

# Kitchen, Bath, and Beyond

When a kitchen remodel grew in scope, the entire first floor was reconfigured for graceful aging in place

BY JOHN T. CONROY

**T**he couple who owns this Cape-style home are avid do-it-yourselfers and have completed a number of impressive remodeling projects on their own, with just enough help to make sure they're doing the work right. When they were looking for more outdoor space, they added a three-season porch. Later, when they desired more interior space, they appropriated that porch to expand their family room. They built the brick fireplace in their dining room. They even added two bedrooms and a bathroom to finish the second floor. Suffice it to say, this house has already been through a number of transformations.

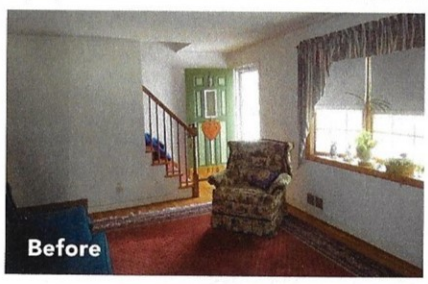
Now heading into retirement, the homeowners decided it was time to tackle their outdated kitchen. Respecting their own design limitations and the complexities of a worthwhile kitchen remodel, they reached out to our firm, Princeton Design Collaborative. As our initial conversations progressed, it became clear that it wasn't just their kitchen that was in need of attention; much more of the first floor could be improved. Before the project was done, we had reconfigured nearly all of the first floor with a relocated kitchen and dining room, a completely overhauled bath, a new bedroom, a new laundry/mudroom, and more. Here's a look at how the project evolved to include a single-floor living arrangement.

## From design to design/build

Although the homeowners had done a lot of work on the house, their life was changing, and the existing setup was no longer

## FROM LIVING ROOM TO KITCHEN

Moving the kitchen into the space of a rarely used living room offered many benefits. The bigger space has more room for cooking, gathering, and storage, and it opens to the dining and family rooms, offering a plan that is more reflective of modern family living. The existing bay window and the entry door were upgraded to bring more daylight into the new kitchen.

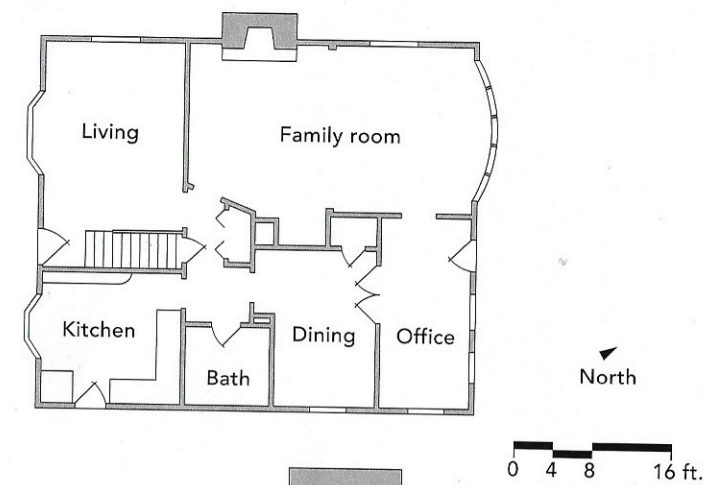




# A KITCHEN GETS CONNECTED

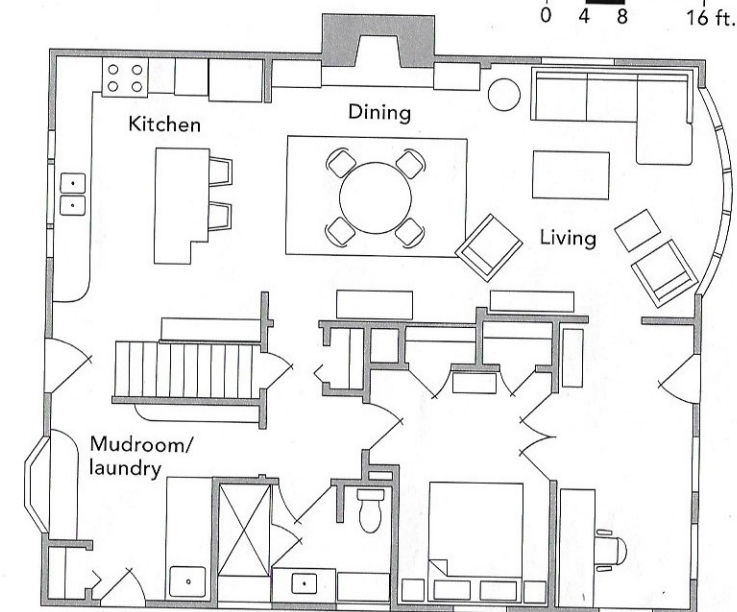
## BEFORE

By today's standards, the existing kitchen was too small and isolated from the main living spaces, and the doorways were poorly placed. The living room was underutilized, and the dining room was too tight for family gatherings. The bathroom was dark and outdated. Also, there were too many stairs for the retired homeowners to climb multiple times a day.



