



A Perfect Kitchen Grows Up

An architect redesigns her kitchen to meet the needs of a maturing family

BY SOPHIE PIESSE

Had someone asked me about my kitchen in 1999, I would have said it was perfect. As a centerpiece of the new home we had just built, it met the particular needs of myself and my husband. Even several years later when our first son was born, the space continued to fit us perfectly. In fact, it matched our lifestyle so well that it was written up in two magazines as a prime example of a comfortable, functional, family-friendly kitchen.

This kitchen that we had designed for ourselves as first-time homeowners on a very tight budget had served us well when

we needed little more than a modest but comfortable kitchen, centrally located, near the entry to the house. At the time, we also wanted a home with an open plan that incorporated the living and dining areas, brought in ample daylight, and felt connected to the outdoors. We wanted it to be affordable and as green as possible.

To control some of the costs, we assembled and installed the Ikea cabinets ourselves, and we chose laminate counters. We got some great deals on appliances, which allowed us to splurge on a tall and very energy-efficient 14-cu.-ft. ConServ refrigerator/freezer. In 1999, it was way ahead of the curve on effi-



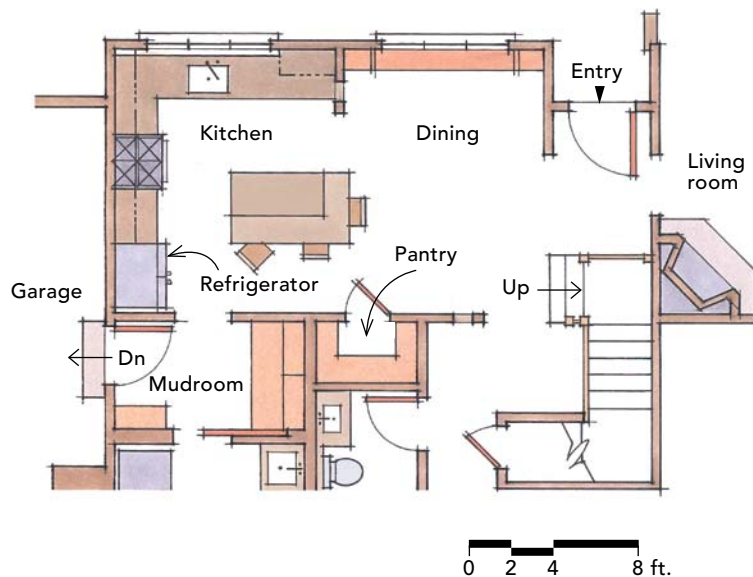
2014

PRIORITIES CHANGE, A KITCHEN ADAPTS

The author's original kitchen, featured in *Inspired House* magazine in 2004, was a cozy space carefully planned to complement the lifestyle of a family just starting out. Years later, with two growing sons in the family, the kitchen needed to grow up, too. Keeping within the same footprint, the author enlarged the island to accommodate multiple cooks and activities while adding a coffee bar, a larger refrigerator, more storage, and a deeper sink. A more contemporary, sophisticated palette emphasizes the new family dynamic.



2004



ciency, and its compact size worked well for a couple, and even a family of three.

Kitchens need to grow, too

Fast-forward to 2014. That first son had become an active 13-year-old, with a younger brother who was all energy. We'd already remodeled much of the house (adding a playroom and an expanded mudroom) to match the new family dynamic, but we also reached the conclusion that our kitchen wasn't quite as perfect as it once had been.

As a residential architect, I renovate a lot of kitchens. The conversations I have with my clients always focus on how the kitchen

serves the family and how it should complement their lives. But what I also discuss with them—and what I now needed to talk about with my own family—is how our kitchens need to grow with us.

Good bones, but different needs

Fifteen years later, the kitchen's basic layout still worked great, as did the lighting, the appliance locations, the size, and the connection to the rest of the house and to the outdoors. But the kitchen now served a busy family of four. Our two boys enjoy helping us cook, and we all love to entertain and to hang out in the kitchen.

