



Design Statement

The mystery of the mis-placed kitchen

This 90's-era architect-designed home took full advantage of an unusual & hilly site that afforded great views of the downtown skyline at each of the several levels. When the owners purchased this five years before, they were overjoyed with the vaulted spaces, airiness and location of this one-of-a-kind home. The kitchen design hadn't looked so bad when they first moved in, but after actually using the space, they realized it was a true mess – dark, tiny, odd-shaped and cramped – out of sorts with the rest of the home. It frustrated the homeowners daily. “Why would someone wreck such an elegant room with such a dreadful kitchen?” they mused. In fact, its placement was so strange they wondered if the architect had forgotten to add a kitchen in the plans, and the builder just threw something in after the rest of the house was built! Or, perhaps the original owners insisted on the change. It made no sense - and remains a mystery.

Not only did the kitchen placement cut off access to the wonderful sun porch and chop up the flow of the great room, but it did not offer much in the way of good kitchen function. Little counter space, odd adjacency of appliances and work surfaces, overhead peninsula cabinets that cut off the connection to the great room and dark, dark, dark. After years of being frustrated, inconvenienced and aggravated, the homeowners - whose impending retirement would mean many more hours in their home - were ready to make a change.

The design needed to favor function and “make-life-easier” cooking features above all else. But, it also had to solve the mess. In true collaboration with the owners, the designer explored their suggestion that the kitchen location could be swapped with the dinning room and take advantage of the existing window configuration there - where it looked as though the kitchen was always meant to live.

The first major design constraint: none of the window or door openings could be altered. The stucco exterior was an unusual and heavy texture, meant to reference adobe. It would have been extremely difficult to match, and the owners' budget would not support re-dashing large areas of the home. The next practical challenge was a very constrained space below the kitchen for altering mechanicals. The lower level was completely finished, with squat height, considerable existing soffits, and the owners' bedroom. Plumbing and heating changes would have to be very carefully considered.

The most significant process challenge in getting to a final design – the owners found it very difficult to come to decisions on which they could both agree. Disagreements were, at times, pronounced – and on more than one occasion a little uncomfortable for the designer. To be fair they had warned us in advance of this dynamic, but it did lengthen the design process by several months as we explored multiple iterations of the plan and other important details to get the “perfect” solution for both of them.

This final solution does swap the kitchen and the dining room spaces and utilizes the existing windows perfectly. The L-shaped plan with a lengthy island keeps the kitchen function well defined and yet completely open to the view and conversations. The island is heavy on function, including: a seamless, integrated stainless steel counter and sink (with built-in drainboard), rollouts that keep utensils at hand, a compost container solution that really makes sense, and an open back – without cabinet doors – that reduce the number of motions the user needs to make. This island is really a little slice of hard-working commercial-style kitchen function tucked into an elegant package.

The unified pantry and fridge arrangement keeps these heavy functions out the way and creates a perfect tucked-away space for small appliances (as well pots and pans storage) that is partially obscured from view. The dining room is now in the much-preferred location with easy access to the sun porch. The odd-angled wall in the old kitchen was reworked (by touching the opposing bathroom) to allow room for a second entire workspace - a great coffee and beverage bar. This added benefit also allowed better flow of light from one of the existing, southern windows.

Finishes needed to complement both the existing wood tones and colors of the home as well as the practical sensibilities of the owners. New mixed wood tones integrate with the existing color pallet and bring more warmth to the palette. The smooth panels fit the era and the aesthetic of the rest of the home and really anchor the aesthetic of the great room. The luxury vinyl plank floor gives the easy-care demanded by the owners and will stand up to coming and going from outside spaces. The execution of the details in the modern, clean form, and the ability to make major layout changes with very minimal effect to adjacent spaces, give testament to the commitment of the craftspeople to care and refined work.

At the end, these (self-described) “difficult and picky” homeowners were both pleased and excited with the final results, as witnessed by the way they show off the details of their new kitchen with pride. Really listening and collaborating with the owners, as well as guiding them - using deep professional experience - was key to such a balanced and elegant result.

