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PROJECTS: Master Design Solutions

RE-IMAGINING the traditional kitchen

By Laurie Banyay





Creative design and precise execution fix structural issues in a kitchen while updating it into the stylish, open space the homeowner sought



When entering this Austin, Texas, kitchen, it flows so seamlessly with the rest of the home one would never guess the complex design considerations and craftsmanship that went into it. The new homeowner, a real estate agent who relocated to Austin, wanted to open up the closed off kitchen area and unite it with the adjacent living space.

The homeowner called upon design-build firm Realty Restoration, Austin, to transform the 1956 home's kitchen. Led by David Davison, CR, CKBR, and Christopher Davison, AIA, the firm often partners with Christy Bowen, CKBR, of Austin-based interior design firm Twelve Stones Designs. Self-dubbed as the "trifecta," the three often collaborate on projects. "We all have a great chemistry and think in the same way and same format," Bowen says.

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

Because Austin sits on the Balcones Fault Line, the soil content is high in clay and tends to move a lot depending on how dry or moist the ground is. As was the case in this house, that shifting soil causes walls to bow and become excessively out of plumb, corners out of square and floors to be not level. In some areas, the walls were bowed up to 2 in.

The team removed all of the materials down to the studs and squared the walls by sistering new studs to the existing structure. They rectified the flooring by adding floor beneath where the new cabinetry would be placed and feathered in.

The kitchen and living spaces shared a vaulted ceiling, but an 8-ft.-tall partition wall divided the areas, making the old kitchen almost galley-like. Removing the wall not only opened the areas, but it also allowed natural light to flood the space from large patio windows.

No less problematic, but much more noticeable, was the weight-bearing column in the middle of the space. "It was

PROJECTS: Master Design Solutions

COMPANY INFORMATION

Remodeler: Realty Restoration
Austin, Texas, RealtyRestoration.com
Designer: Twelve Stones Designs
Austin, TwelveStonesDesigns.com

PROJECT INFORMATION

Spring Lane Galley Deconstruction
Square footage: 3,300
Completed: April 2013
Cost: \$85,000

PRODUCT INFORMATION

Tile/stone: Artistic Tile
Hardware: Top Knobs
Cabinets: MR Custom cabinets
Countertops: Premstone
Range: Wolf
Dishwasher: Bosch
Pendant lighting: Sonneman
Paint/stain: Sherwin-Williams
Skylights: Velux



very awkward. It was a semi-galley kitchen but it felt like it should be open. The kitchen had been remodeled very recently; they had just done a very poor job,” says Christopher. Although the original design eliminated any structural element in that area, the cost of removing that column was prohibitive, as well as incredibly complex.

Christopher continues: “The cost of the structural elements was a major piece of having to keep that column, but that column houses six flexible gas lines in that manifold in the garage below. There’s a lot in that column that would’ve had to be relocated.” Instead, the team decided to keep the column and make it part of the design. At the end of the eight-week design process, three months of construction began.

CREATING THE WOW FACTOR

Bowen encourages her clients to explore Houzz.com and search for photos of elements they like and dislike. “It helps us get inside their head and see what they’re visualizing,” she says. “When all three of us looked at her ideas, we came up with a concept that I drew out in modeling software to show her. When we were dividing the space, we tried to make sure we were cognizant of the existing surroundings. We wanted to keep the character of the house, but still make it modern and reflect their taste.”

The budget allowed for splurging on two items — the pendant lighting and the backsplash behind the cooktop. “We like to splurge on lighting, and the glass pendants were going to be a main visual piece of the room,” says Bowen.

Realty Restoration posted a photo of that backsplash to its Houzz.com page, and David says that backsplash gets a high three to five hits on the site per week. The eye-catching pattern took incredible skill and patience to install. “It was among the most difficult materials we ever laid,” he says. “It was like putting in wallpaper. Our tile craftsman laid it on the floor first, took the pieces and numbered them with a pencil, and starting with the left and working right laid it out on the wall.”

The tile also acts as an art piece. “This is going to be the art for the room because there aren’t many walls,” says Bowen. “That was a textural piece. There wasn’t a lot of real estate on the backsplash so we could afford more since there wasn’t as much [material] to put in. It was worth every penny we spent on it.”

ON THE ISLAND

A dual-level, 15-ft.-long island separates the cook and guest space, which can seat four. It has nearly 120 cu. ft. of storage space. David says: “We pride ourselves on the planning stage of our project. That’s what our trifecta relationship is. I love to cook so every time we build a kitchen I’m thinking about how the client will use it. We think about maximizing the storage and innovation of the



space. Anytime you take out walls and wall-hung cabinets you have a challenge of trying to figure out storage.”

Bowen adds that it’s necessary to rethink traditional storage. “Everything was wall cabinets and base cabinets through the 1960s,” she says. “Today, think about how you can access things so any member of the family can get them — drawers and pullouts are the best way to go. We were able to plan the space so it’s much more functional with better storage. She has this big long island and doesn’t even fill all the drawers. Before, everything was jampacked.

“We try to teach our clients where to store certain things for certain activities,” Bowen continues. “Plates, glasses and cups don’t have to be in the upper cabinet. You don’t have to store all the food in the pantry. You can store things around the kitchen so everything functions well.”

One creative storage solution is a pullout skillet drawer beside the stove. Christopher notes, “This was the second project we used it on, but that’s another item on Houzz that’s really taken the most hits [along with the backsplash]. After we did this, I put it in my personal house and I just loved it.”

Another unique element of the island is what isn’t immediately visible. David explains the ceiling shape eliminated the possibility for attic space to place registers and air ducts. “We custom designed some diffusers and integrated them into the base of that cabinet so all around we’re delivering air in the toe kick of the space,” he says. “The traditional overhead registers are nonexistent there, so the ceilings are uncluttered.”

That column housing the gas lines became a piece of architecture itself, which is Bowen’s favorite part of this kitchen. She conceptualized a finish design that trimmed it with stainless steel square tubing painted gray, which acts as a vertical extension of the island’s stainless steel backsplash. “It was a unique challenge for me to design a column where it looks like a piece of architecture rather than a supporting column. Working with David and



Top left: The glass pendants were a splurge item that became a main visual.

Above: The eye-catching pattern of the backsplash took skill and patience to install.

Left: A pullout skillet drawer was one of the creative storage solutions put in place.

SEE MORE PHOTOS of this project on ForResidentialPros.com/11789972

Christopher to make that column beautiful and functional was a fun challenge,” she says. “It’s how we blended it and anchored it to the island visually. [The island is at one elevation on one side of the column, and a slightly higher elevation on the other side.] The whole function, flow and how you work on that island with different zones was pretty cool to design.” | QR