## AFTER

The existing living room became the new kitchen. A wall had to be removed, but this location made it possible to create a big, open connection between the new kitchen, dining area, and family room. The old dining room was converted into a first-floor master bedroom. The former kitchen was converted into a mudroom with laundry facilities. The bath was expanded and completely overhauled. The new plan gives the older homeowners an ideal single-level living arrangement.



## WOOD, WHITE, AND HUES

The clear-finished hickory cabinets tie the kitchen to the existing wall paneling in adjoining rooms. The white-quartz counters were chosen for their clean look and durability, while the painted white island and fridge cabinets brighten up the kitchen and bring a fresh transitional look to the space. An area rug in the dining room brings a bit of color to the refinished oak floors.



working. Frequent overnight visits from family meant that while everyone gathered in the family room, the cook was isolated in the kitchen. Grandchildren slept on the couch. Everyday meals were eaten in the family room, while dinners with guests were squeezed into an undersize dining room. The separation of the bedrooms on the second floor and the laundry in the basement meant that there were a lot of stairs to climb for clean clothes. The formal living room was mainly used for dusting and vacuuming.

Although the homeowners were focused on improving their kitchen, we saw an opportunity to create a plan that would make their home livable for many years to come. With a limited budget, we knew additions were out of the question. So we went to work creating a proposal to reconfigure the entire

first floor within the existing footprint and to meet the owners' current and future needs. Though we greatly increased the scope of the project, when we presented our plan to the homeowners with 3D modeling software, without hesitation, they asked, "When do we begin?"

We've found that when a project budget is tight, it's helpful to form an invested design/build team as early as possible in the process. As soon we got the thumbs-up on this project, we brought in some help of our own.

Builder and remodeler Michael Kaiser helped us to develop a smooth workflow and schedule. Tucker Distinctive Kitchens helped us pin down finishes, cabinet functions, and pricing. And Mrs. G TV & Appliances, a third-generation dealership, helped the homeowners make informed

decisions that balanced appliance features and pricing.

These collaborators were indispensable as we refined the particulars of the design and planned the construction process. As our proposal became more detailed, the homeowners grew more confident in the team and budget and asked us to expand the project even more to include renovating the first-floor bath, which we initially planned to leave as it was.

### Preservation in progress

One thing we didn't want to do was tear out the character and personal touches that the homeowners had added to the house with the projects they had completed over the years. Our plan was to preserve some of the details from these past renovations, while



## A BATH SEES THE LIGHT

The once-windowless bath was completely overhauled, with two new windows set high in the walls for privacy. A linear drain set in the tile at the door allows for a curbless shower, and a bench seat, hand-held shower fixture, and grab bar are provided for the older homeowners. The cabinets and counters tie the new bath to the style of the rest of the first floor.

also rearranging the spaces and enhancing the existing style.

Relocated to the former living-room space, the kitchen is all new. The clear-finished hickory cabinets tie the kitchen to the existing spaces, where we kept some of the wall paneling the homeowners had installed. Otherwise, white cabinets and stainless-steel appliances give the kitchen a brighter and more modern look. We refinished existing oak flooring in the kitchen and dining areas and added carpet in the remainder of the living areas. For a burst of color, we specified an area rug made with Flor carpet tiles in the dining area and hall. And we helped the homeowners choose complementary furnishings from West Elm to bring new life to their family room.

The bath was a total transformation, with new windows for much-needed daylight, a reconfigured sink, additional cabinetry, and a new curbless shower with a bench and

grab bar. The glass shower enclosure and a combination of large-format and mosaic tiles give the bath a modern look, while the clear-finished hickory cabinets reflect similar details throughout the first floor.

Locating the laundry next to the bath made plumbing runs efficient and cost-effective. For additional savings, we reconfigured the old kitchen cabinets for the new laundry room. The homeowners added a fresh coat of paint over the original oak stain. Ikea butcher-block counters and a sustainable cork floor also made the laundry a durable and affordable room to finish.

Other sustainable decisions included LED lighting throughout the remodel and no-VOC paints and floor finishes. We chose to install Nest thermostats with integrated smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, which can be monitored remotely by the homeowners and their extended family for added security.

### New flow, better function

Without adding any square footage to the house, we were able to deliver a cohesive design that seamlessly connects the old and new elements and will allow a couple in their mid-70s to age in place. The new plan has all of the functionality and convenience they need to live on one floor. If the time ever comes to sell the property, the open plan will greatly increase the home's value.

Recently, the owners held their first holiday function in the revitalized home. Not only did they report that the cook was finally able to be part of the festivities, but the rest of the family was right there after dinner to help wash the dishes—a first at one of their family gatherings. □

Architect John T. Conroy is principal and founder of Princeton Design Collaborative. Photos by Jeffrey Tryon, except where noted.



### Enter the laundry

Located inside the homeowners' daily entryway, the space evacuated by the old kitchen offered the perfect opportunity to add a mudroom—and it was large enough to bring the laundry up from the basement. Cork flooring, repurposed kitchen cabinets, and an Ikea counter mitered for a waterfall edge add durability and style.