



Opening Up a Family Kitchen

Folding the functions of multiple rooms into one makes for a dynamic hub

BY ASA CHRISTIANA

After decades spent designing kitchens in and around Charlottesville, Virginia, Karen Turner is at the top of her game—carefully choosing her clients and working with them to craft efficient, inviting spaces that organize and enrich their lives. Her latest kitchen remodel is packed with tips and takeaways for upgrading the hub of any modern home. From function and flow to finishes and overall feel, Turner leaves nothing to chance. Part of her formula is a hand-picked group of local contractors, cabinetmakers, and carpenters. “It’s a huge relief when



Karen calls,” says Matt Nauman of Magnolia Design Group, the general contractor on the project. “I know it’s not going to be a run-of-the-mill kitchen, and I’ll be working with great people.”

Although this kitchen in Keswick is uncommonly large, Turner created it without changing the footprint or incurring unnecessary costs. “My philosophy is to make the house give you as much as it can, without adding on to it,” she explains. Like other top-notch kitchen designers and contractors, Turner focuses first on getting the bones right—the walls, windows, cabinets,

Signs of age. Not only was the existing kitchen significantly outdated in terms of finishes, its use was restricted to mealtimes. The family wanted it to function on multiple levels, which meant incorporating designated spaces to serve other aspects of their lives.

plumbing, HVAC, and electrical, which are the costliest to change—and then adding distinctive finishes that are easier to refresh someday down the road.

All in one

Like many aging kitchens, this one was disconnected from adjoining rooms and outdoor living areas. “The maze of small rooms pigeonholed the activities going on there,” Turner explains. “It didn’t flow. That was a deterrent to a family really living in the space and using it. My goal was to make it open, light-filled, and functional.”

Turner worked with Nauman to remove walls between the kitchen, mudroom, pantry, and home office, relocating the HVAC ducting as needed. Then she put those key functions back into an open floor plan, rolling the old laundry and office spaces into a larger kitchen that now contains expanded space and better flow for cooks and helpers, as well as a “planning desk,” mudroom lockers for the kids, and a “comfy chair zone”—a small seating area she likes to add whenever possible. While Turner couldn’t save the old pantry, which was reconfigured with other small rooms to create a new, larger laundry room, she did manage to get a hutch cabinet into the kitchen, which adds food storage and a bar area, with a small fridge in the bottom. The result is a place where family and friends can gather in a host of ways, working apart while being together.

Moving the laundry to an interior space gave the kitchen another exterior wall, creating an opportunity to add more windows. “They can enjoy the four seasons in Virginia while being tucked in a bright, warm space,” Turner notes.

At the rear end of the kitchen, an old triple window was traded for a much larger bank of glass doors and windows that lead to a new patio—letting life spill outdoors and light pour in.

Make it cook

“Whenever I do a kitchen, I always think about cooking in it,” says Turner. In this case, the large island is the main work surface and the zone divider. On the range/cooking side, there’s a prep sink, where veggies can be washed and pasta drained. On the main sink/cleanup side are two dishwashers, with the fridge placed for easy access. The trash pullout is on the end of the island for the same reason.

When kitchens are opened up and windows added, there are fewer spots for upper cabinets, so base cabinets have to work harder. On both sides of the island, the lower cabinets are packed with easily accessible drawers and rollouts. “You have to have things stored where you’re standing,” Turner notes. “You shouldn’t have to run around to get the colander and run somewhere else to drain noodles.”

Another key place to perform tasks is the big walnut-topped table that mirrors the height and size of the island. It is dedicated space for homework or craft projects, which don’t have to be tidied up for meal prep. The subcontractors collaborated to run a wire up through one leg to an outlet on the apron for charging electronics.

Aesthetic strategies

Symmetry and order are subtle but important. The windows, farm sink, prep sink, island, and range share the centerline. Matching door heights and sizes adds to the composed, settled feeling of the space. “You want a visual sense of order,” Turner explains. “Get rid of quirky weirdness.”



Calculated coffers. To create the coffered ceiling, the finish carpenter began by transferring layout lines up the walls to the ceiling, and then worked backward from the finished coffer dimensions as he attached framing and outer trim, using a laser level to line things up in every direction.

