

A Blogger's Renovation

A baker transforms her kitchen
without changing the floor plan **BY MICHELLE LOPEZ**

A couple of years ago, I was at a bloggers' gathering here in Portland, Ore., and one of the attendees struck up a conversation about my baking blog. "I love your stuff," she said. "I'd love to see what your kitchen is like. I bet it's beautiful." It took all my self-restraint not to spit out my drink and laugh, because the fact of the matter was that my kitchen at the time was a nightmare. It was cramped and lacked work-surfaces, storage, natural light, and modern amenities. It had a sink that leaked, countertops that were just 18 in. deep, a window that was painted shut, and two dish racks perpetually full of drying pots and pans because there was no dishwasher.

Although my kitchen was configured in a classic work triangle (sink, refrigerator, and range), the elements were poorly integrated and didn't allow for more than one person in the kitchen at a time. So when it came time to plan my kitchen remodel, my thinking went first to function over form. I prioritized modern amenities such as a range hood, a dishwasher, and a garbage disposal. Second, I wanted to open up the kitchen to bring in more light and to reclaim more space for counters and cabinetry.

While the home was built in 1912, the kitchen had been renovated in the 1950s, and it showed. When my thoughts turned to form, I knew I wanted a design that wouldn't stick out like a sore thumb when compared with the rest of the house. Since this was my first house and my first major renovation, that was the extent of my thinking. I was trying to stay as open-minded and flexible as I could.

I started an inspiration board on Pinterest to keep track of styles I was drawn to, and pretty soon it became apparent that I was leaning toward a particular look: white cabinets and subway tile, paired with butcher-block countertops. My kitchen's countertops were tile, which is stone hard and especially awful on plateware. I was drawn to wood because it promised to be softer than the tile, and I loved that it could double as a cutting board. However, the more I researched butcher-block counters, the more I realized they were pretty high maintenance for an everyday kitchen.

Looking through my Pinterest board, I noticed that the second style I was drawn to was a full-white look (cabinets, subway tile, beadboard, and walls) paired with marble countertops. Unfortunately, I discovered that marble is even more high maintenance than wood. When I shared my dilemma with my kitchen designer, Clifford Wageman (eastbankinteriors.com), he said, "Why don't you check out quartz? There are some great quartz countertops that look like marble, minus all the fuss." He showed me some options that would emulate the marble I admired: Caesarstone's Frosty Carrina and London Grey. While the Frosty Carrina was a warm white, London Grey was a cooler, very pale gray.

When I couldn't decide between the two colors, Clifford suggested that I make the decision based on my cabinet colors. At that point, I was sure I wanted white cabinets, but I was drawn to the two-tone look I'd been seeing on Pinterest, where the bottom cabinets are one color and the uppers are another. "Two-tone cabinets don't necessarily have to be limited to black and white," Clifford explained, placing some light-gray paint chips in front of me. "Why don't we consider white cabinets on top with a dove gray on the bottom? The light gray will look great with the London Grey countertops." I instantly fell in love with the idea.

To go with the dove-gray cabinets and Caesarstone countertops, I chose a classic white subway-tile backsplash and a matching white farmer's sink. Again, my Pinterest board revealed that I was repeat-

