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23. Amazing Makeovers

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Kitchen
Makeover
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The Comeback Kitchen

AN ILLINOIS KITCHEN LACKING EVERYTHING
BUT A SINK AND TWO WINDOWS IS
RESUSCITATED WITH VINTAGE TOUCHES
AND A SLEW OF MUST HAVES.



Greedy boarders had picked the kitchen of this once-elegant 1922 house in Evanston, Illinois, to the bone. “All of the appliances had been removed,” homeowner Jackie Mack says. “All that was left was the kitchen sink.” Plus, the kitchen had a gas leak and a labyrinth of clutter that made navigating it challenging and hazardous. But Jackie and her husband, David, found the room’s condition more empowering than intimidating: With so little good to start with, the barren space could only improve.

“The house was completely neglected when we found it, but we could tell it had been a lovely Arts and Crafts house at one time, so we got to work,” Jackie says. “I knew exactly the look I wanted for the room. I wanted it to be fresh and clean, and appear as though it had always been here, tying in with the rest of the house,” which retained its original natural oak millwork and leaded-glass windows.

The Macks asked architect Fred Wilson to remodel the kitchen without increasing its 180-square-foot size. “We were dealing with a very small space and a very serious cook,” says Wilson, who asks: “Did you see the Before pictures? It was filled with junk, and there were only little paths where you could walk. We had to imagine what it would be like when it was opened up.”

Wilson vanquished the gloom when he added vintage-style windows along adjacent walls, where he built a banquette. “We used the smallest possible table here,” Wilson says, “but it comfortably seats six.” The Macks, a family of five, enjoy most of their meals in the sunny nook.

Real linoleum floors, cherry cabinetry, marble counters, and a generous apron-front sink provide the timeless look Jackie wanted, integrating the kitchen with the home’s original architecture. “The interesting duality is that contemporary open Metro shelving with brackets exists right beside natural cherry cabinetry with old-fashioned crystal knobs,” Wilson says.

Intent on being able to find things quickly when cooking in her new kitchen, Jackie originally wanted only open shelving—no cabinets. She had envisioned the modern feature against all-tile walls for an old-new mix. “But because the kitchen is small, I realized we had to go with more cabinetry,” she says. Glass-front cabinets for dishes and food storage provide a happy medium, allowing Jackie to see what she needs at a glance while providing more depth for storage. “Cabinetry in this small space could have had a very heavy feel to it, but the glass doors lighten it up,” Wilson says. The cabinets stretch to the top of the 9½-foot ceiling “to maximize storage even if it was out of reach,” he says.

From barely there to fully functional, the Macks’ kitchen has come a long way. “I love everything about this kitchen,” Jackie says. “The benefit of a small kitchen is that everything has a place, everything’s convenient, and everything’s right where you think it should be. It’s sunny, it’s warm, and it’s a great place to be.”

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Before the remodel, Jackie and David Mack’s kitchen had only one window, positioned above the sink. Now the space is flooded with light, courtesy of new casement windows with small-pane lights that envelop a space-saving banquette. The new windows introduce Arts and Crafts geometry to the kitchen compatible with the original architecture of the 1922 home.



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SNEAKY STORAGE

When outfitting a small kitchen, creative storage solutions are a must. In Jackie and David Mack's kitchen, architect Fred Wilson leaves no square inch unused.

- 1 Toe-kick drawers.** Why seal off that dead space at the floor with more cherry when you can put the same space to work as additional storage? The Macks' kitchen includes toe-kick drawers that store cookie sheets, trays, and anything else that will fit.
- 2 Over-the-window shelving.** Wilson crowned the sink area and the new bank of windows at the banquette with old-style bracket-mount shelving to accommodate Jackie's "large platters, bowls, pitchers, and other things I don't use every day," she says.
- 3 Counter-to-ceiling cabinet.** Jackie and David use their glass-door version of their cabinetry as an easy-access food pantry.
- 4 Appliance niche.** Jackie didn't want her limited counter space cluttered with equipment, so Wilson scooped out a niche from a stairway wall just left of the stove for easy storage and retrieval of appliances, including the toaster and coffeemaker.
- 5 Doorway library.** Jackie's cookbook collection (shown on page 110) is now handsomely housed in built-ins that wrap around the doorway to the dining room.

LEFT: White wall tiles and a trio of metal shelves flanking double ovens provide the clean look Jackie and David wanted. Glass-front cherry cabinets supplement essential storage without appearing too heavy or over-scaled for the small kitchen.

ABOVE: One of the most space-efficient features is a counter-to-ceiling cabinet adjacent to the refrigerator that the family uses as a food pantry. Perishables are stored in containers that run the depth of the cabinet so that all items can be easily seen and reached.



“Wherever we could find space, we put storage. Once we found an inch, we kept it.”

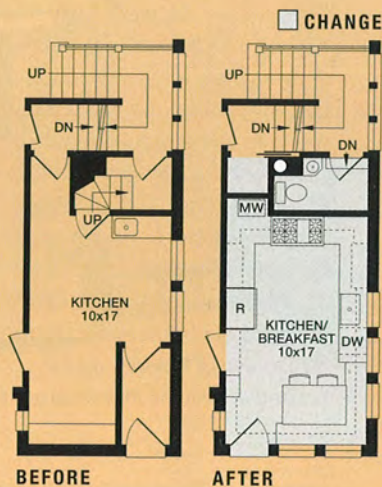
—architect Fred Wilson

THE CHANGE:

A dilapidated 1922 kitchen with no counters, cabinets, or appliances is reinvented as a light-filled family space with double ovens, ample storage, and city-chic Arts and Crafts style—all without gaining a single square foot.

WHAT IT TOOK:

- * Taking the plaster walls down to the studs and scrapping the only existing elements—a sink and a pair of windows.
- * Opening up the gloomy room with a bank of new vintage-style casement windows.
- * Building a space-saving wraparound banquette beneath the new window bank to provide an eat-in function.
- * Creating a clean, classic look with stainless-steel appliances, linoleum floors, marble counters, and a farmhouse sink.
- * Mixing glass-front cherry cabinets with open metal shelves for an old-new feel.
- * Adding creative storage solutions such as toe-kick drawers, doorway bookcases, an appliance niche, and a counter-to-ceiling cabinet.





OPPOSITE: A handsome solution for storing cookbooks, built-in cherry cases that match the kitchen cabinetry frame the doorway leading to the dining room. Frosted-glass doors cover the shelves above the doorway for a tidy segue to the formal room.

THIS PHOTO: The dining room—with its Arts and Crafts oak beams and millwork brought back to their original luster—proves that Jackie and David made a wise decision rescuing this neglected gem in a prestigious Lake Michigan neighborhood.