



From Dead-End Kitchen to Drop-Dead Gorgeous

Removing a wall and adding an island improve traffic flow and storage space in a Craftsman-style kitchen

BY LINDER JONES

Some cooks subscribe to the culinary-cockpit theory and want everything at their fingertips. Good organization and a compact work area can make the cooking process more efficient. These days, though, most kitchens aren't just for cooking. They're the center of a home's activities and require more space. Because the design/build firm I work for handles quite a few kitchen-remodeling projects, we've found that the trick to making a bigger kitchen without blowing the budget is to rework the existing floor plan.

Rethinking the plan

Our clients' ranch house was built in 1980, and the kitchen was ripe for renovation. The U-shaped work area lacked both counter and storage space; half the kitchen was used for an eating area, despite the adjacent dining room, which was used only twice a year. During parties, guests gathered in the cramped kitchen because they felt isolated in the living room and as a result wouldn't congregate there. In the summertime, the sun's heat penetrated the uninsulated vaulted ceiling, making the whole space

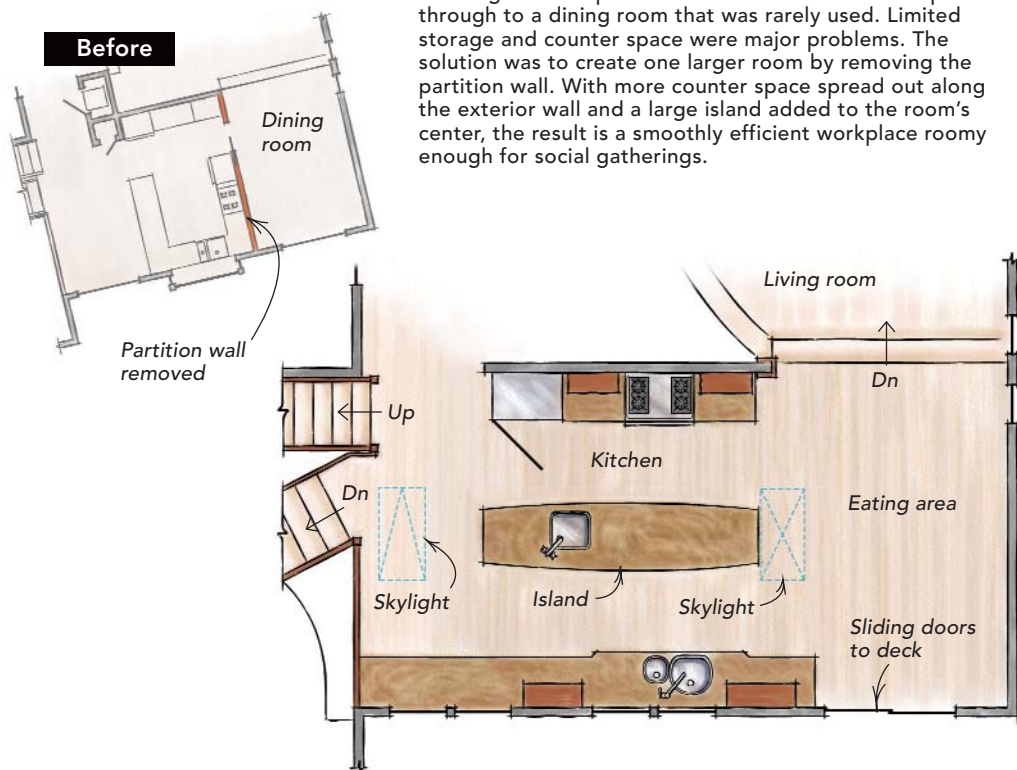


Look familiar? The host home to this remodel was about 25 years old and built in a prevalent style that didn't consider the kitchen as the true center of the house. This remodel created more floor space, revamped the lighting scheme, and expressed the Arts and Crafts style with factory-made cherry cabinets.