Highlights

Client Needs

- Fix the kitchen! Make it work better (and look better)
- Turn a small, uninviting kitchen into a working one suited to space and needs
- High function for both daily use and entertaining
- Get kitchen away from the screen porch to improve flow, circulation and access
- Ability to cook in the kitchen while conversing with guests
- Accommodate two people working in the kitchen together
- 3-season porch more accessible
- Second sink, open shelving, large work spaces
- Light & bright - no more dark & dim
- Compost and recycling solutions
- Remove weird shapes & angles - create a space that made sense
- Ability to enjoy the light and views of the yard while dining/hosting

Functionality

- New kitchen layout dramatically improves the plan – makes sense in the context of the great room
- Hardworking, practical and comfortable
- Better connection to dining and living spaces - cook not isolated from guests
- Good circulation
- View of yard & outdoors from kitchen, dining, and living spaces
- New plan is open for light and connection
- Improved circulation means more ease in coming & going
- Kitchen no longer cut off from the main floor, but integrated fluidly
- General illumination and very specific task lighting carefully placed to complement the open feel of the room
- Aging in place considerations - improvements such as removing pinch points, and one, smooth floor

Aesthetic

- Warm tones with lots of wood
- Clean lines and modern look
- Elegant yet inviting
- Open and accessible
- Kitchen updated from dark & dingy to bright & inviting
- Open concept and contemporary style owners loved
- Stone accent backsplashes provide splash of texture without overwhelming the space

Features

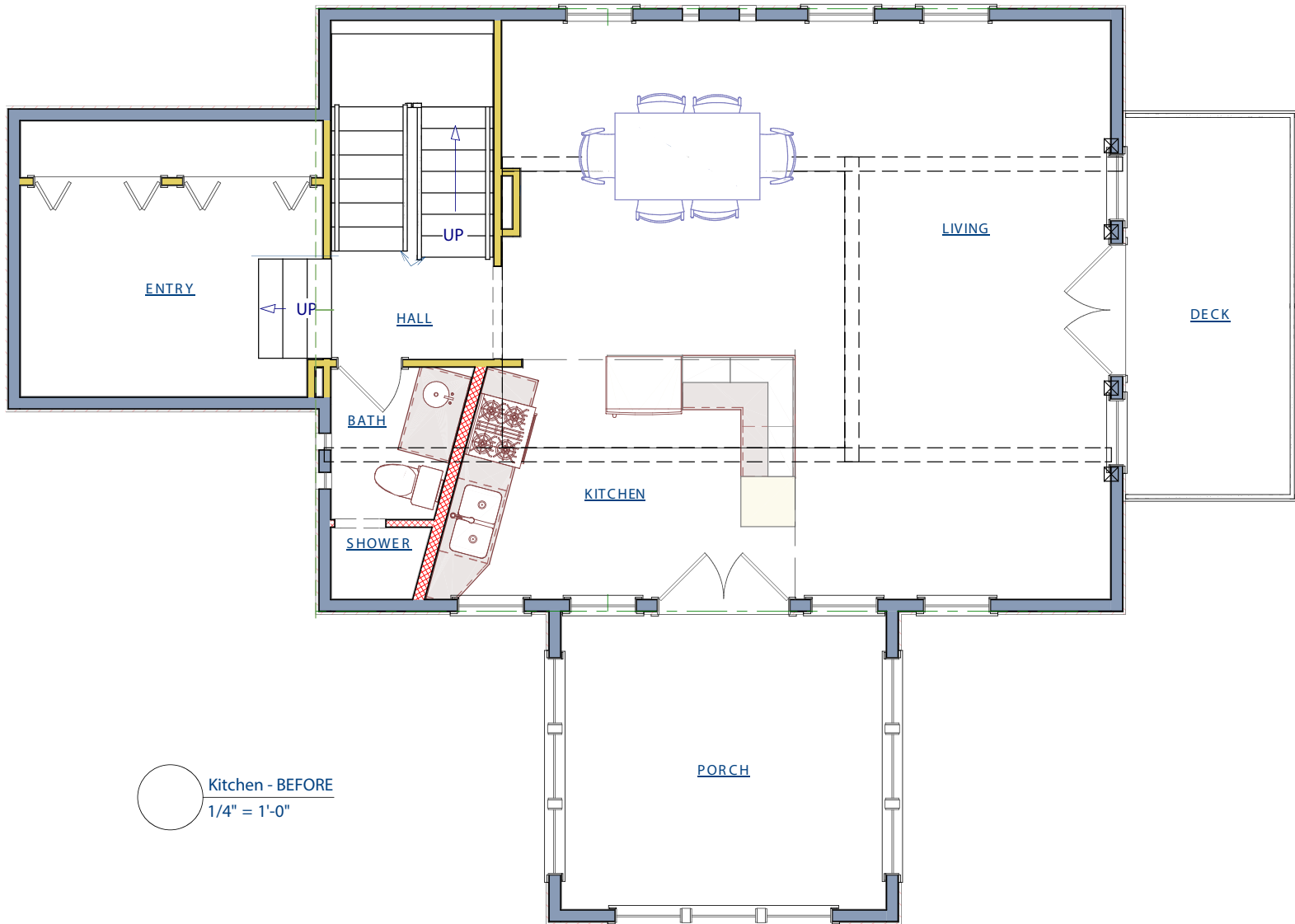
- Induction range
- Compost pull-out
- Raised bar at island provides casual dining space while concealing kitchen mess from dining room table
- Hard-working island has intense cooking tools right at hand. Seamless stainless-steel sink and counter can handle serious cooking messes with ease
- “Flip out” hood gives more refined look when not in use and provides excellent ventilation cover when extended
- Coffee bar area provides secondary kitchen work area, entertainment support and needed storage

