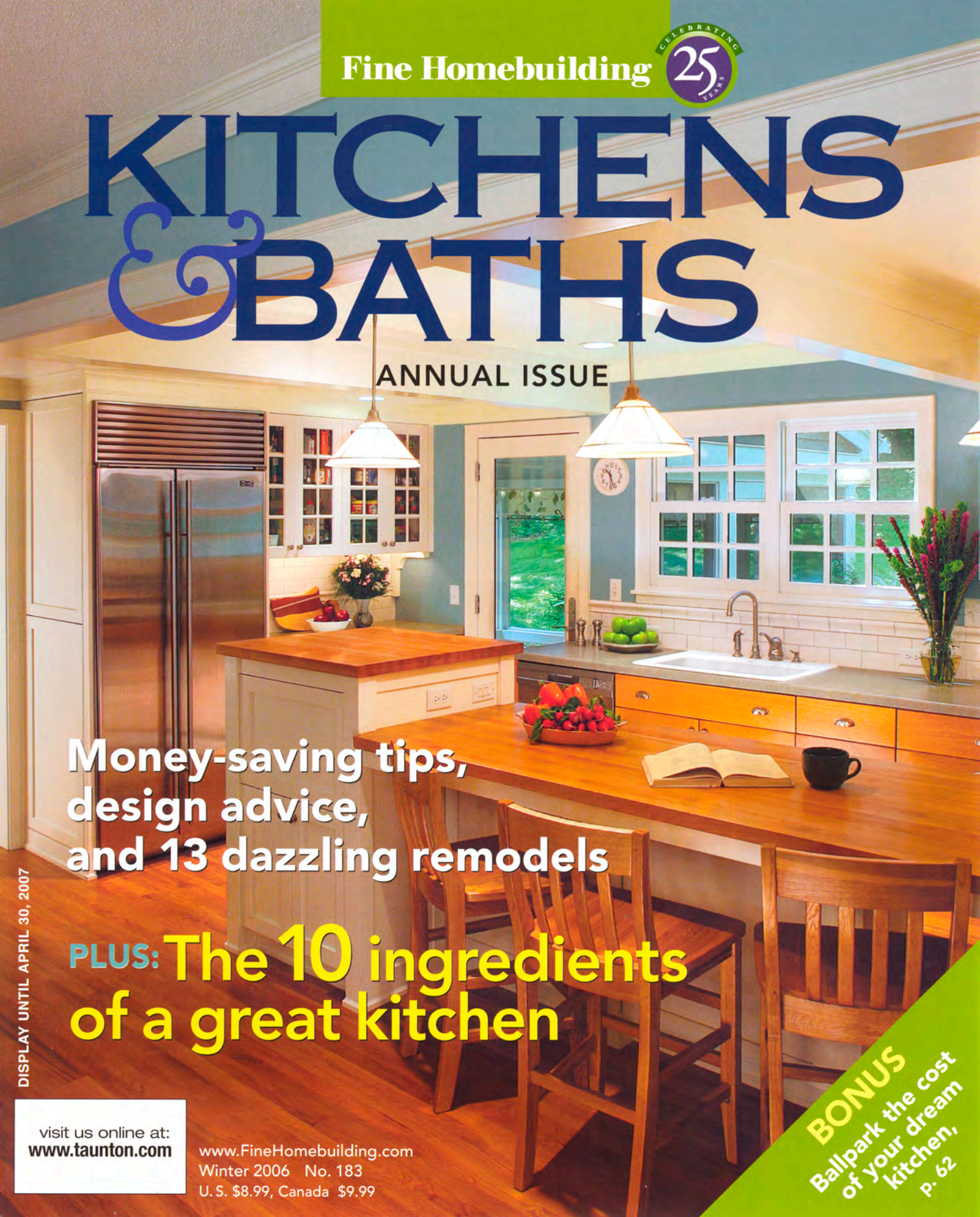
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Same Space, Dazzling New Kitchen

With only slight changes to the floor plan, this kitchen went from dark and cramped to open and inviting

BY ROSEMARY McMONIGAL

As they added up the items on their remodeling wish list, Mark and Jamie Markoe were pretty sure that their house had an addition in its future. An expanded kitchen with space for informal dining was at the top of their list. They also wanted a family room with a fireplace, a laundry, and a mudroom entry with plenty of storage space for coats, boots, and winter gear.

