



## CLEAN SWEEP

A TOTAL LOW-COST UPDATE MAKES A CROWDED, OUTDATED KITCHEN SPARKLE

BEFORE



*After: The upper cabinets are free of clutter, with open shelving added to each side of the window to add light, style and function to the '20s kitchen. A farmhouse sink, beaded board backsplash, new countertops and a hidden integrated dishwasher update the kitchen. Contractor Luke McElmurry added molding under the kitchen window to complement the molding above the cabinets.*

*Before: Dust-catching clutter lined the top of the upper cabinets and a black dishwasher interrupted the bottom row of cabinets.*

BY JOETTA MOULDEN • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JANET LENZEN

Paula Murphy and I met through her business partner, Tessie Patterson, a good friend and co-worker from my earlier magazine days. Several years ago, Tessie gave Paula a consultation with Shelterstyle.com for a birthday present at her tiny four-plex apartment, and we've been friends ever since.

After Paula bought her first house, a '20s bungalow, she made do with her outdated kitchen, which lacked both counter space and room underneath the upper cabinets to house her tall coffee maker and blender.

"Not only did I want new countertops, I also really wanted to make the refrigerator and microwave feel like a part of the kitchen, instead of something thrown against the wall, but I was stuck, thinking that it would just cost too much," she explains.

"I also had a very old vent over my stove that was on its last leg," she continues. "I would pull the chain, and about five minutes later, it would finally come on. This made for a very hot kitchen when cooking in the summer."

### COOKING UP IDEAS

At our first meeting, Paula showed me several kitchen magazine layouts featuring white cabinets, open shelving, dark granite countertops, farmhouse





AFTER



Replacing the dishwasher with an “integrated” one that accepts dummy drawer and door panels and matching hardware makes the appliance completely invisible. Next to it, a pullout trash bin is similarly concealed from sight.



BEFORE

*After: A new Jenn-Air range and Broan vent make cooking a joy. New beaded board walls, larger-scaled pots on the pot rack and knob repositioning add style to the once boring room. Before: A dated range and vent made cooking a chore, while beige Formica countertops offered zero contrast and style.*

sinks and painted beaded board walls. “I wanted a smart and stylish vintage kitchen, not ‘stuffy-looking,’” she explains.

After a few minutes of careful listening and several sketches later, I conceived an affordable master plan — to be accomplished as time and money allowed. Knowing Paula’s available funds, I knew that her desire for black granite counters would not only bust the budget, but also could overbuild the house. Instead, I suggested she buy inexpensive butcherblock countertops from IKEA and refinish and stain them deep mahogany — which saved her \$1,800 right off the bat.

Since she was planning to spend that money anyway, I recommended she take the savings and build in the refrigerator and extend the countertop, creating a niche for the microwave in the process, which would increase future resale value. I also suggested using inexpensive, scored beaded board panels, rather than real tongue-and-groove boards.

We designed a counter extension in the area next to the new, built-in refrigerator, which definitely solved its haphazard-looking placement, and included a wine rack above the fridge. Then, by cutting away the two upper cabinets on each side of the sink, we installed open shelves in their place, which not only made the kitchen feel larger, but gave Paula display space for her handsome white dishes and glassware that were hiding inside the cabinets. By eliminating the “blinder effect” of the two cabinets, the open shelving also allowed more sunlight to spill into the room.

“I love the open shelving look, but was hesitant to make the entire kitchen ‘open,’” Paula explains. “Your suggestion to only install it on each side of the sink was perfect, as it gave me a touch of the look, but also accommodated my wish to keep primary storage behind closed doors.”

When I mentioned how nice it would look in the future to replace her dishwasher with an integrated model that would accept fake drawer and door panels, Paula loved the idea. I e-mailed her photos of an actual installation so she could see how it would actually look.

“That first brainstorming session went way farther than I thought it would,” Paula says. “I really just wanted to validate my thoughts about changing the

countertops and didn’t necessarily expect to redesign the whole kitchen — although inside I really wanted to make major changes to the kitchen. I started out wanting new counters... and now I have a whole new kitchen.”

#### THE DOMINO THEORY

My theory is that freshening a kitchen follows the domino theory: You upgrade one thing and it makes other things in the kitchen look tired. Having recently just worked with contractor Luke McElmurry of McElmurry Homes, LLC, on his mom, Pat’s, similar kitchen redo (*Houston House & Home* “DIY Decorating” column February 2006), I suggested Paula give him a call.

Luke has a knack for concealing the over-the-stove vent, and I knew of his expertise with wood countertop installation. If Paula wanted to get a new vent, she might as well replace the outdated stove with a new stainless model to match her new refrigerator. Thus, the domino theory.

I gave Paula a list of homework assignments and sources to research to help her determine if my suggested changes could be done now or piece-by-piece over time. It was a starter list to which Paula added her own

#### TRADE | secrets

- To eliminate costly mistakes, hire an objective professional to help you stay within your budget.

- Think outside the box. With a little dark wood stain and elbow

grease, prefab butcherblock counters can mimic solid mahogany slabs.

- Sometimes the most effective strategy is to not gut your kitchen, but to rethink the cabinets that already are paid for.



AFTER

The existing refrigerator is now housed in a new cabinet with built-in wine rack above. A new extended, stained butcherblock countertop allows the new microwave to be built in, with pot and pan storage drawer underneath. The custom-treated countertop saved Paula \$1,800, as well. Newly painted walls are Ralph Lauren's "Sisal."

tasks as things developed. I told her the appliances could be replaced as they "died."

"After getting Luke's very reasonable bid of \$3,800 to do the build out," Paula says, "I decided to just replace the appliances all at once — a real splurge of \$5,325."

**A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS**

Paula shares these budget-saving tips when redoing your kitchen: "If you don't mind going several places to comparison shop, you can realize substantial savings. The Internet is helpful for research, but I still like to see what I am buying. So, I researched online, went to see in person, then sometimes bought for less online. I found the faucet at [www.faucetline.com](http://www.faucetline.com), the range vent at [www.ajmadison.com](http://www.ajmadison.com) and the light over the sink from [www.restorationhardware.com](http://www.restorationhardware.com)."

Paula also discovered the Factory Builders Outlet tent sale for the dishwasher and AABC Appliances Gallery for the stove and farmhouse sink.

"What I have learned most from this experience is that before you decide that a remodeling project is too expensive, you should stop, plan and research. Discuss with a professional what you would like your final room to look like and then figure out how to achieve that look...on your budget," Paula says.

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