



The Smart, Small Kitchen

Finding a home for the fridge was the key to designing a tiny kitchen for serious cooking

BY DANA MOORE

There are plenty of reasons to postpone a kitchen remodel. Cost and inconvenience are at the top of the list. On the other hand, there are plenty of reasons not to wait another minute. We spend a lot of time in the kitchen; updating this space can add comfort and value to a home. After years of procrastination, my friends and would-be clients, Ann Reavey and Peter Gilbert, suddenly opted to go for it, but the reason for their unexpected inspiration was unusual.

A family of sewer rats had gnawed its way into Ann and Peter's 1945 colonial and nested in the ceiling above the kitchen. Sure, the existing kitchen was small, cramped, and inefficient, but it was the rat family scurrying around overhead that sealed the old kitchen's fate. It was time for a change.

How we moved the fridge into the living room

At first glance, Ann and Peter's 10-ft. by 10-ft. L-shaped kitchen seemed fine.

There appeared to be plenty of cabinets, and the full range of appliances was in working order. However, a number of problems could not be overcome in the existing layout.

When hooked up to the sink, a portable dishwasher made one side of the room inaccessible. The kitchen-sink window overlooked the neighbor's house instead of Ann and Peter's meticulously tended backyard garden. The refrigerator and a radiator shared a wall where there was no direction for the fridge door to

WARM, MODERN MATERIALS AND HARDWORKING HARDWARE

Paired with a soft, brick-colored cork floor, the green concrete counters, light-maple butcher-block prep station, and caramel-colored bamboo cabinets represent a range of durable, modern, and ecofriendly materials. Readily available but rarely used cabinet hardware makes the most of the tricky spots in the corners and above the fridge. Photo left taken at A on floor plan.



A double-hinged door for a wide-open corner cabinet. Using bifold cup hinges (Blum part No. 79T8500), the cabinet-maker put together two doors to create a full-access corner cabinet. Photos taken at B on floor plan.

swing without causing trouble. It would either bang into the radiator, stopping halfway open, or it would trap someone helplessly between the door and the wall ("Before" floor plan, p. 86).

The old kitchen might have worked for some people, but Ann and Peter are avid cooks who needed more counter space, more storage, and a smarter layout. They wanted useful workstations, better lighting, and a sense of spaciousness. My challenge



Helpful hydraulics. A garage-style door reveals a recessed cabinet above the fridge. The door lifts easily with assistance from a hydraulic lift (Häfele part No. 373.71.902). Photos taken at C on floor plan.



was to achieve all of these goals in a 100-sq.-ft. space.

One of the best things I did on this job was to introduce Ann and Peter to contractor Chris Arias. The first thing Chris noticed was that he could add space to the kitchen by adjusting a doorway and moving the refrigerator to a corner of the living room (floor plan below). I took the idea a step farther and suggested that the best outcome would be if the borrowed corner not only improved the kitchen but also gave something back to the living room.

We decided to hide the fridge with a built-in that faces into the living room (photo facing page). An arched niche mirrors other arched openings in the house and offers a focal point from the front door. Shelves above and a base cabinet below create much-needed storage space in the living room. Finally, the new wall behind the fridge provided a

great place to relocate the radiator and to incorporate a floor-to-ceiling CD rack.

The prep station adds a fourth corner to the work triangle

Once the refrigerator had a home, the rest of the kitchen fell easily into a diamond-shaped arrangement with distinct workstations for food prep, cooking, and cleanup (photos below, facing page).

The kitchen had two existing windows. One faced northwest toward a neighbor's back door; the other faced southwest to Ann and Peter's backyard. We kept their locations but replaced the old double-hung windows with casement windows and moved the sink to face the backyard. To create a useful cleanup station, we placed a new dishwasher next to the sink.

The sink's original location became a food-prep area. Peter wanted a section of butcher block at a lower height for chop-

ping vegetables and kneading bread dough. After he simulated working at different heights, we found that the right counter height for Peter was 34½ in. The prep counter is only 20 in. deep, so the two corner base cabinets have large openings for more-accessible deep storage. The upper corner cabinets flanking this workstation also open wide thanks to double-hinged doors (center photos, p. 85).

