



A New Kitchen and a Better Backyard

Relocating a detached garage adds privacy to the backyard and makes room for a bigger kitchen

BY MICHAEL DE BIASSE

As a residential architect, I've designed many home additions over the past 12 years. Most of my projects have been kitchen renovations and small additions. When it came time to tackle my own house, my wife, Joan, and I started with a kitchen update. However, the project evolved into an enlarged kitchen, a new full bath, and a re-

located two-car garage. We also decided to reorganize the backyard for our kids' sake.

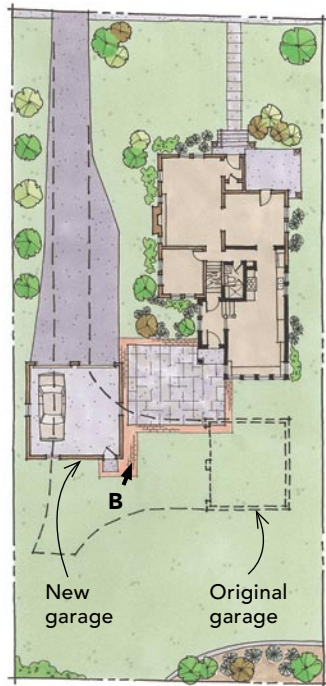
A plan to expand the kitchen

In the early 1990s, Joan and I purchased a two-story shingle home built in 1928. The house had a lot going for it: adequate room sizes, ample closets, a nice layout, and a well-preserved period exterior. However,

we knew that a kitchen addition was in our future. We enjoy cooking and casual entertaining, and both of those activities require a spacious kitchen with more hang-out space; the existing kitchen was the one room out of sync with the rest of the house.

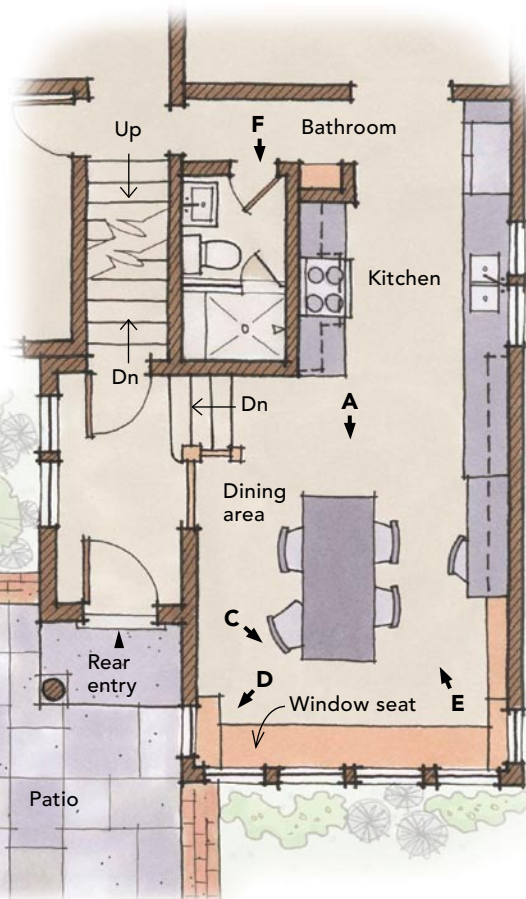
The remedy was to increase the kitchen's size to include a large eating area with more natural light, and to open the kitchen to the surrounding rooms so that it would become the heart of the house (photo above taken at A on floor plan).

First, we had to rid ourselves of a poorly designed eating area (floor plan, p. 70). It had been built over a crawlspace with a dirt floor and an uninsulated, cracked foundation. The



A BENEFICIAL MOVE

Relocating the garage to the side accomplished three objectives: more room to expand the kitchen, more yard reclaimed from the old driveway, and more backyard privacy gained by blocking views from the side and front. Inside the house, about 120 sq. ft. was added for an open kitchen. A powder room at the back entrance was removed to allow the kitchen to grow; space under the stairs and a butler's pantry were converted to a new full bath. Photos at right taken at B on floor plan.



crawlspace also provided a good winter home for field mice.