Before

REMOVE OBSTACLES, AND THE SPACE WILL BLOSSOM



The original floor plan shows a small kitchen with a pass-through to a dining room that was rarely used. Limited storage and counter space were major problems. The solution was to create one larger room by removing the partition wall. With more counter space spread out along the exterior wall and a large island added to the room's center, the result is a smoothly efficient workplace roomy enough for social gatherings.

uncomfortable. Another concern was lack of backyard access. The homeowners thought an addition would solve their problems. We convinced them otherwise.

Tear down the walls—carefully

The obvious way to get more space was to remove the partition wall between the dining room and kitchen, creating one big room with better access to the backyard. The new open floor plan provides plenty of space for guests and also allows easy flow between entry, kitchen, dining area, and living room. The dining area now can be used all the time, which frees the space formerly occupied by the kitchen table.

The wall between the kitchen and living room had to stay; it is load-bearing and a shear wall. We shortened it slightly and re-engineered it to meet seismic-code regulations.

To address the heat issues, we installed R-30 rigid-foam insulation between the exposed ceiling rafters, then covered the foam with custom V-grooved plywood and 1x6 battens to give the ceiling a rustic look.

Even a stock kitchen needs custom details

Once the space was gutted, we could begin to build the new kitchen. To maximize the

work area, we lined both walls with counters and also added a large island in the center of the room. The homeowners selected cherry Arts and Crafts-style cabinets from Medallion Cabinetry (952-442-5171; www.medallioncabinetry.com); we added the matching cherry trim to the windows, doors, and baseboards.

The kitchen island has a $\frac{3}{4}$ -in.-thick granite counter with a large overhang at one end. To maintain a slim edge profile and not clutter the space underneath the island with any supports, our carpenters routed channels into the countertop's $\frac{5}{8}$ -in.-thick plywood substrate, then screwed and glued two $\frac{1}{4}$ -in.-thick

A CLEVER WAY TO LOSE THE BRACKETS



To support the weight of the island's cantilevered granite counter, carpenters routed broad cavities into the $\frac{5}{8}$ -in.-thick plywood substrate, then screwed and glued two $\frac{1}{4}$ -in.-thick steel plates in place.





steel plates in place (photos bottom right, facing page).

A support post at one end of the shear wall gave us the opportunity to create an architectural element that enhances the kitchen's Craftsman style and introduces the style to both the living room and the dining area. The two-riser steps that lead from the dining area to the living room and from the entry to the living room converge at what we call the totem pole, integrating both elements.

A rear-deck addition with a hot tub and trellis creates a wonderful extension to the kitchen. To unify the two spaces, we set the deck height equal to the kitchen floor. Downlights on the four trellis posts provide enough light for nighttime activities.

Dark and light.

Warm cherry tones unify the cabinets with trim details and with the custom-built light tray suspended above the island. Small low-voltage down lights are installed on the underside of the tray. Ambient light is provided by fluorescent fixtures hidden in tray sections.

Kitchens need lots of light

Any kitchen remodel requires close attention to lighting design, which should incorporate plenty of task lighting as well as ambient light. Because California's energy code requires the use of fluorescent lighting in kitchens, we installed fluorescent strips underneath the wall cabinets. We also designed

a light tray to hang over the island, containing both fluorescent and low-voltage task lights. Without the tray, the lights would have been recessed into the ceiling, requiring more light power and also making lamp replacement more difficult. The task lights are controlled with dimmers; now the homeowners can create a more formal dining ambience in the kitchen.

To inject some daylight into the kitchen, we added two Velux skylights (800-888-3589; www.velux-america.com). One skylight is fixed, and the other (model VSE 106-74) has a remote control that opens or closes the vent and also operates the skylight's shade. The unit also has a rain sensor that closes the skylight automatically. □

Linder Jones, a general building contractor and design director for Harrell Remodeling Inc. in Mountain View, Calif., worked with designer Lisa Wasserman-Sivan on this project. Photos by David Livingston, except where noted.