracious than the rest of the house (photo above). The owners wanted the efficiency and elegance of a contemporary kitchen. But they did not want to have the old kitchen blasted out and a "grand kitchen" inserted in its place, looking as though it had just landed from outer space.

The homeowners wanted the new kitchen to look like it was part of the original house, as if the craftspeople who built the original house somehow could have understood and anticipated in their work exactly how a family would want to live 70 years later. So our design goal was to make something new look as though it had always been there, remaining true to the Arts and Crafts elements that had attracted the clients to the house in the first place.



Same place, before and after. The cramped original kitchen (above) needed a more efficient use of floor space. Reorganizing the original pantry, moving the pantry wall back and recessing the refrigerator into part of the old space eliminates much of the congestion in the new kitchen (facing page). The custom-built, quartersawn oak worktable functions like an island but takes up less room.

Three tricks make a small space seem bigger—Minimal expansion room was available for the kitchen: a tiny breakfast area next to the existing kitchen. Our first priority was to reorient and reconfigure the existing space to make it feel bigger and more elegant.

The first trick was to reorganize some existing features. Straightening out a clumsy pantry/back-hall arrangement and building a recess for the refrigerator created considerable new floor space (photos above, facing page). Without sacrificing any storage area, this new arrangement permits a straight view directly through the house, from front to back, and dramatically eases the tight feeling at this end of the room.

The next trick was to magnify any benefit that could be gained from the breakfast area. By

opening the wall between the kitchen and this area with an arch (photo p. 88), the kitchen feels larger without actually overwhelming the dining space. The arch connects the two spaces while maintaining their individual functions.

The final trick was to capitalize on space elsewhere in the house that might be directed toward the kitchen. Several of the doors and halls on the first floor lined up, although this alignment was not immediately apparent because of a few misplaced walls. Modifying the walls slightly and aligning the new openings in the kitchen and eat-in alcove with existing doorways now visible through the rest of the house make the kitchen feel bigger.

By reorienting existing elements, the room changes from having a claustrophobic inward focus to

having an open, expansive outward focus. The new arrangement directs the views past and beyond the kitchen, offering relief from the small size of the space.

Interestingly, the layout of the new kitchen began to resemble the old. The new stove was where the old stove used to be, and the new sink was approximately where the old sink used to be. Apparently, the sink and the stove had worked well in their existing locations for all of those years, but were just cramped by the surrounding space.

Materials are chosen to show the hand of the maker—Characteristic of architects and designers of the English Arts and Crafts movement, such as C. F. A. Voysey and William Morris, is



A simple trick of the eye makes this kitchen appear larger. The aligned entryways tend to draw the eye away from the kitchen and into the rest of the house. This trick makes a narrow kitchen feel larger and less isolated.

what could be described as a celebration of materials, detail and the hand of the artisan.

In this kitchen, the granite countertops are durable and resist stains; their cool mass and dark green/black color balance with the stainless-steel appliances and the oak cabinetry. A double-thick lamination around the nosing edges emphasizes the mass of the stone.

Fulper Glazes (P. O. Box 373, Yardley, Pa. 19067; 215-736-8512) manufactured the ceramic tile used for the kitchen's backsplashes. A prominent 19th-century New Jersey pottery maker, Fulper faded from public view in the 1920s after a major fire. With the discovery in 1984 of six books of glaze recipes in the attic of the family

house, three Fulper granddaughters resurrected the business, which now produces tiles based on the original glaze formulas.

All of the cabinets and woodwork are constructed of quartersawn red oak. A popular wood during the heyday of the Arts and Crafts movement, oak was particularly favored for its masculine quality. Rather than presenting the familiar long, bold bands of dark grain typical of flat-sawn oak, quartersawing breaks up the bands of grain into hundreds of tiny flecks of darker color. Glass-front cabinet doors are fitted with locally fabricated leaded glass, and all of the woodwork is protected by a matte finish of catalyzed lacquer.