Next, we had to create a design to fix the existing kitchen. There were no handy work-surfaces, the refrigerator door was blocked if the table was occupied by more than two people, and the portable dishwasher was always in the way. We also had an open food pantry beneath the second-floor stairs, on display to anyone coming to the back door and a main attraction for the aforementioned crawlspace inhabitants. To make things worse, the kitchen had only two small windows and no view of the backyard.

I become my own client

As a designer, you never have total autonomy, although my wife might differ on this point.

Completing my own project was similar to my daily work. Early involvement on everyone's part is key to successful partnerships. Difficult design challenges arise when the process becomes too rigid or when one party remains inflexible.

The owner/architect relationship is complex, and the design process sometimes follows a difficult course. Luckily, having lived in the house for eight years and talked about the project with my wife during that time, I had hashed through a preliminary design and had a good idea of what I could build and still maintain the proportion and character of the original house.

All aspects of the project were left on the table until we arrived at the final design. By modifying the scope, configuration, portions

of the existing house, and even the budget, we were able to meet our goals: Enlarge the kitchen, create a patio, and provide a play area in the backyard.

Moving the garage to make some room

Because the house sits right on the setback, 8 ft. from the side property line, the only place to build was toward the backyard. The garage was falling down anyway, so the decision to demolish it was easy. Finding the right location for the new garage was more difficult, however. I didn't want to remove any of the big trees, but I also didn't want to position the garage so that it would block the main house's exposure to southern sun, either. I also wanted to provide a location



acceptable to my neighbors because the new garage had the potential to be closer to their house than it was to ours.

I spent quite a bit of time exploring possibilities for the garage's design and its location. My first impulse was to design a small one-car garage and locate it on the driveway side, adjacent to the chimney. This solution preserved the rear-yard views and the southern exposure. Unfortunately, I realized that the size was out of character with the house. It became apparent that a larger garage was a better match. By moving the garage into the side yard, I provided a boundary for the new patio, defined the outdoor space, and added privacy for us and our neighbors. Later, I actually increased the garage's height to improve its proportions and its relation-



Light box with a view. *Wrapped around a large window seat, six windows provide views of the backyard and lots of light to the kitchen's interior. Stained to match the factory cabinets, the maple custom seat is inlaid with ebony and is bracketed with drawer storage and bookshelves. Photo taken at C on floor plan.*

BETTER SPACE AND FUNCTION

With its larger eating area, the new kitchen can host everything from family breakfasts to homework sessions to dinner parties. The big space is reined in by the use of color and a strong horizontal band of molding above the cabinets and windows that creates the illusion of a more intimate room.

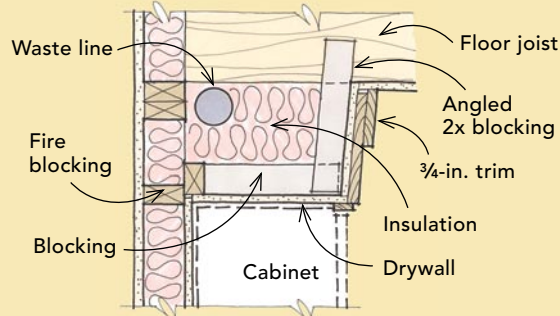


Simple trim is complicated

The maple crown molding ties together the new addition with the original kitchen. The angled trim required tapered blocking installed at a precise height and distance from the wall. Gauge blocks and stringlines simplified the process. The flat-stock design creates an elegant cap over the cabinets and windows that also conceals utilities. Photo left taken at D on floor plan.

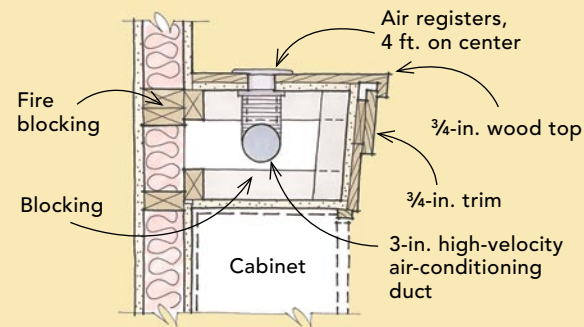
Hiding a plumbing chase

The crown molding over the stove hides a waste line routed from upstairs. The chase is insulated with fiberglass insulation and is enclosed with drywall to reduce noise.



