



## A balcony table for a sunny breakfast

*New windows, custom-made to match the original windows and cabinet doors in the dining room, let in the morning light. The primary sink in the earlier kitchen remains, serving as a prep sink in its new granite counter. Photo taken at A on floor plan. Before its transformation (photo right), the galley-style kitchen included a closet with louvered doors for the clothes dryer.*



**New windows unify the look.** Because the new windows take up more wall space than the old ones, extensive structural reinforcement had to take place before installation. Photos taken at B on floor plan.

# A Kitchen Sees the Light

Opening up two walls created a welcome connection among kitchen, dining room, and garden

BY JERRI HOLAN

**B**uilt in 1925, Alec and Marie’s little house in Oakland, Calif., had the best and worst features of its time. It was in a sweet neighborhood of Arts and Crafts homes, with mature landscaping and a lovely garden. The house still had most of its signature built-ins, generous trim, and delicate wooden windows. But the house also had the typical rabbit-warren floor plan of its time, with small rooms that were isolated from one another.

The old kitchen had been tacked together over the years. Instead of displaying the high-quality materials and graceful details found throughout the rest of the house, the kitchen had become a study in tired vinyl, plywood, and plastic laminate. To make matters worse, a laundry closet blocked the view of the backyard garden (photo left).

## The budget starts at \$40,000

Low interest rates and lots of equity in their house convinced Alec and Marie that the time was right to reinvent their outdated kitchen. As they explained to me in our initial meeting, the scope of the remodeling work was simply to improve kitchen cabinets and appliances, rearrange a few items, and “maybe do something with the odd, underused storage closet next to the kitchen.” This large closet, which was peculiarly placed off the dining room, did indeed invite colonizing to be converted into more usable living



Before

## ▼ From bottled up to opened up ►



**Classic built-ins, hidden from the kitchen.** The original dining room had a solid wall separating it from the kitchen and an under-used storeroom behind the door on the right. The new opening between the kitchen and the dining room allows long views through the house and a convenient counter for dishes traveling to and from the dining table. Photos taken at C on floor plan.



space (floor plan, facing page). The budget would be around \$40,000, a realistic figure for this amount of work.

### How budgets grow

Once Alec and Marie saw how the house could open up by annexing the closet, they suggested connecting the old dining room with the new kitchen by way of a pass-through (photos above).

It wasn't long before the strategy of connecting adjacent spaces took aim on the dryer closet. If we could get rid of it altogether, the garden could extend its pleasant spell from the dining room to the breakfast table (photo p. 82). We found some expendable closet space upstairs, and a contractor installed supply and drain lines for a stackable laundry center.

With the laundry closet gone, we could start imagining a wall of windows across the back of the house, and perhaps another one in the corner of the strange old storeroom (floor plans, facing page). Then another thought: "Let's replace all the windows in the kitchen so that they match the house's original windows." This is the natural evolution of how projects can get better as they progress, and how budgets grow.

### The hidden cost of new windows

At about \$400 apiece, the kitchen's custom windows weren't cheap, and they came with a hidden price beyond installation. California's strict energy codes required that we compensate for their energy loss by adding insulation throughout the rest of the house; that cost approximately \$2,000.

The final stake in the heart of the original budget was the cost of reinforcing the house to allow the new windows and the pass-through. Our builder, Denny Bader, told us that the steel frame and new foundation required for the openings would raise the budget to \$65,000.

But by this time, Alec and Marie were so in love with their backyard views that the cost was hardly mentioned.

### Saving where we could

For the sake of economy, Alec and Marie chose lower-end appliances. It's tougher to change windows once the job is done than it is to change a stove or a dishwasher. They also used their existing refrigerator, investing in a kit that reversed its door swing to suit its new location better.

We also avoided even more expense by limiting the amount of work on the stairs to the basement. We had considered relocating them, but because the existing stairs had risers taller than allowed by contemporary code, we couldn't find a cost-effective place to put another set of stairs that would be in compliance. In the end, we dressed them up with some new treads and an open railing that lets in views and light.

