



A Fresh Start for a Farmhouse Kitchen

Wrapping a center stair with cabinets cleared the way for a sociable new kitchen with a breathtaking backdrop

BY SHAWN SWEENEY

In the same way that delicious meals start with a list of ingredients, great remodels begin with a prioritized list of what the owners want their house to become. Unlike recipes easily found in cookbooks and magazines, however, homes and homeowners are too different for a formulaic approach. Although I encourage my clients to look in home-design books and magazines for inspiration, some tough decisions can be made only during consultations between homeowners and designers.

For Christine Murray, the tough decision was choosing which part of her house to remodel first. Both floors suffered from the same problems: outdated finishes, dark and cramped spaces, and a lack of windows to take advantage of breathtaking views. But tackling both floors at once was out of the question. When we decided to begin by remodeling the first floor, the ingredients fell quickly into place.

Some remodels need a clean slate

Christine's house is located in a beautiful Shelburne, Vt., neighborhood. In spite of the view potential, however, you could barely see out of the place. The home's



A SOCIAL SITUATION

Removing the walls between kitchen and living room, and eliminating the seldom-used dining room created an open floor plan better suited to entertaining. Moving the basement stairwell's door made space for cabinets and gave the designer the freedom to capture scenic outdoor views with four new windows in the kitchen. Photo left taken at A on floor plan.

Before



After



Photos taken at lettered positions.



first floor was cut up into small spaces with a full wall separating the kitchen from the dining room, and partial walls between the dining and living rooms ("Before" floor plan, p. 69).

The original kitchen had room for a large dining table and was open to the family room. Its separation from the dining and living rooms, however, meant that these spaces were seldom used. Also, dark, old cabinets and too few windows made the kitchen feel closed in and dated.

First and foremost on Christine's wish list was a fresh new look. She had clipped a collection of magazine photos that revealed her interest in a number of styles, which we blended for a contemporary farmhouse feel. New cabinetry with traditional white beadboard, inset doors and drawers, and eclectic details would be easy to embellish with a variety of materials and finishes.

My priority for the project was to connect the kitchen to the dining and living rooms and to the surrounding countryside. A stairway in the center of the first floor couldn't be removed, but the walls between kitchen, dining room, and living room could. With the walls gone, the placement of the kitchen became ideal. These collaborative decisions gave us a clean slate on which to

create a new kitchen connected to the home's public spaces.

The kitchen is surrounded by social hot spots

Christine's house and her family's lifestyle had little to gain from a formal dining room. She does a lot of entertaining, and the old floor plan shut her off from the guests she was cooking for. With a table already in use between the kitchen and the family room, we decided to do away with the dining room and to expand the living room to fit a new fireplace ("After" floor plan, p. 69). Not only does the new plan provide long views from the kitchen into the family room in one direction and into the living room in the other, but it also provides distinct social areas. The casual family room is where kids typically play; the formal living room is where adults tend to gather. Between the two, the kitchen is the center of attention.

Two countertop seating areas turned out to be the glue that holds the plan together. Whether you approach the kitchen from the family room or the living room, there is a place to pull up a stool and sit down at a counter. This setup also provides plenty of counter space for Christine to work and to place food while entertaining. But the best thing about these seating areas might be the view.

Moving the cabinets inland optimized views

If we wanted to maximize the views, the kitchen had no room for a refrigerator or upper cabinets. This fact presented a design dilemma: Christine needed more storage than base cabinets alone could provide. She also wanted a small office area and a place for her china.

Brenda Eaton, an assistant designer on the project, suggested that we move the basement-stair door and wrap the entire stairwell with a built-in. The idea worked. The new built-in includes a china hutch, pantry cabinets, a desk, and a refrigerator. Most important, Brenda's idea cleared the way for four new windows in the kitchen.

In the end, we rearranged all the kitchen and living-room windows, capturing views wherever possible. Christine says that before the renovation, her friends had no idea how beautiful the views from her home were. Now, panoramas of the Green Mountains and Lake Champlain can be seen from much of the first floor. □

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WORKSTATIONS FOR EVERYONE

When family life revolves around the kitchen, it's just as important to have a well-designed office nearby as it is to have convenient cooking areas within.

A nook for the cook. An antiqued jade-tile backsplash draws attention to the cooking station (left). With a pot-filler faucet, spice shelves, and plenty of counter space around the range, this compact area packs a lot of convenience. Photo taken at D on floor plan.

Homework headquarters. The plan was to find a place for cabinets while keeping the kitchen's exterior walls clear for windows. The plan worked. A small office, a fridge, and plenty of storage fit neatly into a new built-in that wraps the home's center staircase. Photo below taken at E on floor plan.



NEW AND IMPROVED INTERIOR VIEWS

For a family that likes to entertain, the kitchen is open to two rooms, one for kids and one for adults.

The family room is for fun. Beyond the dining table and the built-in hutch is the family room (above), where a new entertainment center lures children. From the kitchen, the cook can keep a close eye on the action. Photo above taken at B on floor plan.

The living room is for entertaining. Removing a wall opened the kitchen to the living room, where adults are seduced by the warmth of a new stone fireplace (right). Four chairs fit alongside a large mahogany countertop that provides plenty of space to set food when the homeowners entertain. Photo right taken at C on floor plan.



"Before" photo: Shawn Sweeney. Photo top left: Susan Tranc. Drawings: Vince Bajak.