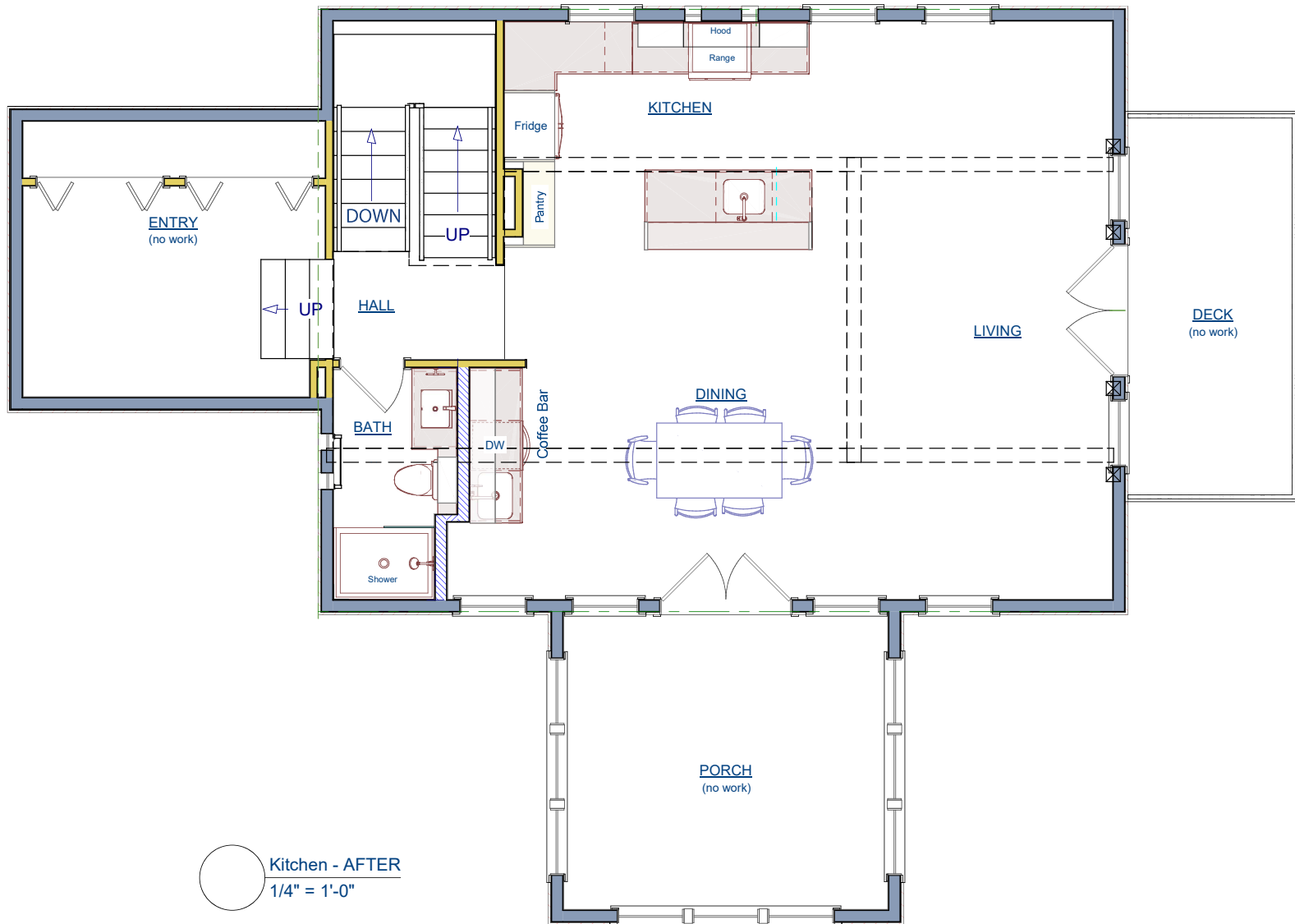
Craftsmanship

- Cabinetry carefully crafted for clean, modern look by local artisan cabinet shop
- Refined functional details of the stainless-steel sink/counter/backsplash - a difficult fabrication and install
- Attending to changes in layout without damaging the living space below - mechanical changes challenging

Floor Plan

Before





Before



The home had a beautiful, open vaulted space – but the kitchen was oddly tucked into a corner of the great room.



The existing kitchen felt like an intruder in what should have been an elegant, calm, lofty great room.



Before

This previous layout was extremely awkward, with the kitchen cutting off the beautiful, sunny porch from the great room.

The kitchen felt cramped and isolated, blocked off from the great room by dark, heavy, cabinetry.



Before



Homeowners really disliked the cabinet area above the peninsula. Although it provided lots of storage, it cut off the kitchen - and the cook - from the rest of the living space and guests.