Utility with design—Another Arts and Crafts detail that inspired the design is high wall paneling, which brings the richness of fine craftsmanship to eye level (bottom photo, facing page). A plate rail 7 ft. 3½ in. above the floor caps the high paneling a small distance below the 8-ft. 8-in. ceiling. Besides crowning the paneling, the plate rail provides ample display space for the homeowners' growing collection of Roseville pottery. An added benefit is that the plate rail resembles a dropped ceiling cornice. The visual effect makes the ceiling appear lifted buoyantly higher, contributing a perception of spaciousness in height similar to the perception created by the three tricks in plan.

At the eat-in alcove the design for the high paneling is interrupted by recessed bookshelves. By headering off a few framing members inside the wall, the bookshelves sit halfway submerged and halfway proud of the wall and provide unobtrusive space for some of the clients' collection of cookbooks.

Furniture also reflects the Arts and Crafts theme—

Below the bookshelves, the design for the wall paneling integrates with the design of a wraparound banquette. Built-in seating accommodates more diners in cozier conditions than chairs, and pulling the table away from the center of the room leaves more space for circulation. The covering for the banquette cushions is cut from fabric designed by William Morris, probably the English designer most closely associated with the Arts and Crafts movement. Here, colors and patterns were picked from readily available Morris fabrics to coordinate with the granite counters, the Roseville pottery collection, the paint colors and other materials in the room.

The custom-built dining table was designed to match reproduction Stickley chairs purchased for this kitchen. Constructed from the same quartersawn oak as the rest of the kitchen, the table's top is rounded at the corners to allow for easy slipping in and out of the banquette.

The narrow table in the middle of the kitchen matches the dining table in style and materials. High enough to be a work counter in front of the stove, the kitchen table occupies less area than an island would in this tight space.

Make an asset of a liability—An existing window in the eat-in alcove presented a problem. Probably because the breakfast area commanded the least attention of the house's original designers, its window is positioned well on the exterior of the building but falls in an awkward location inside, a little too high and left of center. The design of the wall paneling imposes a more dominant pattern and distracts attention from the poor location of the window (top photo). As part of the panel design, a new, larger window frame around the existing window centers a new opening on the room. Somewhat proud of the existing wall, the new paneling and frame make the window appear recessed and less important. Within the new window frame, a



Planning and paneling balance an off-center window. This window's asymmetrical placement became an asset in the design of the window seat; the window adds the right amount of interest to the grid-work of the paneling.



A banquette with built-in bookshelves. This nook is pulled back from the flow of traffic, but it's open to the kitchen so that occupants don't feel too isolated from activities there. The dining area unifies many Arts and Crafts themes in the kitchen.

panel grid is set up to balance the window location.

A new window seat and flanking bookshelves and cabinets help to define this space further. The window seat helps make sense of the high sill, and its lift top provides access to practical storage space beneath. By manipulating the panel grid and adding the seat and flanking bookshelves, the window is made to seem desirably offset, adding energy instead of awkwardness to the room design.

Lighting for character and for tasks—

It is often better to separate lighting functions so that one kind of fixture is devoted to aesthetics while another handles functional needs. In this kitchen the aesthetics are handled by delicate Arts and Crafts-style pendant lights (Brass Light Gallery, 131 S. First St., Milwaukee, Wis. 53204; 414-271-8300) over the kitchen table and sconces on the wall in the eat-in alcove. With low-wattage bulbs, they give a gentle glow and character to the space, but they don't attempt to meet light-level requirements.

Task lighting is handled by recessed downlight fixtures concealed in the ceiling and by under-cabinet lights above the perimeter work counters. Low-voltage incandescent lamps are inconspicuously placed underneath the base of the upper cabinets, behind the bottom rail. Similar to fluorescent lamps in life span and energy-efficiency, low-voltage lights provide the warm-light quality of standard incandescent lamps and tuck into small spaces.

An artist adds a finishing touch—

Central to the Arts and Crafts movement was a collaboration between artisans and artists, a true marriage of every facet of the manmade environment. High on the wall in the band of space between the plate rail and the ceiling, painter Lisa Hess of Stony Creek, Connecticut, was commissioned to design and paint a continuous frieze around the room. In the kitchen she chose a woodland motif appropriate to the natural theme used in all other aspects of the design. In the eat-in alcove she introduced a subtle Garden of Eden theme with the innocent Adam and Eve represented by the clients' two children. □

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