



Kitchen, Meet Dining Room

Opening up an old house ties

together these important spaces

BY NICOLE STARNES TAYLOR



BEFORE

Old homes are seductive. They charm us with their high ceilings, quiet plaster walls, solid-oak floors, painted wood trim, and scale and proportion that for many of us says “home.” I think this is why so many century-old homes in Seattle, where I work, have dodged the wrecking ball and continue to be patched, remodeled, and loved. The one consistent albatross in these sweet old homes, however, is the kitchen.

The floor plan in this 1926 house was typical for the era, with the living room, dining room, and kitchen all stacked along one side of the house. The existing kitchen and dining room were each large enough, but they were disconnected from each other through a maze of doors and awkward circulation paths that wasted 75% of the potentially useful space.

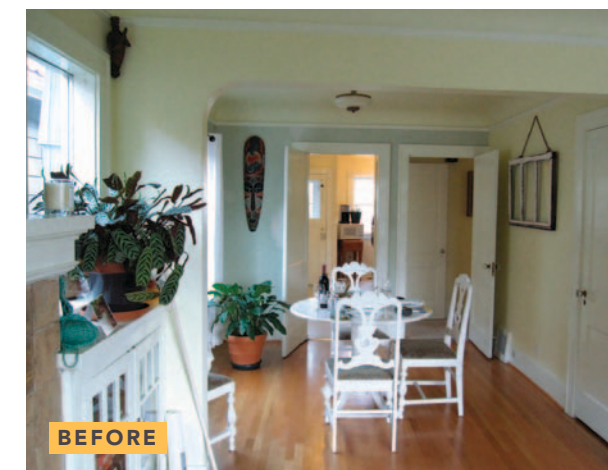
Removing walls uncramps two rooms. With no increase in the footprint, a small kitchen and dining room are now larger and more open. A new half-wall defines the spaces and the new circulation pattern.

My client loves to cook and entertain, so the redesign she hired me for needed to transform her isolated kitchen into the heart of the house. In fact, the new design focused primarily on the kitchen, with the additional goals of connecting better to the backyard and creating a more usable dining room.

We could have extended the home’s footprint, but the client and I felt that good design could fix the house’s issues on a more reasonable budget. This cost-saving measure allowed more money for custom cabinets, wood flooring, countertops, new windows, and appliances.

The kitchen didn’t play well with the dining room

In the existing kitchen, the upper cabinets started 12 in. above the countertop, making food prep and small-appliance usage almost impossible. The lighting was poor, and the kitchen needed more natural light. The existing window over the sink looked directly into the neighbor’s house. Southern light and views of the backyard and of downtown Seattle were cropped by a small window and a mudroom. In the existing dining room, the only spot that made



BEFORE



Light and privacy. The new reeded-glass windows high in the dining-room wall admit daylight but limit the view of the neighboring house. The new half-walls between the rooms create space for the dining table and clearly define the circulation path.

DETAILS

Cabinetry: Pacific Crest; pacificcrest.us

Dining-room fixture: West Elm; westelm.com

Faucet: Kohler; kohler.com

French door: Simpson Door; simpsondoor.com

Hardware: Restoration Hardware; restorationhardware.com

Kitchen-ceiling fixture: Rejuvenation Lighting; rejuvenation.com

Range: Bertazzoni; us.bertazzoni.com

Reeded-glass casement: Lindal Windows; lindal.com/windows

Tile: The Home Depot; homedepot.com

sense for a table was in the way of anyone walking between the kitchen and the living room. Plenty of natural light came from two wide 5-ft.-high windows. However, these windows looked directly into the neighbor's bathroom 10 ft. away. Four doors opening into the dining room reinforced the sense of separation between it and the kitchen.

