

## Clearing the way for a new lifestyle

### ■ Kitchen makeover yields lighter, brighter interior

BY JOHN BYRD  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Even a kitchen you helped design yourself may eventually seem a little tired.

Take, for instance, the one recently remodeled by a McLean couple who have occupied the same spacious Colonial for three decades.

Back in the 1980s, Marianne and husband Franklin built their handsome 5,000 square foot home on a shady lot, an ideal place for raising children.

With nine foot ceilings and a large dining room and a breakfast room, the floorplan handily accommodated all formal entertainment requirements, leaving for family-use a traditional-style kitchen, which Marianne had personally helped create.

The space was comfortable in all the ways busy parents require.

The working kitchen was concentrated into a 12-by-14 foot galley accessible from the breakfast room and a mudroom linked to the garage.

Cooking amenities included both gas and electric ranges: the former on a back interior wall ensconced in a hearth-like recess; the second on a stand-alone island surrounded by a U-shaped counter that incorporated the kitchen sink.

One leg of the counter



PHOTO BY GREG HADLEY

The kitchen's striking white-on-white interior is balanced by refurbished walnut-stained hardwood floors. The Calacatta marble—with its unique soft veining—is a particularly distinctive design element.

formed a peninsula between the kitchen and the breakfast room. Cherry cabinets tucked under ceiling-flush bulk heads provided storage. An archway with decorative corbels primly separated the kitchen from the breakfast room.

Over time, of course, styles change; so, too, personal needs.

"Our kitchen had gotten dated," Marianne Polk admitted,

describing steps that inspired her to pursue a complete makeover more suitable to current needs.

"I'd been looking for a plan that would work better for casual entertaining. I wanted an open, light room...with a relaxed, elegant ambiance. I was looking for ideas, but not sure where to go."

Polk's search had also been driven by an awareness of the existing kitchen's now-glaring shortcomings.

The island's counter top, for instance, which included four electric burners, was configured on 3-by-2 foot surface, an arrangement which left little room for staging the ingredients needed to prepare a meal.

The peninsula—which had become a catch-all for clutter—was mostly a barrier against free-flowing traffic in and out of the kitchen.

It was also now apparent that the original 30 inch cabinets really didn't meet existing storage needs. Moreover, the wall separating the kitchen from the breakfast room was now plainly seen as one reason the kitchen was too dark.

It is at this juncture that Polk met Sonny Nazemian, president

and CEO of Michael Nash Design Build and Homes. From the beginning, Polk found Nazemian's ideas insightful and directly relevant.

"I recognized right away some design limitations that are common to kitchens created in 1980s and 1990s," Nazemian recalled. "A decade back, there was less concern for optimizing space. We've since learned that re-routing HVAC concealed in bulk heading can create the wall surfaces needed for taller cabinets. Replacing 30 inch cabinets with 42 inch cabinets, for instance, can be a good starting point for a better kitchen plan."

With these discussions underway, Nazemian next proposed relocating the gas range to the south-facing interior wall. Crowned with a decorative cook top hood, the new cook station would become the kitchen's primary focal point.

But first a series of demolitions and deletions were in order. The ceiling-flush bulk heading would be removed. The small cook top island eliminated; ditto, the peninsular counter surface.

With the old hearth no longer needed, the kitchen's inside back

wall could be completely redesigned, making room for a double refrigerator/freezer, a stacked oven with microwave and a spacious serving station crowned by glass-facing cabinets.

Also, with the peninsula gone, removing the archway between the kitchen and breakfast area became an obvious call, one that allows a lot more light and visual continuum.

"Revealing the taller ceilings makes the space feel really expanded," Polk said. "The change highlights the unique character of the house."

With the implications of an "open" plan now fully in view, Nazemian next proposed an innovative food preparation island that would incorporate glass-facing display cases and custom-designed drawers. The built-in would be situated between the new gas range, the sink, and the refrigerator and stacked ovens on the back wall.

"We established work triangles in three directions," Nazemian said. "The island provides direct support for cooking, meal prep and clean-up, yet the 3 feet of floor space around it allows for comfortable thru-traffic."

Still, more importantly, the island is the defining piece in an interior design scheme skillfully developed throughout the interior. A row of glass-facing cabinets on walls formerly occupied by bulkheads provides display space for collectibles Polk previously had to store in boxes out of view.

A new floor-to-ceiling hutch

between the kitchen and the breakfast table provides additional display space, as well as storage for mats, table-cloths, and other kitchen necessities.

"There's been a 30 percent increase in storage overall," Nazemian said. "And many drawers custom-designed for serving plates, pots and cooking tools."

Meanwhile, the white Calacatta marble used for counter surfaces and backsplashes presents a particularly distinctive design element in a white-on-white interior suitable for any occasion.

"It's a marble without a lot of veining," Polk said. "Very special."

To further augment natural light availability, Nazemian replaced the box window above the sink with substantially larger bay window. The solid door formerly connecting the mudroom has been replaced with a French door and overhead transom.

Refurbished walnut-stained hardwood floors unify the interior's sea green wall coloring and white crown molding.

"It's opened-up a wonderful new entertainment space for everyone," Polk said. "It's the new center of the house."

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PHOTO BY GREG HADLEYS

Wall elevations in the Polk's kitchen were completely revised. The gas range with hood is the new focal point in a spacious gourmet kitchen and designer Michael Nash replaced a box window with a bay window.



PHOTO BY GREG HADLEY

Before: The previous cook top island left little room for staging ingredients needed in prepare a meal. Ceiling-flush bulk heading limited cabinets to 30 inches.



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