

NORTHWEST

RENOVATION

FREE

October/November 2010

A Home Improvement Magazine

Conquering the Great Divide

Tile for the Mid-Century Modern Home



Local Volunteers Help Haiti Rebuild

www.nwrenovation.com



Conquering the Great Divide



Above: Repeated architectural elements like molding and cabinetry not only tie the remodeled space into the rest of the home, but also unify the various zones of the great room.

Top: The new kitchen configuration sufficiently separates it from the family room and improves traffic flow.

By Stacy Green

Our lives should dictate how we use our homes, not the other way around. But living a 21st century life in an early 20th century house can be challenging. Take, for example, the small size of common rooms found in many early 1900s residences. They don't work for those modern families who cultivate more time together.

So how does the owner of a vintage home incorporate a more open floor plan and conquer the great divide of so many walls of separation? With some foresight and finesse, a successful juxtaposition of modern configurations and older character can be achieved, says interior designer Chelly Wentworth.

Evaluating the Impact

Most importantly, says Wentworth, the homeowner must recognize that both the extent of the changes and the ways they harmonize with the rest of the home will



A peninsula counter replaces the function of the dining nook removed to expand the kitchen. The former eating area is now occupied by the kitchen's range and sink walls.

affect the home's aesthetic and its future resale value. Working with clients in such instances, she often helps them "determine if the gain in functionality is worth the sacrifice to the home's architectural fidelity and possible resale value."

Wentworth, who works at Craftsman Design and Renovation, a Portland design/build firm, recently completed a project that beautifully incorporates a modern great room into a well-crafted 1916 Colonial. The successful remodel won top regional honors in its category this year.

When Wentworth's clients came to Craftsman Design, they loved their charming home, but a previous kitchen remodel had left them with a cramped space, low ceiling, inadequate counter space, and poor traffic flow. The clients wanted to rectify those issues while opening the kitchen into the adjacent study to create a welcoming space that would accommodate a variety of family activities.

Whether to dramatically change that

part of the home's layout and character didn't merit an exhaustive exploration, as the affected space was so obviously not meeting the homeowner's needs. "A kitchen, especially, is such an intimate family space. And if it doesn't work for the family, it can really affect the home's livability," says Wentworth.

Leaving the formal dining room untouched also freed the designer and her client to take liberties in adding a separate, more casual eating space as part of the remodel. "We didn't want to do anything that would dramatically depart from, and potentially subtract from, the historic character of the home's critical 'public' rooms," says Wentworth.

Reviewing the Design

Once an area is identified as suitable for some modern reinterpretation, creating a larger space out of smaller individual rooms is much more than a matter of tearing down walls. To make the new

space efficient and get the most for the homeowner's renovation dollar, a design review is often worthwhile.

A new kitchen layout that expanded into a former eating nook was a big part of the budget-friendly design solution. "Initially, the clients had thought to bump out the family room wall approximately five feet to gain needed space," she says. "That plan was ultimately unnecessary and cost-prohibitive, and we came up with a design that could meet all their goals without changing the (home's) footprint."

Craftsman Design removed the walls separating the kitchen from the eating nook on one side and a study area/family room on the opposite side. Most crucially, they moved the kitchen back into the under-utilized dining nook and improved the kitchen configuration.

"Open kitchen designs today trend toward an expanse of unused space, but we chose a 'G'-shaped design to maximize

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 12

function,” says Wentworth. In this case, the configuration affords sufficient separation between the kitchen and family room and improves traffic flow, precluding the need for a bump-out. It also creates a highly efficient cooking area and abundant workspace for communal food preparation. The peninsula counter provides a place for family and friends to

gather and enjoy casual meals, read the paper, or watch television.

Moving the kitchen back into the former eating nook freed up space, which, along with the pre-existing study now comprises the family room. The study, formerly at the heart of the space, now discreetly occupies the far end in a quiet sitting area, its business functions tucked into clever built-ins. Keeping the family

connected, the areas are open to each other and communicate as one space.

Maintaining Continuity

Regardless of how marked a change the homeowners are willing to make to their home’s historic character, the new and old rooms must flow together. That can be achieved, Wentworth says, largely by incorporating aspects of the adjoining rooms, including original moldings and trim, finishes, and cabinetry.

Craftsman Design painstakingly matched new moldings to those elsewhere in the home. Care then was taken to ensure the new kitchen cabinets harmonized with the moldings, and the cabinet design was echoed throughout the built-ins in the family room and study. Softening the modernizing effect of the “great room,” a wide entryway frames the new study in period-inspired fashion while still allowing open circulation and sightlines.

When blending the new with the old, pared-down choices of the highest quality tend to stand the test of time, both aesthetically and functionally. “Introducing modern design concepts and function is best achieved without calling a lot of attention to the updates,” says Wentworth.

“For instance, we used clean, off-white traditional subway tile for the backsplash and contrasting 2 cm, honed black granite with a simple edge detail for the counter,” she says. Minimally detailed cabinets and white oak flooring all blend seamlessly with the rest of the home.

While a deep chocolate accent wall and Asian-influenced decor provide a resort-like ambiance, the remodeled rooms are still historic enough in character that a change in paint and furnishings could easily return it to an older era. It’s a stunning example of conquering the great divide. ■

Stacy Green is the writer behind Green Ink and writes about home improvement, small businesses, the environment, and travel. Contact her at sgreentag@aol.com.

An open space can still benefit from the clandestine. Here, period-inspired cabinetry conceals the workaday functions of a home office that might otherwise detract from this family space.



Craftsman Design and Renovation is an award-winning build/design firm based in Portland and knowledgeable about both vintage and contemporary homes. You can contact them at www.craftsmandesign.com or 503-239-6200.