

Sunlight pours into the dining area in the winter, sinking into the ceramic tile floor, where the heat is retained. A Vermont Castings woodstove provides backup heat for cloudy, frigid days.

Working closely with an architect pays off for two avid cooks.

## A MEETING OF MINDS

BY MICHAEL J. CROSBIE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAXWELL MACKENZIE

To some people, the kitchen is nothing more than a room where food is prepared and stored, with a sink for cleaning up. But the owners of this 70-year-old house in Washington, DC, wanted something more.

They transformed their cramped, uninviting kitchen into a grand space in which they now spend most of their time at home, enjoying the fruits of a successful

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It's tough to find a cool spot on a humid summer day in Washington, DC. This porch is designed to provide breezy relief and a panoramic view of the flower and vegetable gardens.

collaboration with Washington architect Robert William Reinhardt.

Like many renovation projects, this one started when something broke. A column on the decrepit two-story back porch crumbled, prompting the homeowners to consider replacing the porch. They were also eager to remodel the adjacent kitchen. Avid gourmet cooks, the couple had always felt that the old kitchen was an impossible place in which to work. So they took their ideas about a new kitchen layout, new porch spaces, and passive solar design to Reinhardt. Working closely with the homeowners, he synthesized everything into a practical yet attractive renovation.

Reinhardt decided on the addition's octagonal shape early in the design process. The back of the house faces west, so he found the octagon perfect for maximizing solar exposure to the south and southwest. The turreted form also ties neatly into the house. It gives the addition a distinctive appearance without making it stick out in this neighborhood of mostly turn-of-the-century houses.

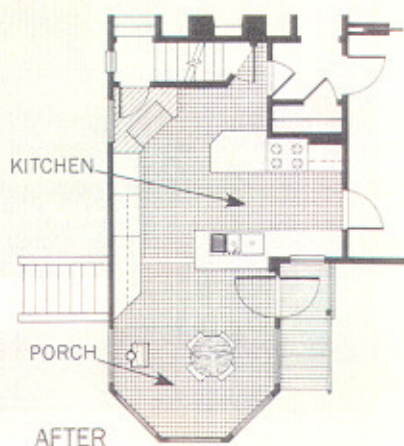
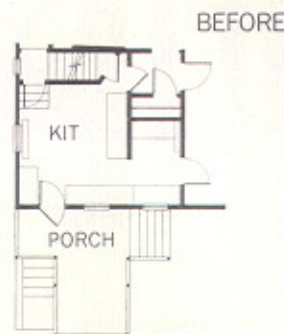
As the design progressed, the character of the rooms changed. At first, the second story space was to be an enclosed studio and the first story an open porch. But in the final design, the upper level is open and the lower level is closed. This is a better solution visually, because the more transparent second story is supported by a "solid" base. The other way around, the addition might have appeared top-heavy.

The upstairs porch is a comfortable retreat, commanding a view of the flower and vegetable gardens. In the summer, with the sun high in the sky, it's a shady place that captures cool breezes. During the colder months, the sun, lower in the sky, shines directly in for warmth. The

solid north wall provides privacy as well as protection from cold winds.

The floor is made of redwood panels that rest on notched sleepers, or crisscrossed slats. The slats raise the flooring so rainwater drains into a gutter that wraps around the octagon at its midsection. The ceiling is clad with finely beaded pine like that found on old porches.

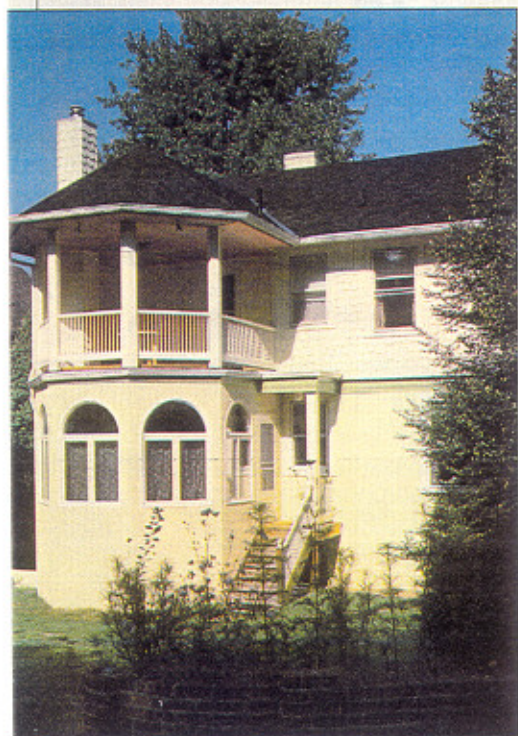
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## RENOVATION



*Inset*, The old kitchen was awkward and difficult to work in. Counterspace was nonexistent, and elements that should have worked together (the stove and refrigerator, for instance) were miles apart. The clock was the only thing the owners salvaged. *Above*, With the dining area connected to the kitchen, it's easy to entertain and cook at the same time. Round-top Marvin windows embracing the dining area bring in lots of natural light and provide a spectacular "kitchen-window" view. *Below*, This sleek octagonal addition was once a crumbling back porch. The unique shape increases solar exposure on the south and southwest. The addition sets the house apart from, but doesn't make it stick out among, the other turn-of-the-century homes in the neighborhood.



