

# In a New Light

BRIGHT, BIG, AND FULL OF  
FUNCTION—THIS MINNESOTA  
KITCHEN GETS IT ALL WITHOUT  
THE EXPENSE OF AN ADDITION.

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Sunlight streams into this remodeled Minnesota kitchen thanks to a new double-hung window above the sink. Laminate countertops offer a budget-friendly and low-maintenance alternative to stone.



**S**ometimes it pays to think inside the box. So says Minneapolis architect Rosemary McMonigal, who helped a Minnesota couple sidestep a costly and time-consuming addition to their 1970s Colonial by convincing them to rethink what they had. “There was enough space, but it needed to work better,” McMonigal says.

Especially the kitchen. The 8×11-foot room had an awkward layout and was big enough for just one cook. It was closed off to adjacent rooms, and the one small window couldn't usher in enough natural light to offset the dark cabinets. Having made do with the shortcomings for more than 20 years, the owners had their remodeling priorities set. They wanted more light, better function, and an easier flow within the kitchen and into nearby rooms.

To open up the kitchen, McMonigal took space from the adjoining family room and seldom-used formal dining area. Absorbing parts of the two spaces and removing walls nearly tripled the kitchen's size. This allowed for a two-level island that stretches the length of the room, providing lots of elbow room for preparing foods, eating snacks, and gathering around. Large windows, glass-front upper cabinets, and white subway tiles keep things on the light side and lend classic Colonial style.

As she did when carving out extra square footage, McMonigal got creative with choosing materials. The butcher block that tops the island does more than balance the wood floors and base cabinets: “This gives the family the opportunity to pull things out of the oven or microwave and set them on a surface that won't melt,” the architect



**LEFT:** Mixing materials—*butcher block and laminate counters, painted and stained cabinets—adds to the kitchen's relaxed look. A fresh green palette echoes the woods surrounding the home.* **THIS PHOTO:** The island buffers the work zone, allowing the cooks freedom to move. The cabinet at the end of the island provides a work space convenient to the refrigerator. Plain-sliced oak cabinets have less graining for a refined look that complements the butcher block on the island.



## WHAT MAKES THIS KITCHEN WORK

**1. Ceiling beams:** Hefty beams—both structural and decorative—provide architectural interest and unify the different-height ceilings (a result of taking space from adjacent rooms). “The beams also break up the narrow feel of the space,” architect Rosemary McMonigal says.

**2. Cabinetry:** Glass-front upper cabinets keep the kitchen from seeming closed in. Mixing white upper cabinets with light-stained oak base cabinets ensures that the north-facing kitchen stays bright and visually warm.

**3. Laminate countertops:** Subdued laminate around the perimeter keeps the focus on the kitchen rather than the countertops. “Everyone thinks you have to have granite, limestone, or some type of solid-surfacing,” McMonigal says. “We encourage people to consider laminate. It’s durable and cost-effective, and there are thousands of choices now.”

**4. Tiered island:** A tall cabinet at the end of the island breaks up the horizontal lines. It’s also full of function—it holds the microwave and provides a right-height work surface for the tall homeowners.

**5. Backsplash:** White subway tiles reflect the timeless materials used throughout the renovation. “We didn’t want anything too heavy,” McMonigal says. “Some handmade tiles are heavy or clunky looking and would have overwhelmed the space.”

**6. Range:** A professional-quality range teams with other stainless-steel appliances to bring a streamlined look to the vintage-inspired kitchen.

Start your remodeling project with a comprehensive analysis of your family's lifestyle, including how you use your existing house. Be flexible and open to new ideas and solutions. —architect Rosemary McMonigal

### STORAGE SMARTS

New cabinetry offers a chance to get storage that works for the way you live. When planning for it, inventory your pots and pans, especially oversized items such as baking sheets, roasting pans, cutting boards, and platters. Vertical thinking is key to adequate storage, says architect Rosemary McMonigal. "Think about the things that seem to stack up awkwardly and fall out when you open a cupboard," she says. New cabinetry should factor in space for them, with features such as slots that allow baking sheets and serving trays to be stored upright. For convenience, place the items near where you use them most. "Some people need tray storage near an exterior door because they entertain on a patio," McMonigal says. "Others need muffin tins down low because their kids like to make cupcakes."

### THE CHANGE:

A small, inefficient kitchen is expanded and reworked into an 11×23-foot space that's light, bright, and full of function.

### WHAT IT TOOK:

\* Customizing storage with pullout units and vertical dividers in the base cabinets as well as wine storage and appliance areas in the island.

\* Installing a long island that provides lots of prep and storage space.

\* Incorporating an adjacent dining area and part of a family room to almost triple the kitchen's size.

\* Adding ceiling beams to help mask the varying ceiling heights resulting from taking over space from the dining room and family room.

\* Replacing dark cabinetry with white and light-stained cabinets and adding a large window above the sink to brighten the space.

