

# A Dated Kitchen Shines Again



## Improving flow, storage, workstations, and lighting brings a relic into the 21st century

By today's standards, this isn't a big kitchen. But for Leslie and Mike Midgley, it's just right. As empty nesters, the Midgleys have seen their need for extra space come and go, but new finishes and better lighting, real workstations, and improved flow were long overdue. Built in the 1970s, the original kitchen was poorly arranged and was frustrating to use. There was little counter space and limited cabinet storage, and the lighting...oh, the lighting!

**Design:** Paul DeGroot, Austin, Texas, pdegroot@austin.rr.com

**Construction:** Don Tenney and Mike Troy, cabinetry

**Photography:** Brian Pontolillo; Paul DeGroot (before)

Drawings: Martha Garstang Hill

## KEEP THE GOOD PARTS OF A BAD PLAN

If the old kitchen had anything to offer, it was the connection to adjacent spaces: the dining room at one end, the hallway at the other end, the living room via a pass-through, and the backyard through an exterior door. The challenge of the new layout was to optimize the space between these entry points without changing the footprint. The cleanup zone and the breakfast

Before

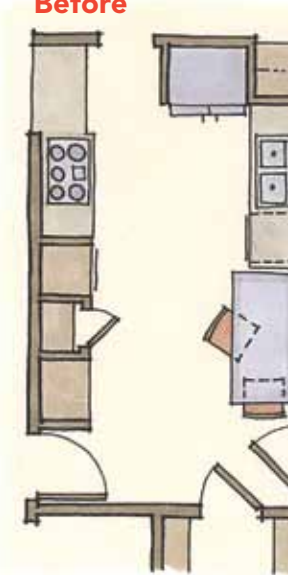
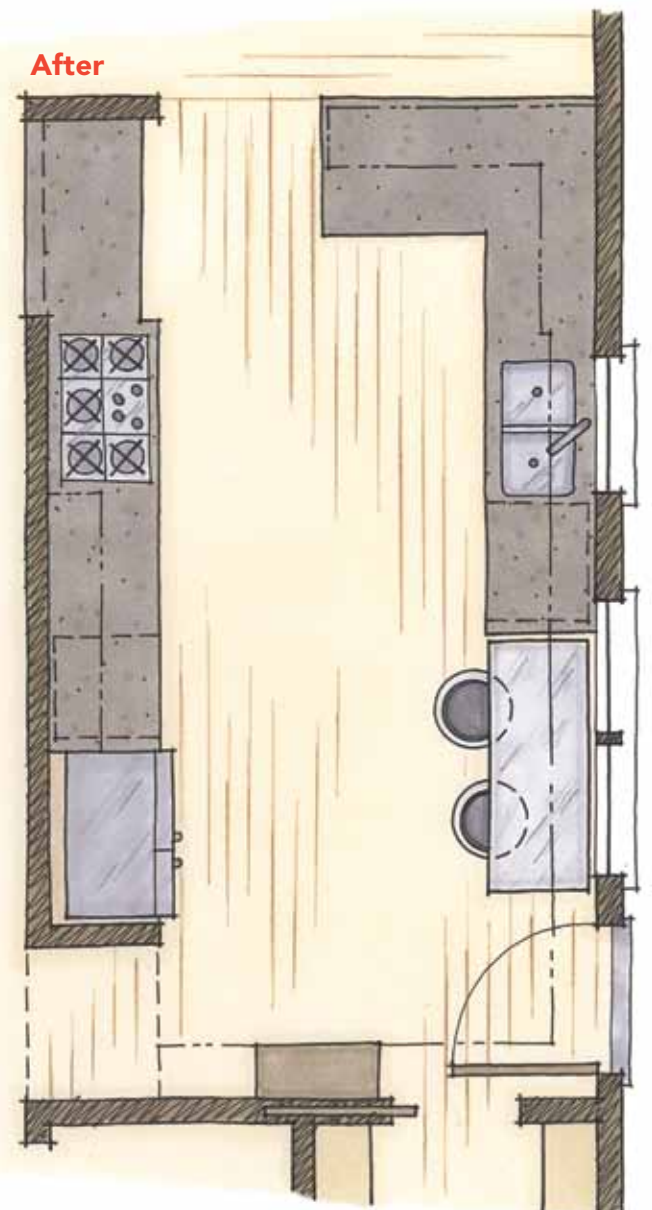
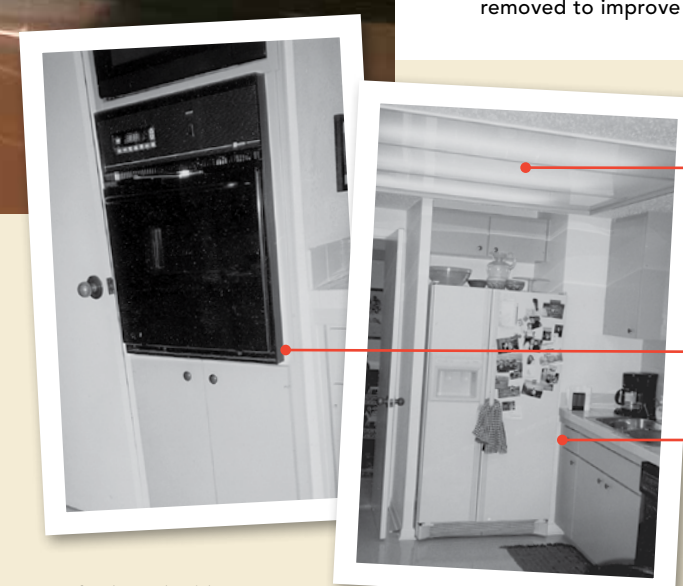