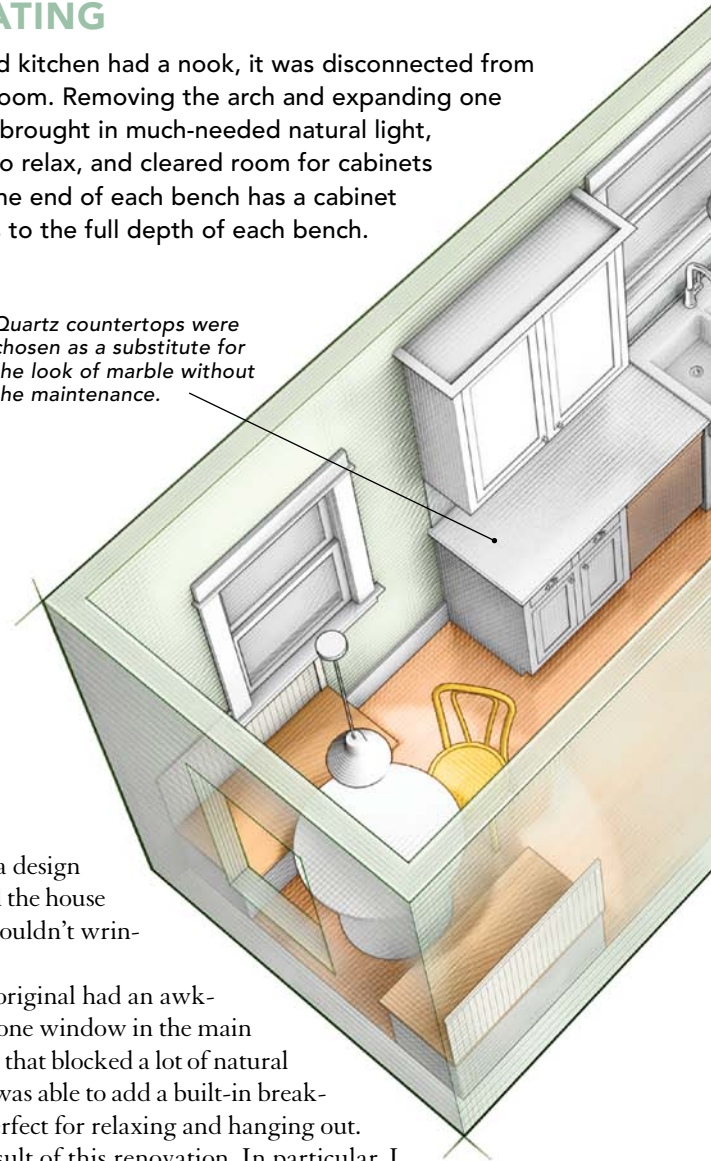


FROM PINTEREST TO PERFECTION

COZY SEATING

Although the old kitchen had a nook, it was disconnected from the rest of the room. Removing the arch and expanding one of the windows brought in much-needed natural light, created a spot to relax, and cleared room for cabinets and counters. The end of each bench has a cabinet door that opens to the full depth of each bench.

Quartz countertops were chosen as a substitute for the look of marble without the maintenance.



DETAILS

Dishwasher Miele Futura Classic 4225 with cutlery tray

Sink faucet Ikea Hjuvik

Sink Ikea Domsjö double bowl

Pendant light West Elm Mini Industrial Glass Pendant

Hood Vent-A-Hood K30 Pro Series

Range KitchenAid Architect Series II five-burner gas double-oven

Refrigerator KitchenAid Architect Series II French-door

Light fixture Schoolhouse Electric Factory Light No. 4 Pendant

edly drawn to this sort of look. I knew I wanted a design that would be timeless enough that if I were to sell the house 10 years down the road, the prospective buyers wouldn't wrinkle their noses.

My final goal was to open the kitchen up. The original had an awkward L-shape, with two windows in a nook and one window in the main area along with a weird archway between the two that blocked a lot of natural light from entering. By removing the archway, I was able to add a built-in breakfast nook, creating a well-lit, open space that is perfect for relaxing and hanging out.

I did lose some of the old-house charm as a result of this renovation. In particular, I was sorry to see the black-tile border and the ventilated cabinets under the sink go, but now the sink area is much more timeless and functional with the white tile and neutral cabinetry. I went with a double-bowl farmer's sink from Ikea. The faucet reaches all corners of the huge sink, and it has excellent spraying capacity. Washing sheet pans and giant woks has never been easier. And now that I have a dishwasher and no longer keep dirty dishes in the sink, I'm amazed at how much tension has been relieved.

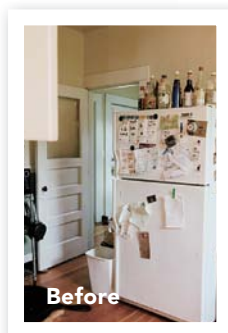
People turn to magazines and websites for inspiration, but it's important to remember that the spaces depicted there are exaggerations; what you're seeing is everything at its best/shiniest/happiest/most Pinterest-worthy. In reality, there's a large unphotogenic drying rack by my sink, and the double-oven range is always splattered with grease. There are weird sticky puddles on every surface of the kitchen. Outside the frame of every shiny, sparkling picture is a messier reality most don't see. The greatest testament to the success of my remodel is that my kitchen is lived in, and it doesn't really look like the pictures you see. □

Michelle Lopez is the blogger and baker behind Hummingbird High (hummingbirdhigh.com). Photos by Celeste Noche, except where noted.



VERSATILE STORAGE

This side of the kitchen used to be dimly lit and had excessive and oddly sized storage that wasn't actually all that useful, which led to tons of clutter. These new long and tall cabinets are perfect for sheet pans, baking trays, and bottles containing cooking oil and vinegar. Multiple drawers store a variety of cooking utensils within arm's reach of the range.



COUNTER INTELLIGENCE

Replacing the obtrusive refrigerator is a counter (right) that creates the author's dream bake station. The drawers and cupboards below are filled with measuring utensils, spatulas, cake pans, and pie plates. Above the counter is a glass cabinet full of baking ingredients (left).