



Remodelling in a heritage home requires care and kid gloves

BY PEDRO ARRAIS, TIMES COLONIST JULY 23, 2011



The kitchen is a little smaller than the original space, but it now has larger windows and much better lighting.

Photograph by: Adrian Lam, Times Colonist, Times Colonist

Creating a modern kitchen in a heritage house can be a daunting challenge but one that, when overcome, can make the home more accommodating for modern families.

While other rooms in a older home can simply be retrofitted with period furniture, few people wish to forgo the modern conveniences normally found in today's kitchens.

The concept of comfort and convenience has changed in the last century. To our parents and grandparents, the kitchen was merely a place to cook food. Today, a kitchen is frequently the hardestworking room in a house.

Not only is food prepared there, it is frequently the hub of daily life.

When Katherine Rowe and her husband Paul Cumberland bought their 1906 British Arts and Crafts house in historic James Bay five years ago, they set about on a labour of love to bring the home back to its former glory.

"The working triangle [between the fridge, stove and sink] wasn't there," says Riddell, principal designer of Artistry Design Group. "Creating a functional kitchen was the easy part. But we were tasked with creating an update that was sympathetic to the home."

Another challenge came with traffic flow. There are four doors in the kitchen - one enters from the hall, one leads down to the basement, one to the dining room and one to the outdoors.

To improve the flow, they had to relocate three of the doors - making one of them a pocket door.

The existing windows were small and let in little sunlight. They replaced two of them with one oversized, custom stained-glass window above the sink.

The pattern is derived from a design found in the home's living room.

A new double-hung window with modern thermal glass is found above a breakfast nook with its built-in bookcase. The wooden back door was replaced with a door with a frosted glass insert to let in more light yet provide privacy.

To solve the problem of insufficient counter space or cabinets, Riddell installed a new wall to create an L-shaped run.

"By putting a new wall in the kitchen, we actually made the kitchen smaller," says Rowe. "Although we went against the trend [of bigger is better], we came away with a better layout."

Old mouldings were replicated and the original fir floor was refinished. A century's accumulation of paint was removed from the walls. Modern lighting, in the form of recessed pot lights, augment a light fixture that is correct for the period but not original to the house. A reproduction

The new cabinets have Shaker-style facings and subway tiles serve as the backsplash for the granite countertop. A dishwasher is artfully hidden behind a panel but a stainless steel refrigerator sits uncovered. The kitchen gained a useful pantry and added storage under the banquette seats in the nook.

Pull-outs on either side of the stove keep oil and spices close at hand.

Furniture legs were used on the base of the cabinets, further reinforcing the period look of the kitchen.

"It was a fun but challenging project," says Riddell, a certified kitchen and bath planner and member of the National Kitchen and Bath Association. "Not only did we have to design a modern kitchen for the client, we had to do it in a way that captured the architecture from the rest of the house."

Rowe and Cumberland are very happy with their renovated kitchen.

"It turned out better than expected," says Rowe.

That's music to the ears for City of Victoria councillor Pam Madoff, a longtime champion of heritage conservation and former governor for B.C. on the board of the Heritage Canada Foundation.

"I can personally attest that it is possible to have a modern kitchen or bath in a heritage house," says Madoff, who also lives in a heritage house in James Bay. "Although there is nothing original except for the door and window, people still think it is the original kitchen. The idea is to take cues from the house and design a kitchen that fits the house. I remember a saying: 'Listen, and the house will tell you a story'."

The house is on Victoria's heritage registry, so any modifications to the exterior of the house - in this case the relocation of the back windows - had to be approved. Still, the couple found the process relatively straightforward.

"The people [from the Heritage Advisory Committee who oversee applications for change] were very accommodating," says Rowe. "I suspect they realize there must be some give and take to account for modern living. Our experience should reassure people afraid to buy heritage homes because they can't modernize them. It certainly hasn't been the case with us."

parrais@timescolonist.com

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