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A kitchen renovation pays homage to the home's original style while adding modern updates and functional elements

By Chelsie Butler

A DUTCH COLONIAL HOME for sale in a Chicagoland suburb really spoke to the eventual owners, but the 1922 floor plan did not suit their lifestyle. They turned to O'Brien Harris to transform the compartmentalized kitchen into a space that opens up to the family room addition and also includes a bar and butler's pantry.

"The clients were excited by the process, and we brought ideas that surprised them," said Laura O'Brien, the firm's owner. "They could not envision how great the result would be."

Addressing Project Objectives

The task at hand was to create a functional kitchen with an island for seating and ample storage in a narrow space. The homeowners also wanted to include a bar for entertaining, which the design team installed at the north end of the kitchen. This area features a darker color palette to set it apart and provide some contrast in the mostly white space.







Previous Page: One end of the kitchen is home to the dining area, which is infused with natural light. Laura O'Brien of O'Brien Harris installed an interior window that divides the spaces. The black La Canche range with stunning brass accents is topped by a plaster hood. The marble countertop and backsplash feature vibrant green and purple veining that adds some color to the space.

The south end of the kitchen features a partition with an interior window that looks into the dining area. This is also where O'Brien located the butler's pantry, which is in the same shade as the bar area in the main space. The pantry serves as an auxiliary space for the kitchen and includes a coffee bar, additional sink and an ice maker.

To achieve the additional storage the homeowners required, the design team came up with some clever solutions, including built-ins at the bar and cabinets with various depths and angled backs to capture every inch. Perhaps the most unique yet functional element of the kitchen is the custom divider and buffet, which looks like an elegant piece of furniture.

"This element was designed to fulfill many functions, the first of which is to provide some separation and a transition between the kitchen and family room," said O'Brien. "On the kitchen side are drawers for storage, and the family room side features a TV that can be hidden when not in use."

Kitchen Color Scheme

The clients wanted the main space to be light and bright to complement the home's architecture. The strong green and purple veining in the marble countertops and backsplash was a must and was an early selection.

"Taking those color cues from the marble, we pulled a greenish black for the bar area and butler's pantry," said O'Brien, who added that the walnut divider in the kitchen provides some warmth to the space.



The previous kitchen was tight, and there was not enough seating at the island to accommodate the entire family.

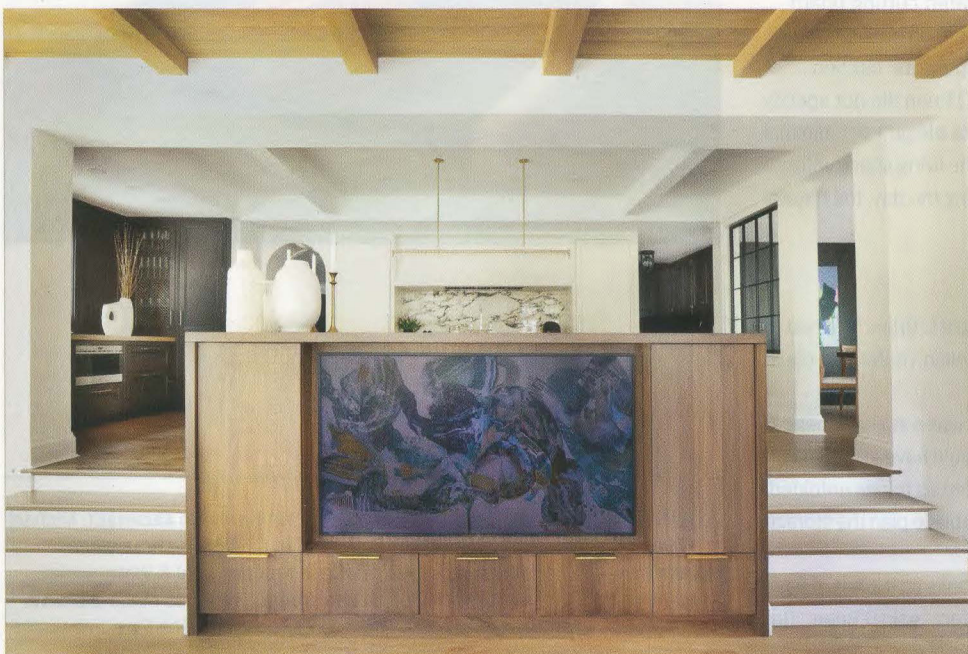
Left: In recreating the kitchen, the task at hand for O'Brien was to create a functional space with a large island and ample storage. The bar area at one end with cabinetry painted in a green/black and a butcher block countertop provides some contrast to the rest of the kitchen and can be used as a serving area when necessary. Mesh doors were designed to conceal the liquor.