We now needed workstations for multiple cooks and a serious increase in our food-storage capacity. Young boys, it seems, eat their weight in food every week, and teenage boys eat twice that. It soon became clear that we needed a much larger fridge, and a bigger cooktop and sink.

We found the original kitchen lacking in a few other areas: Standardized Ikea cabinetry did not provide the most efficient use of space, especially in our small kitchen. We needed more functional, easily accessible storage. Cheaper materials (cabinets and countertops, lighting, appliances) fit our budget at the time, but now that we were plan-

Like our family, the kitchen has matured to reflect our style



Crowd pleaser. The new "coffee altar" keeps hot-beverage supplies neat but accessible behind a stainless tambour door. Mugs, cups, and saucers reside in the drawer below.

Cabinet collaboration. Designed by the author to maximize function (see "Great Ideas, p. 28), the cabinets were built by Mark Burford and mix glass doors from Ikea's Jutis line with doors and drawer fronts made from stranded bamboo (plyboo.com). The floor is the original colored concrete, accented by a new rug that was designed by the author using carpet tiles from Flor (flor.com). The backsplash tiles are from the Crystile Wave series.

Location Carrboro, N.C.

Design Sophie Piesse, sophiepiesse.com

Cabinetmaker Mark Burford,
wooddoneright.com





ning to stay in this house for the long haul, many of those items needed to be replaced.

Similar goals, new priorities

We still wanted to select environmentally friendly materials and energy-efficient appliances, and we also still felt the need to be fiscally responsible.

Keeping the same space but using it better enabled us to do both. We didn't move any doors or windows, and we kept the original floor, a colored-concrete radiant slab on grade. This allowed us to focus our creativity and resources elsewhere. We splurged on locally made recycled-glass countertops (environite.com), stranded bamboo cabinets, and aluminum-laminate toe kicks (richelieu.com), which make the cabinets seem to float.

Retaining the layout also allowed us to focus on making our cabinets function better. We designed a storage area over the fridge to accommodate our baking trays, tins, and platters, and another to store frying pans vertically alongside the range. We installed a two-tier spice drawer as well as an organized space for utensils, knives, trivets, and gadgets. Dishes moved to a base-cabinet drawer so that the kids can easily unpack the adjacent dishwasher. An extralarge (33-in.

by 18-in. by 10-in.) sink (ukinox.com) keeps soaking dishes hidden.

I dislike lazy susans, so I used the corner cabinet for a trash pullout. It fits two 35-qt. bins for trash and recycling, with room on the side for dish towels. The cabinet pulls out diagonally on full-extension slides and is equipped with a toe hole in the bottom for hands-free operation.

Our favorite addition is our "coffee altar," a garage with everything needed for coffee or tea. Mugs, cups, and saucers are stored directly below.

Finally, we reoriented and expanded the island (which originally sat only two people) to seat our whole family comfortably. It has since become our primary workstation (see "An island expands," below).

Do these changes mean that our kitchen was not so perfect the first time? Not necessarily. It was a great kitchen for who we were then. But I have grown as a mother and an architect, and my kitchen needed to do the same. Like our family, the kitchen has matured to reflect our style and our needs today—and hopefully for many more years to come. □

Sophie Piesse is a residential architect in Carrboro, N.C. Photos by the author.

An island expands



The original kitchen island measured 36 in. by 48 in. and included seating for two. It had a 15-in. drawer stack and a sink cabinet. (The island was plumbed for a prep sink that proved to be unnecessary.) Redesigned, it now measures 39 in. by 68 in. and has comfortable seating for four. The waterfall countertop is striking and shows off the beauty of both the Environite and the stranded bamboo as it flows from one end to the other. (It also helps stop legs from sticking out into the traffic flow.) The island incorporates an easily accessible duplex outlet; a pullout chopping board; and drawer storage for knives, mixing bowls, measuring spoons, Tupperware, towels, and utensils. A separate drawer is dedicated to plastic wrap, tin foil, and other school-lunch needs. The new orientation makes meal prep very efficient, with the sink, dish drawers, and a large drawer for small appliances all located within a few steps of a lovely large island top to spread everything out on.