The dark oak stain of the previous cabinets not only created a cave-like feel to the kitchen, but it did not fit with the rest of the design choices. The flat grained doors even felt cheap.

Switching the spaces for the kitchen and dining room functions not only created a great deal of openness in the great room but also improves the flow of both light and traffic.



Getting the dining room table close to the outside living spaces improves the view and the adjacency of these functions for better entertaining and daily living.

Before



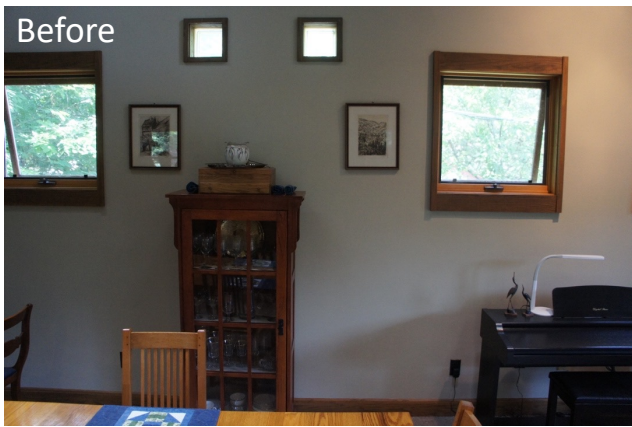
Opting for easy care - and planning ahead for any future mobility challenges - the worn-out carpet was replaced with a simple wood-look Luxury Vinyl product.

The careful choice of grey-washed wood allowed for the mixing of the real wood in the cabinetry with the synthetic wood on the floors - without a visual discord (which can be a risk).

The end result is easy care and a balanced aesthetic.