### Spending the salvaged part of the budget

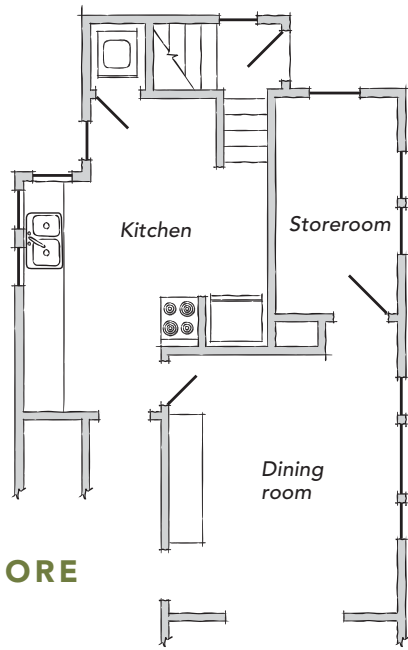
After all the windows were in, the cabinetry completed, and the hard work done, Alec and Marie looked at the level of craftsmanship and decided it was necessary to take another budget plunge. "After tearing out the old vinyl floors and laminate counters, it seems a crime to put the same sort of cheap materials back in," reasoned Alec.

The new counters are dark-green granite, reflecting the garden's influence. To stay in keeping with natural materials, Alec and Marie chose cork floors, which are both easy on the eye and on the legs but costly. By the time we finished, the budget had doubled to \$80,000. The project's scope, however, improved the entire first floor of the house. □

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### Tiny rooms, solid walls

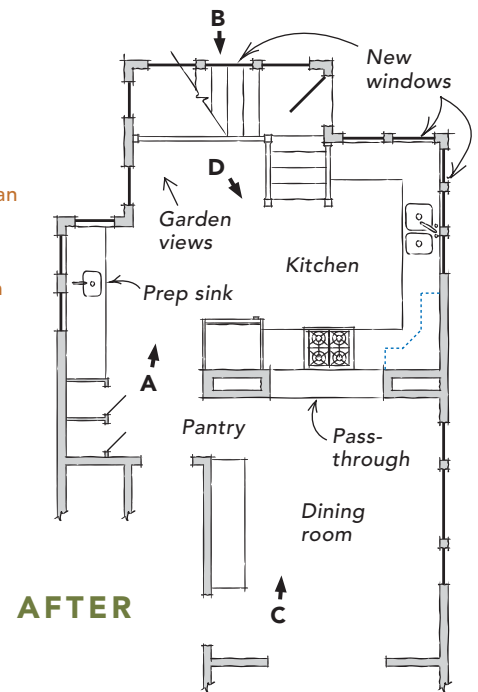
Typical for a house of this vintage, the kitchen and dining room were isolated from one another. Overlooking the garden, a storeroom on the southeast corner made poor use of this prime part of the house.



### Open for business

With its spacious plan and abundance of windows, the new kitchen is open to views and light from front to back.

Photos taken at lettered positions.



### SOURCES

#### 30-IN. RANGE

Dacor Duel Fuel, model RSD30  
800-793-0093  
www.dacor.com

#### CABINET KNOBS

B&M Pyramid Pulls  
510-843-7368  
www.ohmegasalvage.com

#### DINING-ROOM PENDANT LIGHT

Sue Johnson  
Custom Lighting  
510-527-2623

#### FAUCET

Grohe Eurodisc  
630-582-7711  
www.groheamerica.com

#### UNDERMOUNT SINK

Elkay Stainless  
630-572-3192  
www.elkayusa.com

**From closet to kitchen.** The former storeroom is now the business end of the kitchen, with the range located to allow the cook a view of the living room. Cork floors, maple cabinets, and a dark-green crown molding tie the room together. Photo taken at D on floor plan.