

Kitchen Conversions

THREE KITCHEN RENOVATIONS REINFORCE THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF THIS DOMESTIC HAVEN *By Barbara Knox*



Design team (left to right): Rosemary McMonigal, AIA; Ashley Mitlyng, Assoc. AIA; Jennifer Hilla Schlag; Curtis Martinson; Melissa Steinberg.

Phil Gerlach had fond memories of the St. Paul four-square house in which he grew up. But when he purchased the house from his father in 1991, the 1904 home needed loving care. Undaunted, Gerlach and his wife, Cathy Perrone, began restoring the Merriam Park residence from top to bottom. But when it came time for the kitchen renovation, the weekend warriors set down their toolboxes and called Rosemary McMonigal, AIA, principal, McMonigal Architects, LLC, Minneapolis.

“We recognized that we just didn’t have the skills to do a project of that size by ourselves,” Perrone says, by which she means transforming a small, cramped and out-of-date kitchen into a functional space with a style in keeping

with the historic house. “Cathy and Phil really wanted a kitchen that would connect visually to the outside and to the rest of the first-floor living spaces,” McMonigal says. “They have been such excellent stewards for the house that it was a pleasure to help them with this aspect of the renovation.”

After realizing she couldn’t fit all of the couple’s goals within the existing footprint of the house, McMonigal planned a 185-square-foot, single-story addition that allowed her to reorganize the main floor and provide more kitchen space. The resulting plan accommodates a hall to the front foyer, a new butler’s pantry, a full bath, a small kitchen pantry, a new back entry and a new eat-in kitchen.

After Gerlach discovered remnants of the home’s original woodwork under the front porch, McMonigal replicated the red-oak millwork for the new kitchen. Cherry-wood cabinetry with inset doors runs up to the ceiling—as was typical of early 20th-century houses—and new white-oak floors match those in the rest of the house. The oil-rubbed bronze hardware is similar to that found on the one remaining interior door in the house. The homeowners said “No, thanks” to the idea of modern recessed lighting and instead chose hanging fixtures for a more authentic look.

Unlike many homeowners today who are eager for an open-plan kitchen with a center island and lots of gadgetry, Gerlach and Perrone asked for “a nook for the cat’s dishes” and “lots of light,” along with more counter-top space and storage. So instead of an island, the couple uses a 100-year-old oak pedestal table that once belonged to Gerlach’s aunt. “That’s our gathering place,” Perrone says.



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"We can cook and have our friends here at the table." Cooking is accomplished with greater ease these days, as McMonigal's plan added 19 feet of gray-green granite counters. A new under-counter freezer unit mounted at counter height recalls the old kitchen's rare horizontal refrigerator.

"The investment we made in our architect was probably the best money we ever spent," says Gerlach, who along with his wife contin-

ues to work on the rest of the house in his spare time. "Rosemary was so knowledgeable about all the details, always on target with estimates and a great advocate for us when it came to issues with the builder."

Gerlach/Perrone Kitchen Remodel

St. Paul, Minnesota

McMonigal Architects, LLC

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Instead of an island, the couple chose a 100-year-old pedestal table as the focal point of the kitchen (opposite and above), and asked for special features like a nook for the cat's dishes (opposite left).