Before



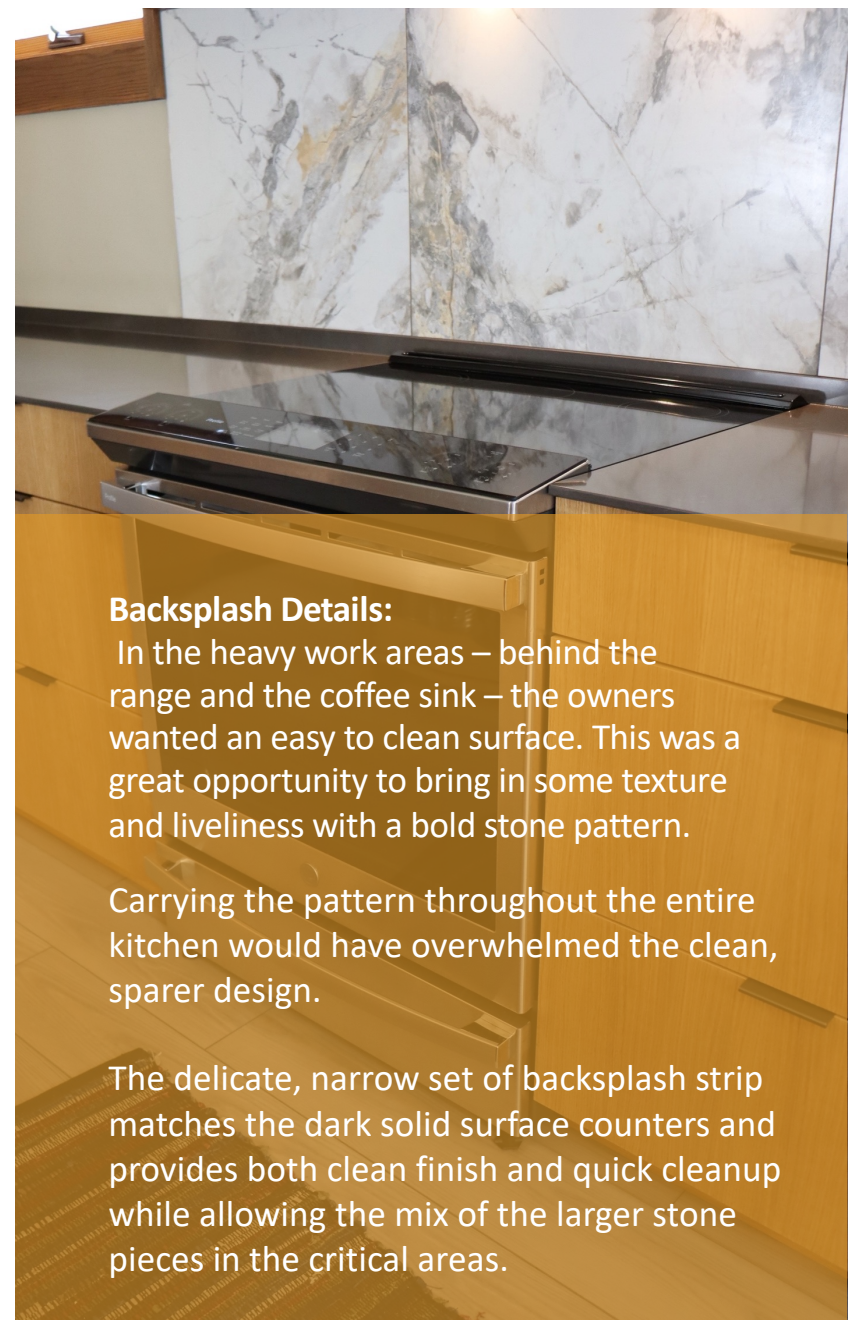
The arrangement of 4-square windows in the original layout almost begged to have the kitchen installed around them. One almost wonders if this was, indeed, the original design intent for the home! If so, it would be interesting to have been involved in the design conversation that led to putting the kitchen in the strange place it ended up.

Placing the kitchen in the new location of the room was actually an idea from the homeowner – a great example of collaboration between the designer and homeowner, as well as responding with elegance to the existing conditions of the home.



The openness of the of the new floor plan takes advantage of and compliments the vaulted openness of the room. Light and view are enhanced. The view from the sink is now connected and open - looking over the dining space out to the sun porch ahead and to the back deck on the left.