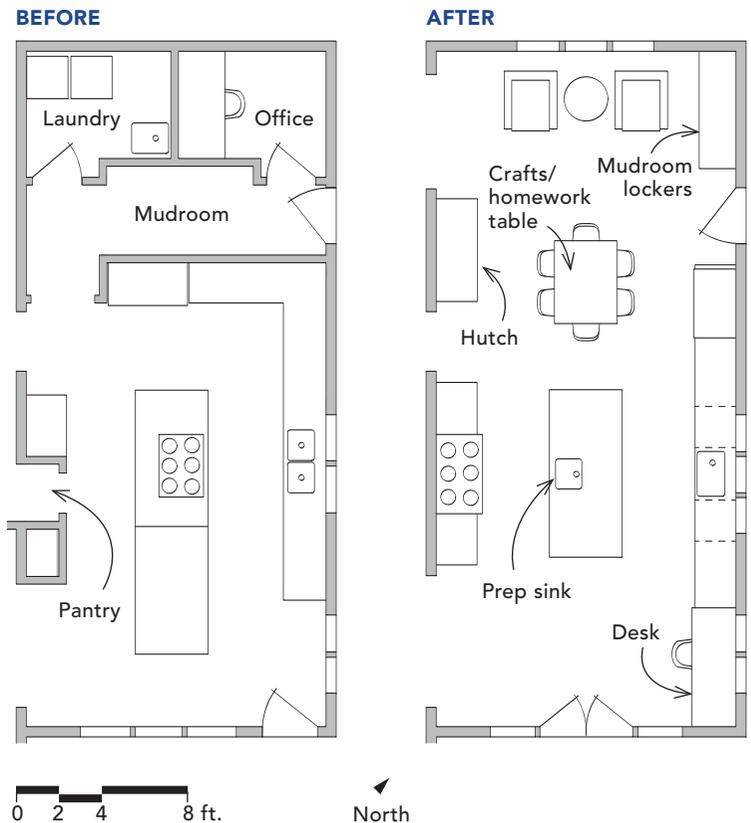
Colors play a key role in creating that order. “When you open things up, you have to bring it all together,” she says. “It shouldn’t feel like you are walking through a crayon box.” In this case, light blue-gray walls and soft-white trim create a calm atmosphere, while the bold blue island draws you to the center of the room. The blue-gray palette continues into adjoining spaces, with the blue tones deepening and the white trim staying consistent. Similarly, matching hardwood floors run throughout the house, and raw-brass hardware serves as another unifying element—demonstrating how a successful design connects spaces while making each one feel special.

To avoid a bowling-alley look in the long, tall kitchen, Turner added a deeply coffered ceiling. To retain the symmetry of the room, it was critical to line up the coffers with the other main elements—a challenge the construction team was ready to handle. To fine-tune the ceiling layout, Nauman and finish carpenter Darren Wilkins drew the cabinets, windows, doorways, and coffers on the subfloor in different chalk colors, redrawing the latter until everything lined up nicely.



SAME FOOTPRINT, MORE FUNCTIONS

The design called for knocking down walls between the kitchen, mudroom, home office, laundry room, and pantry. The idea was for those elements to exist in an open floor plan that allows for comfortable flow, better organization, and more ways for people to be together.



Transitional style at play

The natural light, clean lines, and bright tones are not only a peaceful backdrop for life, they're also a neutral setting for traditional touches that recall the past and make the space welcoming and personal. Here, the coffered ceiling, wood floors, walnut countertops, and beaded and molded cabinetry tie the kitchen to its region.

To enhance the room's handcrafted character, Turner spec'd gray zellige tile—a popular Moroccan terra-cotta that changes color with the light—for the backsplash. The countertops are honed quartzite, which offers the look of natural marble without issues of staining or susceptibility to damage. Another of Turner's favorite touches is furniture-style cabinetry; these cabinets include restoration glass and traditional brass butt hinges. And, as always, there is plenty of space for the personal items that bring a kitchen to life. □

Asa Christiana is a contributing editor working in Portland, Ore. Photos by Jason Ward, Ward Photography, except where noted.



Bright and practical. The "planning desk" offers a designated place for the family to pay bills or work on a laptop. Above it to one side are personal cubbies for mail and other items.