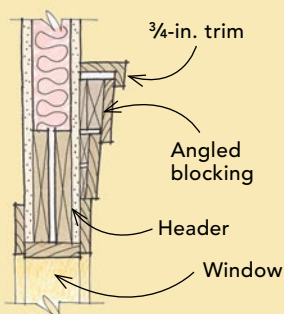
Concealing air-conditioning ducts

High-velocity air-conditioning ducts run up the sink-wall framing and into floor registers that vent from the top of the chase.



Conventional trimming over the window seat

Trim above the window seat is blocked off the wall to match the cabinet trim.





Open spaces need visual cues. One way to imply spatial divisions is to change floor color. The cork floor used throughout the kitchen has a dark border in the addition; in the kitchen area, the dark color becomes the field, accented with contrasting diamonds. An upstairs interior window makes communication between kitchen central and the bedrooms easier than with an intercom. Photo taken at E on floor plan.

ship to the neighbors' house and to our new kitchen addition.

Elements determine kitchen's shape

We needed a hardworking kitchen with lots of storage, efficient cooking space, a computer station, and a large table that would be our primary gathering place. We wanted to be able to entertain, and the back door was the de-facto entrance to the house. We also wanted plenty of natural light and a unique style. That's a lot to ask of one room.

Outside, a 120-sq.-ft. addition grows naturally from the house's lines. I kept the window detailing similar, and used a 2-over-1 lite pattern reminiscent of older homes in the area.

Inside, the addition's ceiling is open to the roof. We were able to retain the cozy character of the existing rooms by creating a virtual ceiling with cabinets, crown-molding trim, and pendant lights. Adding more windows maximized views and natural light. The gable end of the room became a light box that wraps around a built-in maple window seat. I also relocated and enlarged the arched opening from the dining room to the kitchen to create a more open floor plan, to provide a view to the front yard, and to unite the new kitchen with the rest of the house.

A change of materials provides a bright, fresh look

To keep costs in check, we opted to use standard maple cabinets with overlay Shaker-style doors from Yorktowne (www.yorktowne.cabinetry.com). I designed a custom three-piece crown molding to pull the whole room together. Cabinetmaker Frank Klausz (<http://frankklausz.com>) of Pluckemin, N.J., crafted and installed the window seat and the crown trim. He purchased the honey-colored stain from Yorktowne for an exact match.

We selected a cork floor to go with the hardwood throughout the existing rooms. I think it was the ideal selection even though stone tile would have performed better with the new radiant heat. The more-resilient cork is offered in a large variety of patterns and colors; I selected a solid-cork 12-in. by 12-in. glue-down tile so that the floor could be sanded and refinished throughout its life.

Out with the old, in with the new

To make more space for the new kitchen, we removed a powder room at the back entrance. The half-bath was small, its plastic vanity was delaminating, and its steam radiator could

brand you if you were not careful. Because the powder room was slated for demolition, I was able to start the new bath's design from scratch. Typically, I try to locate a bathroom so that it will have an exterior window. As it turned out, though, our design for a beautiful kitchen relegated the bath's location to the center of the house. This compromise eliminated an existing butler's pantry but gave us an unobstructed view from the kitchen to the yard.

The new full bath adds a well-crafted room and an extra shower that eases the morning rush. Tucked beneath the stairs, the shower



A modern bath can fit in an older house. Built in the former butler's pantry, the new bathroom has period details of subway tile, pedestal sink, and a shower enclosure that recalls the house's original arched passageways. Photo taken at F on floor plan.

has an arched tile ceiling and a matching arched frameless glass front. The modern sea-glass floor contrasts with the room's porcelain subway tile, which is in keeping with materials used in the original home. □

Michael De Biasse lives and works in Fanwood, N.J. Photos by Charles Bickford, except where noted. Joe Diaco of C&F Builders in Clifton, N.J., was responsible for the construction.