Twenty different plans were considered before one was chosen to get this professional-looking kitchen in shape. Only top-notch ingredients, such as Argentine granite countertops, went into the kitchen. Efficiency was critical to the homeowners, both avid cooks, so they created plenty of counterspace in strategic areas.

## RENOVATION

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Though fully enclosed, the dining area downstairs has the open feeling of the porch above it. Reinhardt installed Marvin windows, positioning them low in the room. "When you're sitting down, you look out the lower windows," he says. "They

give you a different feeling than when you're standing up and can look out the top windows." Knowing that the exterior of the addition would be pebble-dash stucco to match the base of the existing house, Reinhardt suggested round-top windows, since an arched opening is the most appropriate shape for a masonry wall.

The dining area stays quite cool in the summer, thanks to the triple-pane windows, shading from the upstairs porch, and heavy insulation. During the winter

months, sun comes in from the south when the yard's deciduous trees lose their foliage and is absorbed into the ceramic tile floor on its cement setting bed. A small Vermont Castings woodstove provides additional heat.

THE KITCHEN WAS THE TOUGHEST DESIGN challenge. It underwent about 20 different plans before everything fell into place. The homeowners wanted a kitchen designed for efficiency; a galley arrangement of a commercial stove, sink, and refrigerator met this demand. Everywhere you look there's counter space—including a "holding area" for grocery bags, conveniently placed next to the refrigerator.

One thing the homeowners knew they wanted was a ceramic tile floor set in a mud base, which would put a considerable load on the joists. A structural engineer suggested using lightweight steel beams instead of beefing up the wood floor joists, since the steel would be cheaper and easier to install. A single beam running across the joists' midspan was sufficient.

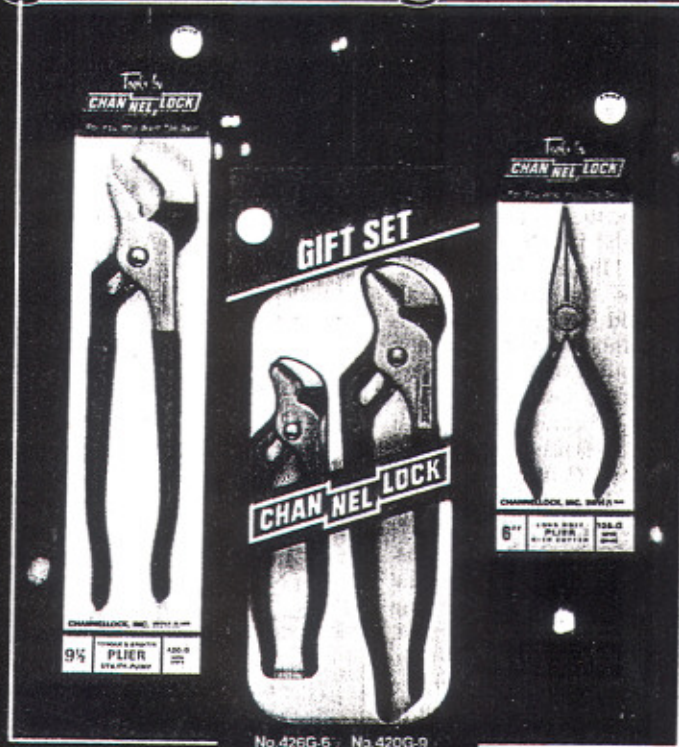
The homeowners insisted on using the finest materials in their kitchen and hunted them down. During a stroll through a stoneyard, they found a dark green-and-brown Argentine granite to use on the counters. Although three times the price of a plastic-laminate countertop, it has, they feel, a hundred times the value. In their words: "It has a good shine that it won't lose, and we'll never tire of looking at it. Even cleaning the countertop is enjoyable!"

Off-white baked-enamel metal cabinets with wood-core doors and stainless-steel pulls maintain the clean, crisp, working-kitchen aesthetic. Overhead downlights with parabolic reflectors and glass lenses provide plenty of illumination and reduce glare. Finishing touches include light-green crown molding that matches the belt molding on the house's exterior. The oak quarter-round molding above the baseboards and countertops adds warmth; the homeowners finished it to match the existing oak woodwork.

What made this collaboration between homeowners and architect so successful? According to the homeowners, the key is finding an architect who is "willing to listen to you and who won't be offended by the fact that you want to think about the design, too."

And what makes a good client? "One who takes an active role in the whole process," says Reinhardt. "Because this couple was involved, they understood what you can and can't do. The more we worked together in the design process, the better I understood what they did and didn't want, and that made for a better project." The results speak for themselves. ■

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