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YEARLONG NEIGHBORHOOD

HOME SERVICES+REFERENCE GUIDE

FRESH FROM THE OVEN

What to do when your dated kitchen fights you every teaspoon on a gourmet meal? Bring in the experts, of course, and knock down some walls

STORY BY Keri Mitchell PHOTOS BY Scott Williams

No matter whether we are gourmet chefs or can barely boil water, all of us spend quite a bit of our lives in the kitchen. Whether whipping up a batch of homemade cookies or hosting this month's book club, we want it to be a place both functional and beautiful.

Yet many homes in our neighborhoods were built during decades when kitchen uses and design were vastly different. Lucky for us, many interior design companies have mastered the art of taking small, dated kitchens and reinventing them.

RECIPE
FOR A PERFECT KITCHEN REMODEL

These days, people want their kitchens to have a more open feel. Since people tend to congregate in the kitchen, the trend is making it part of the living room area, instead of having two separate rooms. The Burke Company, a remodeling design-build firm, has performed this "operation" on kitchens built as early as the 1900s and as late as 1998, and project developer Abby Keyes has advice for anyone else wanting to make changes:

- If you want a complete overhaul, the best thing to do is find a remodeler. Work with a designer to come up with plans, especially if you're removing walls or replacing plumbing.
- If you remodel your own kitchen, the best thing is to use licensed plumbers and electricians. It's faster, and will cost less money in the long run.
- If you use a contractor, make sure the company is reputable and insured. Choosing a company in the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) is best because they have to be insured and have good work history and reputations.
- Design the kitchen for yourself. Don't worry about what the resale value will be — you're the one who has to live in the kitchen.

Headed toward retirement

A stainless steel refrigerator takes over the sink's former space, with enough room up top for a flat screen television.

With a Super Susan (a two-tier Lazy Susan) in the corner, Connie says she no longer has to stand on her head to reach something.

Cabinetry is extended all the way to the ceiling, replacing the wallpaper-covered fur downs, and matching crown molding creates the finishing touch.

New cabinetry adds storage to what was once dead space.

A sink "island" with African Jewel granite countertops replaces the range, which had a couple of drawers for pots and pans but not much else.

The new "triangle" of the sink, refrigerator and stove allows the Reynoldses to stand at the sink and have everything needed for cooking and cleaning within arm's reach.

Before its transformation, the kitchen in Connie and Steve Reynolds' early 1970s Preston Hollow-area ranch house was isolated and full of obstructions. The couple hired Kitchen Design Concepts to knock down the walls separating the kitchen from the dining room and breakfast nook, and the firm also moved practically everything around to make it more user-friendly.

"Now everything's within a step, and I think as we get older that's going to be more and more important," says Connie. "My husband and I are in our mid- to late-50s, so we intend to stay here until they carry us out."

the details:

RAISED DISHWASHER
Now the Reynolds family doesn't have to bend over to load and unload. Connie's mother believes that of all the changes, this one made the biggest difference.

WALK-IN WET BAR CONVERTED TO A DRY BAR
Previously, the Reynolds family used this space as an extra storage closet. The new dry bar includes a wine rack and plenty of space to store glasses, not to mention a state-of-the-art wine refrigerator.

SHALLOW SHELVES
Because of all of the added cabinetry, these shelves didn't need to be so deep, and their limited depth makes things easier to find.

SILAGRANIT SINK
The new surface hides scratches and stains better than stainless steel or porcelain, and Connie believes it's easier on her dishes. She also added a filter, which enabled her to get rid of her bottled water.

Improving an investment

The refrigerator switches places with the stove, creating more room for cabinetry. Previously, only two drawers and four cabinets provided storage for the entire kitchen.

The cabinetry, created by Ultracraft in concert with designers from Sacile, Italy, features the distinctive Eurotek finish and adds to the kitchen's contemporary feel.

An undermounted microwave is tucked away in a convenient spot, giving the kitchen more countertop space.

An avonite countertop accented by yellow pendant lights fill the sink area with amber tones, and the rounded counter adds even more warmth.

The sink moves from the left counter to the front, creating more space for the metal laminate countertop finished with brushed iron, which has the appearance of stainless steel.

The mid-century modern in Old Lake Highlands was being sold by its original owner, who had built the house in 1952, and Realtor Dori Warner couldn't resist. "Before I even walked in the door, I knew I was going to buy it," she says. "I also knew it was a project." She started with the kitchen because "it's the showcase of the house," and asked her designers for something open, bright, modern and clean. They took out the wall separating the kitchen from the living area and rearranged everything in the room — making Warner's 14-by-11-foot space seem much bigger.

the details:

CORK FLOORING:
It looks like something you'd stick in a wine bottle, and it's a softer material, friendlier to both your feet and the environment than traditional hardwoods.

SPICE CABINETS:
For easier access to those tiny containers of nutmeg and paprika, they pull up instead of out.

BOTTOM-DRAWER FREEZER:
If you're more likely to grab something out of the fridge than dig around in the freezer, this provides a more user-friendly alternative.

EXPOSED BEAMS:
Replacing the removed walls, they add both support and a decorative touch.

The hobby chefs

One tiny window gave way to a row of windows looking out over the couple's patio and bringing the back yard into the home.

Porter stores her KitchenAid mixer here, within arm's reach of the sink, rollout trashcan and convection oven. Now, her once-a-week chocolate chip cookie making takes 45 minutes instead of an hour and a half.

The kitchen's centerpiece is this tile mosaic. The couple loved the design and knew the cabinetry and stove would break it up enough so that it wouldn't overwhelm the small room.

To lengthen the kitchen, the couple took out a wall and extended into the dining room. No regrets there — they can still seat eight comfortably.

The duel fuel stove is nicknamed McCoy's "Harley." He likes to experiment with sauces, and the five burners allow him to multitask.

The water heater closet formerly cut into this portion of the kitchen; they moved it into the garage to open up the corner.

Betsy Porter attended a chef sale with the sole intention of buying a KitchenAid mixer, but things didn't quite work out that way. When she arrived home with Wüsthof knives, a Cuisinart toaster and armfuls of other cooking supplies, her husband, Richard McCoy, asked, "Where are you going to put it all?" Porter replied, "I don't know — would you like to build a new kitchen?"

The pair had needed more room for some time; the tiny space in their 1947 Gastonwood/Coronado Heights home wasn't enough for two people who spent as much time cooking as they did. Porter and McCoy asked their firm to double the kitchen's size and give it a complete overhaul.

the details:

APPLIANCE GARAGE:
The toaster and food processor are now stored underneath the microwave, plugged in and ready for use.

APPLIANCE LIFT:
Porter's beloved KitchenAid mixer is easily pulled out for use and placed back in storage with this moveable stand.

COOKBOOK NOOK:
Every inch of the room was utilized, including the extra space at the end of this counter, which was turned into cookbook storage shelves.

POTS AND PANS DRAWER:
A space for everything and everything in its space with this specialized drawer.