

With hints of the Shaker style, this kitchen's more modern leanings are subtle, but important

BY BRIAN PONTOLILO

Nestled in the heart of Westchester County, Bedford, N.Y., is within reasonable commuting distance to Manhattan with its own stop on Metro-North Railroad's Harlem Line. To those not familiar with the landscape of New York's Hudson Valley, that may conjure images of cookie-cutter neighborhoods. The area is home to many of New York City's daily refugees, but it is also home to farmland, dirt roads, and some of the most charming antique houses in the country.

This kitchen is in one such home. A home-steader's dwelling originally built in 1830, the house started as an understated, one-and-a-half-story farmhouse and was remodeled and added onto regularly over its nearly 200-year history, most recently when it was purchased by a family with three young children. They were attracted to the idyllic stream that runs through the property, the backyard pool where their children could make summertime memories, and the house's storied character. Charming as it was, it would take some work to make the house livable for the new family, who like to entertain. The kitchen would have to do some heavy lifting.

To help get the design right, the owners hired Rafe Churchill. Rafe is a co-founder of Hendricks Churchill, an architecture and interior design firm in Sharon, Conn., and is fluent in early American architecture and the new/old-home aesthetic.

"This was clearly an evolved house," Rafe explains. "The last family owned the house for 40 years, and it had been shaped to their changing family needs. The goal was to start over and to make it work for this family, and to accommodate guests."

Starting over in a protected home means starting over with sensitivity. To make the kitchen work spatially, Rafe designed a 16-ft. 6-in. by 6-ft. 8-in. bump-out addition. This was the only part of the project that included a change in footprint, but it still required approval because the house sits squarely in a historic district. The long run of custom Mar-





Traditional at First Glance

vin windows is one detail that helped to tie the new addition to the rest of the house.

Rafe's goal for the windows on projects like this is to maintain the same pane proportions as the original windows. He says that the height-to-width ratio of the lites is the most significant detail to maintain. In this case, he also kept the 8-over-8 lite patterns of the double-hung windows. The window sash color is Farrow & Ball's Down Pipe, a deep charcoal with some green in it, similar to the Essex Green and Black Forest Green commonly found on the doors and shutters of historic homes throughout the Northeast.

The large bank of windows helped to meet another of the homeowner's goals—a light-filled interior. "They wanted as much natural light as possible in the kitchen," Rafe says. "What's nice is the sunlight is indirect"—the windows face northeast.

The window color pairs well with the soapstone used for the counters, backsplash, and custom-made sink. Not only does the sink have a seamless look and the stylish farmhouse aesthetic many are after, it is oversize at 2 ft. 9½ in. across the front, 1 ft. 4 in. front to back, and 10 in. deep. Rafe has a similar sink in his home and is enthusiastic about its performance.

"One you have one of these, you wonder how you ever lived with a regular 30-in. sink," he says. "Soapstone is soft, and the sink will stain and chip and develop a patina and that all adds to the authenticity."

The black-walnut island counter has an oil finish. It is food-safe, but not as durable as some other options, and therefore will also age naturally. Similarly, the unlacquered-brass cabinet hardware from Rejuvenation and faucet from Waterworks will take on a living finish, appropriate for a house of this age. Rafe mentions that if you don't want them to wear, it's important to make sure to order hardware and fixtures with a finish.

While the kitchen island is set apart from the cabinetry and designed to appear as a freestanding piece of furniture, the cabinetry recalls the simplicity of the Shaker style.

"There's no doubt that the word Shaker was thrown around a little," Rafe says of his interactions with the homeowners. "But at the same time, they wanted the kitchen to feel more contemporary."

Rafe says that the Shaker style was ahead of its time, always pared down and understated. He explains how, if you subtly change the dimensions of the cabinet's face frames and the doors' stiles and rails, you can easily shift





THE CLEAN LOOK OF SOAPSTONE

The kitchen is tied together with a deep-green soapstone used for the counters, backsplash, and sink. The stone is appropriate for the house's historic vintage and connects the lighter-colored interior finishes to the window color and landscape beyond. An oversize custom sink is a must-have once you've lived with one, the architect says.



toward a more contemporary look. And that is what he did in this case.

“Shaker stiles would likely be more like 2¼ in., or even 2½ in. wide. Rails might be as wide as 1½ in.,” he explains. “Here, the stile dimensions are 1¾ in. wide. The rails are 1¼ in. wide.”

The custom cabinetry was built by a local company, R.C. Torre Construction, and the cabinets and millwork are finished with Farrow & Ball’s Dove Tale. The island is painted with the company’s Manor House Gray.

There are a few more details that lend to the kitchen’s modern look, including the Sub-Zero fridge, Wolf range, and pair of Muuto pendants that hang over the island. The new flooring is white oak finished with Dinesen oil. The bar stools are a vintage find and a place where the homeowners’ kids regularly hang out in the kitchen. Kathryn Fagin of KJ Designs was the interior designer on the project, and helped with many of these selections.

One interesting decision was to lower the kitchen floor. After completing the addition, Rafe was standing in the space during a meeting with the owners. Rafe is a tall man and his presence made them aware of how low the kitchen ceiling was. By the end of the meeting, they had determined to take up and lower the floor. This meant reducing the number of steps leading from the entry into the kitchen and adding steps connecting the kitchen to the dining room and a hallway.

“When a house evolves like this one has, you often get all of these steps happening,” Rafe explains. “In this case we were able to remove one step, which made a big difference. So, by dropping the floor, we improved the flow. Because having a step at one end of the kitchen was a little unusual, and now there are steps in other locations, it makes more sense. It created the expectation of steps into and out of the kitchen. It’s also a nice way to define the space. The kitchen was large enough to handle a step up.”

This kitchen is a wonderful example of subtle design, true to the Shaker ideal of simplicity, but updated for modern time. Rafe says the homeowners’ interest in refining the details and designing a kitchen that worked for the family was refreshing and more fun than working in a vacuum. And clearly, expectations were set. It can’t be any other way in a kitchen that is meant to wear well. □

Brian Pontolilo is editorial director. Photos by Amanda Kirkpatrick.



STEP BY STEP BY DESIGN

The kitchen's floor plan is straightforward—the refrigerator, sink, and range create a work triangle that radiates around the island. The homeowners asked for a few particulars, like a pantry and coffee station, but their most significant request was for taller ceilings. The only viable path was to lower the floor. Now the kitchen is defined by a step separating it from all adjacent spaces.