Opening and joining the spaces

By knocking down the wall and an unused chimney between the kitchen and the dining room, and by removing the maze of doors, we streamlined circulation and connected the kitchen and the dining room physically and visually. We added half-height walls with columns at their ends on each end of the dining room to maintain the scale and proportion of the house. These walls share light and views while defining the spaces and creating an alcove for the table that's out of the traffic path.

We tore out the mudroom at the back of the kitchen, adding French doors that allow southern light to pour in and that connect the house to the gracious backyard and views of downtown Seattle. A larger casement replaced the window over the sink. The new window's reeded glass diffuses the view of the neighbor's nearby house.

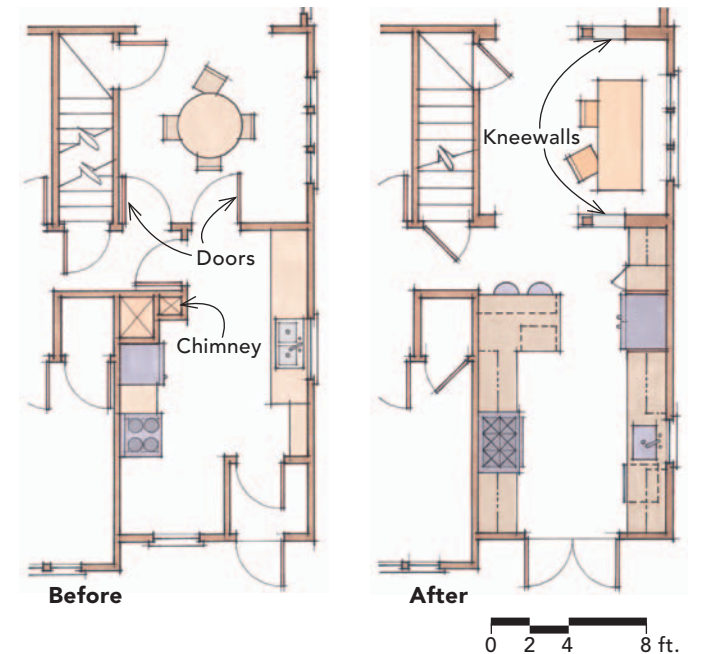
Where a wall had truncated the kitchen, a peninsula now acts as a perch space. It also slows traffic flow into the kitchen to foster a warm, natural gathering space.



Stools for onlookers. The peninsula provides a spot for guests to sit and chat with the cook. A shelf above the refrigerator keeps cookbooks out of the way, yet accessible.

NEW FLOOR PLAN UNITES EXISTING SPACES

Tearing out existing walls and doors connected the kitchen to the dining room, improving circulation and enlarging the space visually.



Details tie the rooms together

The existing oak floors in the living room and dining room were carried into the kitchen. The floors' warm, dark-brown stain highlights the painted wood trim. The honed, absolute-black granite countertops define the space, while the subway-tile backsplash with its dark-gray epoxy grout provides a contrasting, softer texture. Vintage light fixtures pay homage to the home's 1920s roots, while undercabinet lighting provides excellent task lighting at the countertops.

Three new reeded-glass windows high on the dining-room wall bring in light while screening the neighbor's bathroom from sight. General contractor Nicole Dumas built these windows on site. The new pendant fixture above the dining-room table provides a fun, modern focal point to the dining area. Dumas built the table from old-growth fir studs salvaged from demolition.

A beautiful finished project is rewarding for everyone, but it's the process of getting there that makes me want to come to work every morning. For me, that hinges on a strong architect-contractor relationship. In this case, I have known Nicole Dumas for almost a decade, from when we were both carpenters. That field experience developed into an easy rapport and collaborative approach that makes our work more engaging and gives our clients a better process and project. □

Former carpenter Nicole Starnes Taylor is an architect and the owner of MAKE Design Studio (makedesignstudiollc.com) in Seattle. Photos by Aaron Leitz, except where noted.

Architect: Nicole Starnes Taylor, MAKE Design Studio **Location:** Seattle **Contractor:** Nicole Dumas, Dumas Build