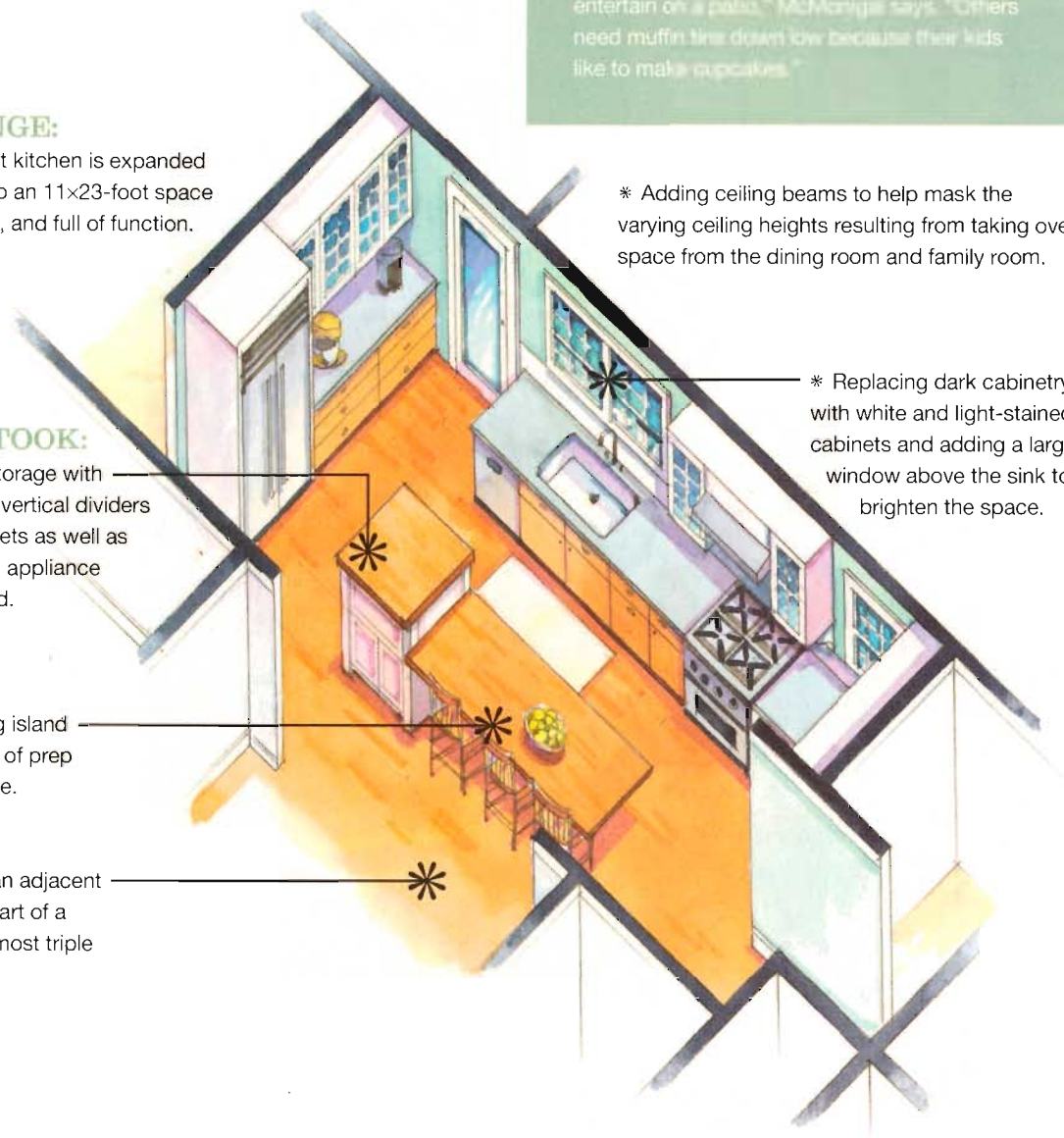


ILLUSTRATION BY GARY PALMER





says. The perimeter countertops are the big surprise—they're humble laminate rather than showy stone. "When people walk into the kitchen, they see the space as a whole, not just the countertops," she says. "Most people don't have a clue that these are laminate."

The cost-saving laminate came about after the architect advised the owners to look at the big picture and be willing to rethink features as the project evolved. The island is another example. The homeowners initially thought they wanted a shorter island, until McMonigal's layouts showed how that would create more walking space and less storage—in other words, it would use the space inefficiently. "Ultimately, the longer island worked well for everyone," she says.

Although the homeowners didn't get the addition they thought they needed, they still got everything they wanted. Their kitchen is bigger, brighter, and better. And their formerly standoffish dining area flows right into this new hub of the home, so it gets used every day. "It's so rewarding when clients are willing to revisualize how their house could work," McMonigal says. "It takes someone gutsy to see how they can use spaces differently."

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**TOP:** A 48-inch-high cabinet at one end of the island hides the microwave and provides extra prep space for the tall homeowners.

**ABOVE:** Decorative corbels add architectural detail that the home lacked and nod to the kitchen's vintage character.

**RIGHT:** Nifty storage solutions include vertical tray dividers in the island.

