



OPEN HOUSE

A kitchen renovation opens up
the entire living space in this 20-year-old home

DESIGN BY REBEKAH DROZELL

TEXT BY DEBORAH J. CARR

COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE O'LOUGHLIN

Some rooms can tolerate design flaws, but if a kitchen doesn't work, residents will feel its inadequacies every day. It is the room where function, technology and comfort must pass muster. Remodeling a kitchen is an opportunity to correct mistakes, test new convictions, match form and function and adjust the busiest room in the house to evolving needs, preferences and lifestyle changes.

When Dale Shaughnessy decided to remodel the kitchen in her Chatham

home, she recruited local builder Marc London, with whom she had done business for more than 20 years. "I don't advertise," says London, who specializes in remodeling work. "I've been working on the Cape for over 20 years. It's been strictly word of mouth, and I still have my first customers."

He recommended Rebekah Drozell, kitchen and bath designer at the Mid-Cape Home Centers Kitchen & Bath Design Center in South Dennis, who worked with Shaughnessy to refine her



Above: The original kitchen gets a facelift with new Thermofoil cabinets, granite countertops and a mosaic tile backsplash.

Right: The most significant change was the creation of a doorway between the kitchen and dining room. The builder added the wine rack above the doorway.



remodeling objectives. “Dale was up for anything,” Drozell says. “She wanted some functional changes, and she had some basic project criteria, but she didn’t have a particular layout in mind. She wasn’t looking for major structural changes, but she wanted to make the kitchen lighter and brighter, improve its efficiency, make dead space more functional, capitalize on the view, have a better connection to the exterior space, reduce clutter, upgrade appliances and give the kitchen a facelift.”

While many clients may have a sense of what they want, they’re not quite sure how to pull it all together or how much it will cost. Working with a design professional to sharpen preferences and align priorities with a budget is a way to develop a plan that avoids disappointment.

After project discussions with Shaughnessy, Drozell suggested five or six proposals. “I really used Rebekah’s advice,” says Shaughnessy. “It was so helpful to have her input. I knew what I wanted, but I’m not a visual person. Design really isn’t my thing.”

With the advice of her contractor and designer, she made wise choices in her basic design and product selection. In the ultimate expression of confidence, Shaughnessy made decisions about the project, selecting everything from appliances, cabinetry, flooring and countertop materials to knobs and faucets, and then went to Florida for the winter. She entrusted the project to London and Drozell, who didn’t disappoint her. “If Marc called me with a question, I told him to do whatever he would do in his own home,” says Shaughnessy. “I trusted him completely.” She loves the final product and appreciates that Drozell and London were able to capture her vision.

“The nicest thing about the project was we had from September to May to get it done,” says Drozell, who appreciated her collaboration with London, especially his can-do spirit. “His attitude is, if there’s a problem, it’s his job to solve it.”

Because of the shared planning, Shaughnessy’s confidence in her team and the compatibility between designer and contractor, the project remained on time and within budget.



Above and right: An under-used corner is transformed into a work station. Builder Marc London crafted an L-shaped desk of longleaf yellow pine and added cabinets for storage.

Left: With the stove positioned in the island, Dale Shaughnessy now has plenty of room to prepare food while chatting with guests.

THE TRANSFORMATION

The remodeled kitchen is consistent with the traditional elements of the charming house, which is nestled in a quiet Chatham neighborhood. Built 20 years ago, its basic Cape style has absorbed a number of additions. It is modest in scale and architectural detail, enhanced by the quiet grace of natural woods and a gentle landscape. Despite the home’s appeal, Shaughnessy felt the interior had begun to show its age. Appliances needed replacing, wood floors needed refinishing, walls needed painting and cabinetry needed upgrading.

When homeowners face the need to replace appliances, address energy concerns or confront general wear and tear, remodeling becomes a solution to multiple problems, not just decorative whimsy. Shaughnessy’s kitchen remodeling project became the impetus for a general interior facelift.

Relying on solid workmanship and practical materials, the remodeling



project retained the integrity of the house while giving it a lighter, fresher appearance and a more integrated floor plan. There is a connection among all the rooms and a lightness that transforms the mood of the house. The new kitchen reflects a modern approach to traditional design that is easy on the eye. It has a contextual sensitivity to the house’s prevailing architecture, as well as the owner’s personal vision. It is refined and simplified – not done to death. “I didn’t want anything too frou-frou,” says Shaughnessy. “That’s just not my style.”

Without significant gutting, wall removal or replacement, the new kitchen, which is updated, improved, clutter-free, light, bright and appropriate, has fulfilled all of Shaughnessy’s expectations. She had the joy of returning from Florida last spring and finding that the new kitchen had transformed the house. “I just love it,” says Shaughnessy. “It has changed the feeling of the whole first floor.” She says it no longer “looks as if we added on little rooms,” which she admits is how the first-floor layout actually evolved.



Design tips

There are plenty of tips for remodeling a kitchen, but the trick is how to get it right. Since a kitchen generally costs more per square foot than any room in the house—and gets the most attention, use, wear and tear—it pays to make the right choices. The average kitchen design lasts about 15 years, but it will seem much longer if you make the wrong decisions.

Fundamental reconfiguration, aesthetic and functional updates, as well as modest enhancements, can transform a kitchen. By keeping existing walls but improving access to appliances, work areas and adjoining rooms, kitchen space will feel more functional. Repositioning appliances can eliminate kitchen gridlock. By enlarging door openings or cutting a pass-through, the space will appear larger, lighter and more connected with the rest of the house or the exterior spaces.

Cabinets designed for convenience, efficiency and easier access can improve storage capacity and reduce clutter. Creative design elements (task, interior and under-cabinet lighting) can improve ambience. State-of-the-art appliances, materials or palette changes for walls, ceilings, countertops and floors can give a kitchen an entirely new lease on life. Interesting appointments (designer tiles, knobs); amenities (wine storage) and conveniences (pull-out garbage and recycling receptacles) add interest and appeal. A functional design makes a kitchen work, but style makes it special.

Shaughnessy's remodeling project transformed her home and exceeded all her expectations. With clear goals, a realistic budget and a compatible team, she remodeled a kitchen without compromising expectations, committing to major structural work, experiencing mid-project surprises or deviating significantly from anticipated costs. "Some clients are unrealistic," says Drozell, "but Dale really did know what she wanted." With the help of London and Drozell, she refined her design choices and achieved her remodeling goals.

The project stayed within her original budget of \$50,000 to remodel the kitchen and do the companion "facelift" (painting, floor refinishing, etc.) throughout the first floor. Some of her favorite aspects of the remodeling are the physical, visual and emotional comfort details that the new kitchen provides. There are also small, whimsical details of the remodeling that excited Shaughnessy as much as the total package. She loves the cubby spaces at the top of the cabinets; the small cabinet for platters; the natural mosaic tiles for the backsplash and the tiny tip-out tray for sponges. However, what she really loves about the new kitchen is that it has transformed the overall feeling of her home. ❖

