A New Kitchen From an Old Tree



BEFORE

A bottleneck choked the space. *A bump-out housing the refrigerator blocked floor space, light and a sightline to the deck. Photo taken at A on floor plan.*

In Seattle, a Craftsman-style kitchen is recast with a new floor plan and wood from an ancient log

BY STEPHEN R. BOBBITT

No doubt about it, Sally and Zygi needed a new kitchen. They had a beautiful 1912 Craftsman house in Seattle, but the kitchen suffered from a badly planned remodel (photo left). With a single line of cabinets interrupted by the range and sink, the kitchen lacked workspace and storage. And the new backyard deck lay hidden beyond a bottleneck where the refrigerator enclosure blocked half of the west wall (before floor plan, p. 90). Besides solving these problems, Sally wanted to add a baking area and a display space for her growing collection of American pottery. Because Sally is an interior designer with whom I've worked many times, Zygi let her take the lead, so long as she made a space to park his new Italian espresso machine.

Two small plan changes make a big difference

Sometimes, just a few critical changes can improve circulation and work patterns. In this case, the refrigerator slid back into a bedroom closet, providing a few extra square feet while opening sightlines and the bottleneck at the back door (after floor plan, p. 90). This opening made room for a baking center and extra windows in addition to a glass door along the west wall (photo right). Besides letting in light, the glass wall lets Sally and Zygi look out to the deck, the backyard and the sunsets beyond.

Behind the east wall of the kitchen, an unused brick chimney was removed from the dining room, and the new cabinets were extended into the freed-up corner. This move provided an upper display cabinet for the pottery collection, a work surface and a home for Zygi's espresso machine (top photo, p. 91).

Reading the house

Most houses speak a language, a consistent vocabulary of materials and design. A successful ad-



Photo left: Stephen Bobbitt



AFTER

Removing the bump-out revitalizes the west wall. *Recessing the refrigerator into a bedroom closet made room for expanded sightlines, as well as a baking center and storage. Photo taken at A on floor plan.*



500-year-old wood tells its own story. *Light stain contrasts with the dark trim and highlights the figured grain of the old fir log that became this cabinet.*

dition or renovation should retain the integrity of the house by manifesting those details. Sally and Zygi's home has a clear message: The living and dining rooms express the unpretentious craftsmanship of the early 20th-century builders who worked here.

Dark-stained, off-the-shelf fir millwork and well-done simple joinery make these rooms an exhibition of the carpenters' art. Wide cornice banding replaces crown molding, and broad, flat window and door casings extend from a simple board wainscot.

The woodwork imparts not only rich warmth but also clear lines that we knew should extend into the new kitchen. We continued the cornice banding and window and door casings in the same plain-sawn fir. This technique of integrating new space into old is a bit like reweaving a tear in fabric: the less obvious the repair, the better.

The original living- and dining-room floors were a dark oak. To save money, early 20th-century builders often used fir—at the time a less-expensive choice—to floor the back and upstairs rooms. This kitchen's original vertical-grain fir floor had been damaged and overlaid with blond oak some years earlier. We removed the oak and replaced the original fir, which, ironically, is now the more expensive choice. To achieve a seamless transition between the original and new construction, we stained the new floor to match the oak of the living and dining rooms.

Cabinets make the kitchen

For the cabinets, finding the material to re-create an aesthetic from 90 years ago presented a challenge, but Jim Newsome, a cabinetmaker and urban logger, provided the solution. He had salvaged a huge Douglas-fir log from the bottom of a nearby lake, where it had fallen about 80 years ago. Milled to showcase its unique grain (photo left), this wood gave us the new kitchen cabinets.

The cabinets became one of the signature elements of the new design. Overscale corner posts in the base cabinets and generous stiles and rails visually anchored the room. Recessing the drawers and paneled doors from the face frame created depth, adding to the solidity of the Craftsman style. A medium-colored stain allowed the grain to speak for itself in contrast with the dark trim, the floors and the colorful pottery.

For the countertops, Sally wanted a natural material that would complement the fir cabinets and stand up to hard use. Dark granite fit the bill. But highly polished granite would have seemed too glossy in this simple house. Instead, we had the stone honed to a matte finish.

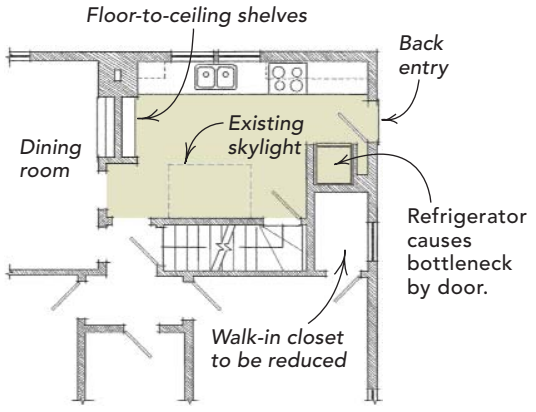
A single course of matte-glazed ceramic tiles makes a backsplash, introducing a line of color to lighten the effect of the stone and to reinforce the horizontal lines. A continuous fir trim band caps the backsplash, echoing the rest of the dark trim.