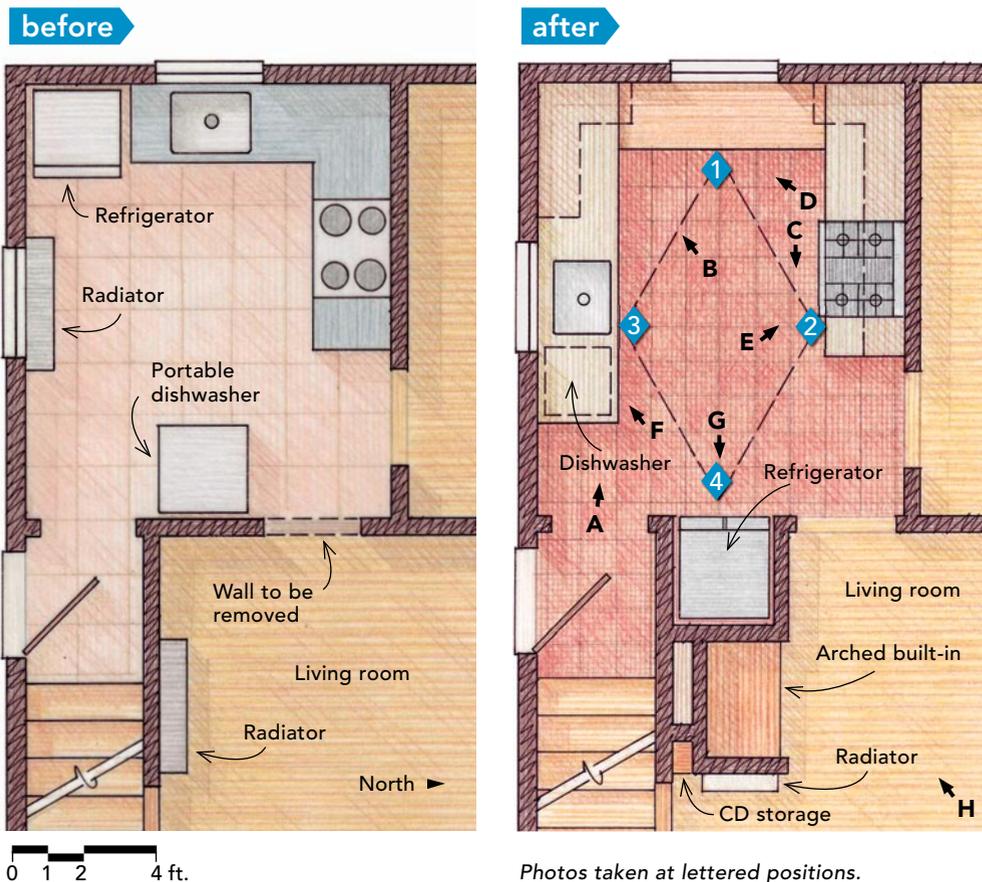
The range stayed in its original location. Ample counter space on both sides provides a landing zone for pots, pans, and ingredients. To complete this work area, a microwave is built into the cabinets above and has an integral fan that vents outside.

The kitchen's style evolved as the project progressed

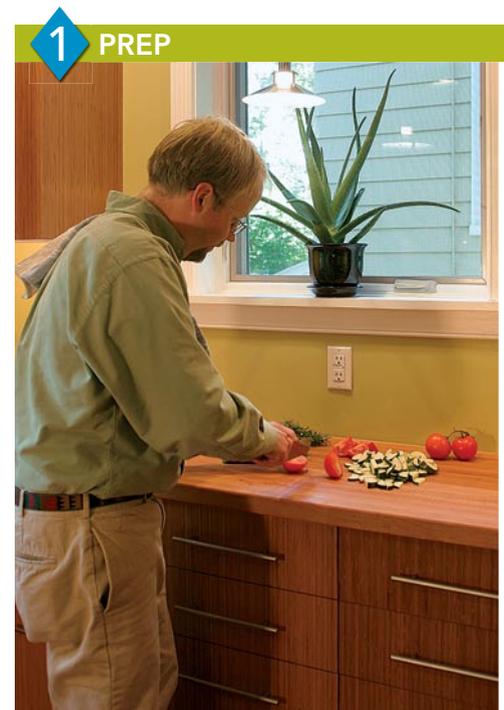
Because the renovation began so suddenly, Ann and Peter didn't really know

A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

Borrowing living-room floor space for the refrigerator was a good idea that allowed the architect to create a smart, diamond-shaped working arrangement in the small kitchen. In barely 100 sq. ft., this kitchen includes dedicated stations for prepping, baking, and cooking, as well as for cleanup and cold storage.



Photos taken at lettered positions.



The 20-in.-deep butcher-block counter is 34½ in. tall, the perfect height for the homeowners to chop vegetables or knead dough. Photo taken at D on floor plan.

what they wanted their finished kitchen to look like. Their main objective was to make the room seem more spacious and functional. They also wanted to use ecofriendly products where possible. To meet these needs, we created clean lines with straight runs of concrete countertop and single-height wall cabinets with flat-panel doors.

Cabinetmaker Rob Staropoli made the cabinets from Plyboo bamboo plywood (www.plyboo.com). Paired with a maple butcher-block counter at the prep station (www.johnboos.com), the green concrete countertops and the caramel-colored bamboo set a warm and modern tone for the kitchen (photo p. 84).

The brick-colored cork-tile floor fits right into the palette of colors and textures. Its natural spring makes cork a wonderful material underfoot (www.fastfloors.com).

Finally, we flooded the kitchen with light. The room has four recessed cans; pendant lights (Sonneman Loft Pendant, SM-3091-37; www.lightingbygregory.com) centered over the sink and the food-prep station; and undercabinet light strips ([**Bonus built-in.** Rearranging the passageway between the living room and the kitchen made space for the fridge outside the kitchen proper. In the living room, an arched built-in hides the refrigerator and creates a display niche with extra storage. Photo taken at H on floor plan.](http://www.lucifer</p>
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lighting.com). This flexible arrangement of fixtures allows the kitchen to have either bright task lighting or an ambient glow, depending on Ann and Peter's needs.

Although the room is small, the variety of materials we chose does not overwhelm it. They all work together to make this an elegant and extremely functional little kitchen. Ann and Peter marvel that such an interesting space could replace the previous kitchen; it almost makes them thankful for the sewer rats that instigated the project. Almost, but not quite. □

Dana Moore is an architect who lives and works in Richmond, Va. Photos by Brian Pontolilo, except where noted.



2 COOK



Plenty of counter space near the free-standing gas range and convection oven accommodates pots and pans. Above, a microwave with an integral fan vents outside. Photo taken at E on floor plan.

3 CLEAN UP



With a picturesque garden view above, the sink and the dishwasher are surrounded by adequate counter space for quick cleanup. Photo taken at F on floor plan.

4 CHILL



The placement of the fridge not only opened up the kitchen, but its convenient location close to the living room also makes it easy to grab a drink without bumping into the cooks. Photo taken at G on floor plan.