Backsplash Details:

In the heavy work areas – behind the range and the coffee sink – the owners wanted an easy to clean surface. This was a great opportunity to bring in some texture and liveliness with a bold stone pattern.

Carrying the pattern throughout the entire kitchen would have overwhelmed the clean, sparer design.

The delicate, narrow set of backsplash strip matches the dark solid surface counters and provides both clean finish and quick cleanup while allowing the mix of the larger stone pieces in the critical areas.



The open cabinetry in the back of the island was a very intentional choice to by the owners, to simplify use and create easy access to often-needed items. It also lightens the visual weight of the “interior” part of the kitchen, keeping the cook from feeling “hemmed in”.

All items in the back of the island are accessible when needed, but then hidden and out of site when in the dining area and living areas.

Kitchen tools and utensils easily accessible, right at hand!





Reducing waste is of high value to these ecologically-minded homeowners. Having a simple and elegant solution for compost was important.

This pullout was a great solution. Compost is easy at hand - yet out the way when not needed.

Disposal is a snap: Just carry the container out to the compost bin!



To create a functional yet refined hood, this pop-open choice was selected. When not being used it's a very clean, visual line. When used, it's extremely functional, with both lights and good circulation of air.



In closed position, very clean lines gives the hood a crisp look.



In open position, the hood captures smells, circulates air – high function.

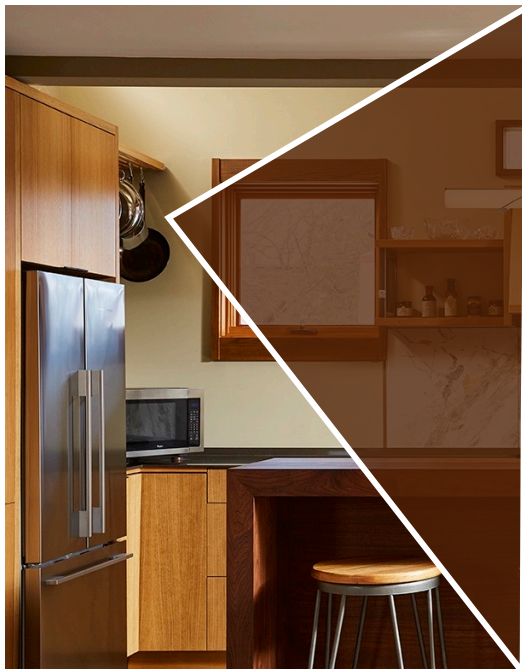
Open shelves above the coffee bar keep the look light and allow for an elegant display of collected pottery. It also harkens back to a historic, working kitchen.



The “coffee bar” retained needed storage and creates a secondary workspace. Great for entertaining, cooking as a group, or entertaining.

This utilized what could have been wasted circulation space and turned it into a valuable asset.





The pot rack makes good use of an odd inside corner. A full cabinet had been suggested by the owner, but that felt very visually-heavy and would have been difficult to use. This solution met important homeowner requirements for function and keeps the corner light, open and accessible.





A hard-working pantry means all of the cooking supplies are highly accessible while still being hidden and out of site.

Flipper doors provide easy access to pantry items without blocking entry into kitchen and allowing others to easily pass through or use the space at the same time.





Sourcing the faucet proved challenging. The design demand limited space between the back edge of the sink and the raised bar. A typical, side-handled faucet would not function properly there. The homeowners wanted the simplicity of a lever style faucet control. The designer worked at length to source this faucet where the level handle sits in the front. The homeowners are just thrilled with the way it works - sometimes the simplest details bring the most joy...



The stainless-steel island countertop is exquisitely designed to be the perfect meeting of form and function. With integrated backsplash and drainboard functions it's as hard working as it is elegant. The visual aspect of the stainless steel is obscured from primary view by the raised bar that creates a refined and practical modesty panel (the sink area does not have to be perfectly clean in order to enjoy dinner with friends).



Getting the right wood tones was crucial to pulling the design together. The combination of vertical grained oak with the walnut accent raised island responds to and augments the existing wood pallet in the home.