Technology vs. tradition

The range of choices in kitchen equipment has become a major

SMALL PLAN CHANGES YIELD BIG RESULTS

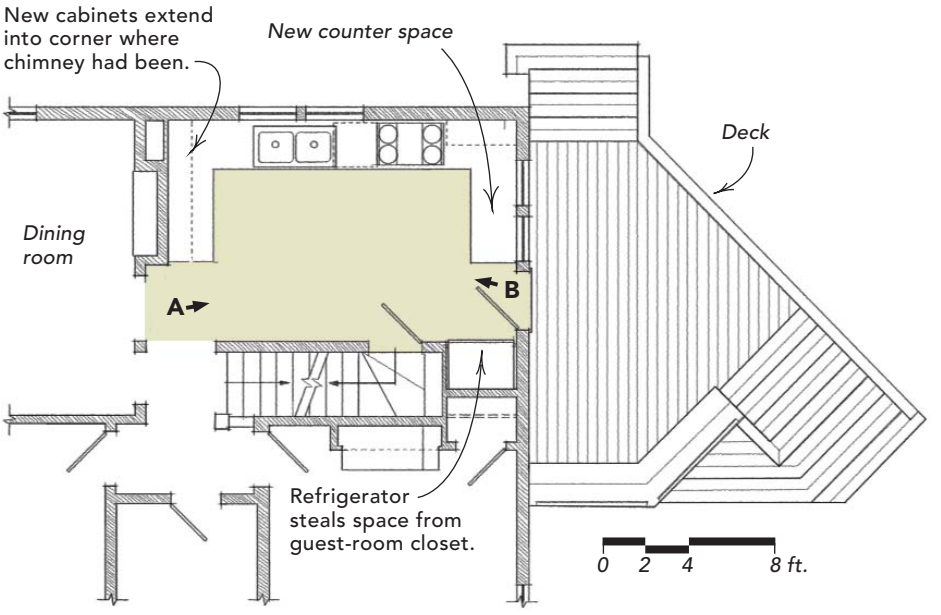
When you're working with a small kitchen, a few extra square feet make a big difference. Sacrificing part of a walk-in closet in a guest bedroom let the refrigerator slide back flush with the rest of the wall, opening a path to the back deck and making room for more counter space and windows. Removing some plain open shelves and an unused chimney in the north wall made room for more cabinets and workspace.



Before (not to scale)

Photos taken at lettered positions.

After



ONLINE CONNECTION

Tour this kitchen on our Web site at www.finehomebuilding.com.

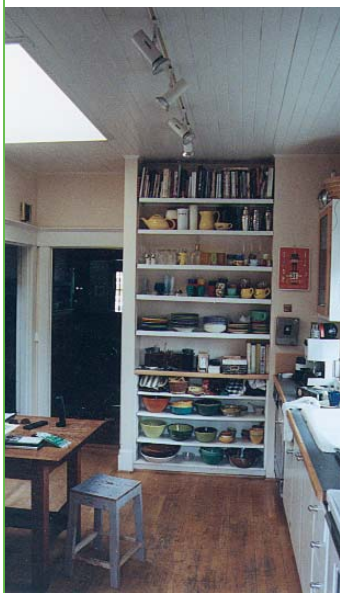
Drawings: Paul Perreault

AFTER

The new Craftsman. *Horizontal lines in the dark trim, light cabinets and tile backsplash anchor the new kitchen. Generously sized face framing and legs add solidity to the design, making the new cabinets fit into an old Craftsman home. Photo taken at B on floor plan.*

BEFORE

A floor-to-ceiling shelf becomes a catchall. *A tower of open shelves offered one-size-doesn't-fit-all storage and dwarfed the rest of the kitchen. Photo taken at B on floor plan.*



design challenge. Both the scale and the number of appliances in a modern kitchen can overwhelm a small, vintage Craftsman house. It helps to select appliances and fixtures that match in materials and detailing. In this case, the refrigerator, oven, cooktop, dishwasher, sink, faucet and espresso machine are all stainless steel with black controls. We positioned them to make food preparation efficient and to balance the visual impact of so much metal in a relatively small space.

With all the options, it's no wonder homeowners often are overwhelmed by the decisions they must make (while typically living in the house during construction). I believe part of my job is to minimize the surprises and angst that accompany renovation, which isn't always fun. But the ultimate reward is receiving an invitation from my clients to a meal cooked in their new kitchen—and they tell me it was all worth it. □

Stephen R. Bobbitt practices architecture in Seattle, WA. Sally Oien did the interior design. Photos by William Wright, except where noted.

Photo bottom: Stephen Bobbitt