table share the outside wall and views of the backyard. The refrigerator and the cooking area are combined along the interior wall with the kitchen's largest uninterrupted counter between them. A wall and a door isolating the kitchen from the dining room were removed and replaced with a serving peninsula. A pocket door was added to the pantry to eliminate interference with the backyard access. Finally, the door between kitchen and hallway was removed to improve flow.

After



0 1 2 4 ft. North



## BEFORE: STUCK IN THE '70S

### NOT-SO-LUMINOUS LIGHTING

In the 1970s, it was popular to recess fluorescent lights into the ceiling and cover them with an acrylic diffuser panel. On blueprints, this was called a "luminous ceiling," a term you don't hear much anymore and maybe not such a bright idea. To accommodate the recessed fixture, the old kitchen ceiling was 7 ft. 5 in. high, making the room seem smaller and everyone in it seem taller.

### PINT-SIZE OVEN

20-lb. turkey? Go next door. The original 24-in.-wide built-in oven had its limitations.

### CRAMPED CORNER

With only 12 in. between them, the refrigerator and the sink duked it out in one corner. The fridge couldn't open beyond 90° without hitting the countertop, and the drawer beside the sink couldn't open fully because the fridge stuck out too far.



## AFTER: A STREAMLINED LOOK



With a flat roof, clean lines, and lots of windows, the original house has a modern aesthetic. In the new kitchen, flush-panel full-overlay cabinets complement this style. Adding space to the house was not an option, so the

designer rearranged the kitchen within the existing footprint. To stay on budget, the sink remained where it was, but the fridge moved. Keeping the existing sink window and plumbing helped to save money.



**Matching cabinet fronts.** A 6-in.-wide, full-length strip of quarter-sliced maple veneer (known as a flitch sample) was approved by the designer before the plywood was made and shipped to a cabinet shop. Specifying that the panels are "sequenced" ensures that all cabinets have the matching linear-grain characteristic of quarter-sliced maple.



**Layers of light.** Removing the old "luminous ceiling" brought the kitchen ceiling up to 8 ft. Now, different types of lighting on independent switches offer multiple layers of light, depending on the task at hand, the time of day, and the mood desired. There are recessed cans for ambient light, undercabinet lights for countertop tasks, dimmable cove lights for softly accenting the ceiling, and an individually switched recessed light above the fridge for midnight snacks.



## Double-duty kitchen table

Even with a formal dining area close by, the Midgleys always liked having a small breakfast table in their kitchen. So instead of cabinetry continuing along the exterior wall, the space was left open for a table. This time, the Midgleys opted for a counter-height table and stools. The stainless-steel surface doubles as additional prep or baking space. They found the table at Williams-Sonoma ([www.williams-sonoma.com](http://www.williams-sonoma.com)) and the stools at Design Within Reach ([www.dwr.com](http://www.dwr.com)).



**Cohesive design.** The kitchen's far wall was the only spot available for storing cookbooks and wine, but a cabinet would have looked funny there all by itself. Extending the maple soffit and the cove lighting across the room ties everything together visually.

**Open plan.** Moving the fridge opened the kitchen to the dining room with a serving peninsula between the two. This design nets more counter space and makes the rooms feel connected and spacious.