Layout & Storage Needs

The back wall in the kitchen is home to the range, refrigeration and a tall cabinet for the dishes and glassware. The island houses the dishwashers and trash receptacles. The design team specified ample pullout drawer storage, as the space was too narrow to accommodate swinging cabinet doors. O'Brien also noted it is easier to access drawers in the divider when people are sitting at the island. The bar area is equipped with several built-ins for barware, a locked liquor cabinet and refrigerated drawer storage.

Appliance Envy

The stunning La Canche range with its bold brass accents is the cornerstone of the kitchen, and although its black hue matches the vintage look of a 1922 home, it is indeed a modern appliance. Instead of a dark hood, O'Brien chose a soft plaster she says makes the wall feel rooted in the architecture. The other appliances include two dishwashers in the island, a refrigeration/freezer unit on the back wall and a microwave drawer and beverage drawers in the bar area.



Left & Above: To separate the kitchen and family room without closing off the two spaces with a wall, O'Brien created a custom divider with 12 decorative drawers for storage on one side and a built-in TV on the other. It can also serve as a buffet piece when entertaining.



Left: The butler's pantry features the same green/black cabinetry and wood countertop as in the bar area in the main kitchen and includes a bar faucet and sink. The tile backsplash provides tone-on-tone texture.

Below: "The pullout cutting board allows for a convenient prep surface located in the island right across from the range," said O'Brien. "This further expanded the opportunity for workspaces and for having multiple people in the kitchen at once."

"The appliances are intentionally spread out so the kitchen can accommodate multiple functions simultaneously," said O'Brien. "There was no space to accommodate a steam oven; we could only include what was necessary – kind of like designing a yacht."

Fixtures & Fittings

The kitchen features a traditional gooseneck faucet with lever handles in polished nickel. The undermount sink has an integrated cutting board accessory, and the design team also incorporated a built-in cutting board that might have been seen in the homeowners' grandparents' kitchen.

To keep the kitchen feeling as authentic as possible, O'Brien did not specify a lot of can lighting. The island fixture was chosen for its elegant yet minimal aesthetic. It lets the eye move to the range wall and into the living space without interruption, depending on where one is positioned. During the day, the natural light coming in is all the space really needs.

Solutions to Challenges

"With a home of this age, there were a lot of unknowns," said O'Brien. "We had to wait to see how the space was going to unfold during demolition before we could make some of the final design decisions."

Behind the butler's pantry and leading to the basement was a stairway header that did not meet building code, and raising the header would have an impact on the kitchen storage plan. The design team had to be patient as things unfolded, and once the architect resolved the issue, they were then able to plan the storage accordingly.

"This was one of my favorite projects; the new design looks as if it has always been part of the original home, and I think it turned out perfect," said O'Brien. "Our clients could not be happier." **KBB**



SOURCES: DESIGNER: Laura O'Brien, Owner, O'Brien Harris ARCHITECT: Michael Abraham Architecture PHOTOGRAPHER: Katrina Wittkamp CABINETRY & WOOD COUNTERTOPS: O'Brien Harris DISHWASHERS: Cove FAUCETS: Rohl & Waterworks HARDWARE: Katonah HOOD INSERT: Wolf ISLAND STOOLS: Gregorius Pineo LIGHTING: Garge & Riloh MESH DOORS: Kent Design PANTRY BACKSPLASH: The Fine Line RANGE: La Canche REFRIGERATION: Sub-Zero SINK: Kallista