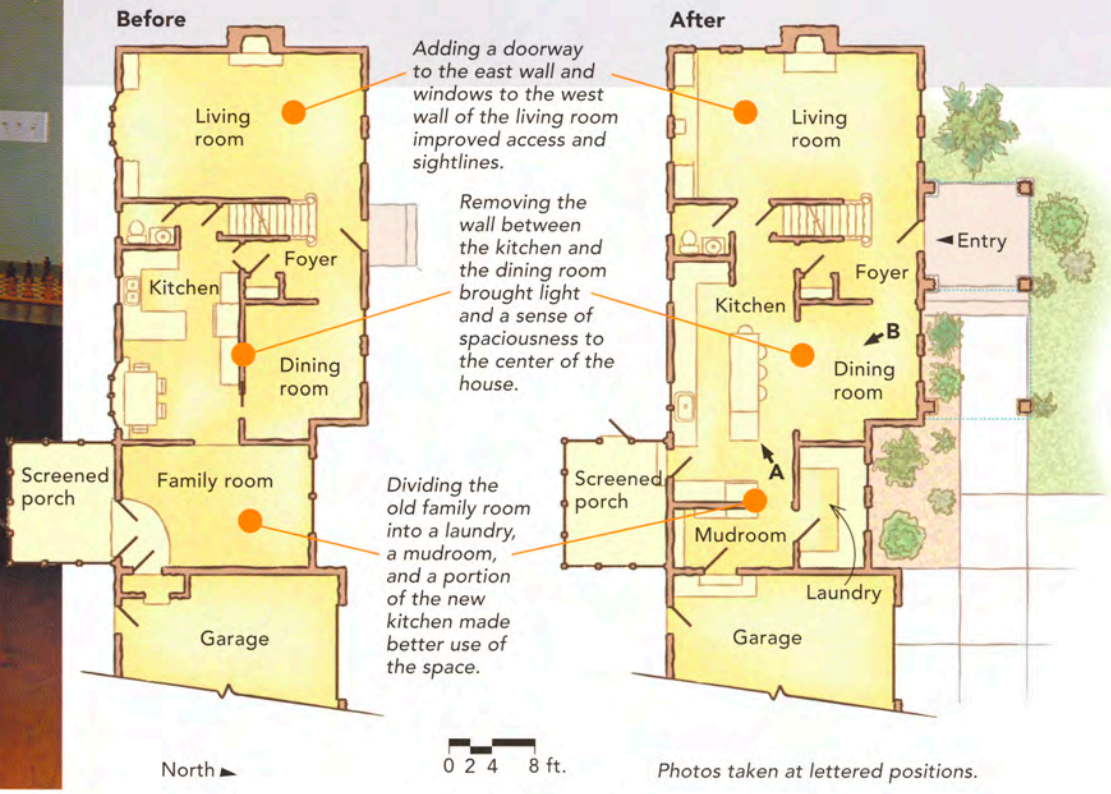
My firm designs plenty of additions, but no matter what the budget, getting the most return for my clients on their construction dollars is a top priority. I always want to make sure that there isn't another solution awaiting discovery within the bounds of the original house before breaking ground on new space.

Retool existing spaces

I sat down with Mark and Jamie with an eye toward identifying their home's deficiencies and assets. As we studied the circulation patterns through the house, the sizes of existing spaces, and the requirements of new ones, our gut reaction told us that the house

MAKING BETTER USE OF EXISTING SPACE

Cramped and outdated, the original kitchen was tucked into the far corner behind a bunkerlike row of dark cabinets. The remodel made it wide open to views and light. A new doorway offers long sightlines from the kitchen through the new windows in the west wall of the living room; it also serves as an important connection between the two rooms. Three beams, two of which are fake, mask irregular ceiling heights and divide the kitchen into a series of four distinct spaces. Photos taken at A on floor plan.



already had enough space; it just needed a little tweaking.

Almost one-third of the main floor, the living room was the largest space in the house. But even though it had a fireplace, the room was used only occasionally. The problem was that you had to go through the foyer to get to the living room; it was off the beaten track, so nobody went there. With its three exterior walls, though, the living room offered great potential for light and views.

On the other hand, the family room was used a lot. It was partly open to the kitchen and connected to the screened porch on the south side of the house. Coincidentally, the family room's more than 200 sq. ft. just about equaled the amount of space required to fulfill Mark and Jamie's wish list.

Bingo. Why not connect the living room to the kitchen and use this generous, neglected space for everyday living? We did just that with a doorway next to the powder room, resulting in a circular flow with the other rooms (floor plans above). With ready access to the living room from the kitchen, the old family room became redundant. We divided it into three pieces: a laundry, a mudroom, and a food-storage area in the new kitchen.

Next, we tackled the dining component. Jamie and Mark wanted to preserve their seldom-used dining room and transform the kitchen's informal dining area from a dark, spindled cubby into something more inviting. Once again, we challenged the notion of adding versus reconfiguring space. Removing the wall between the dining room and the kitchen brought light, views, and fresh air into the center of the house from both

Drawings: Paul Perreault. "Before" photos: McMonigal Architects.

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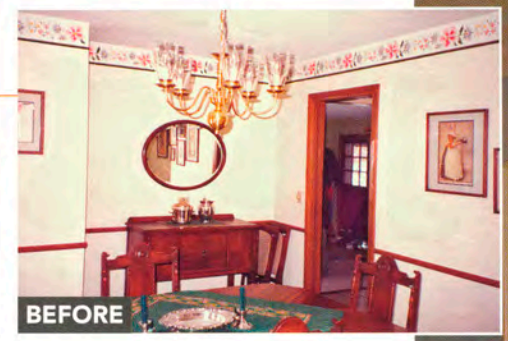
Removing the wall between the dining room and the kitchen **brought light, views, and fresh air** into the center of the house.



The dining-room connection. *Originally isolated from the kitchen, the dining room is now an extension of it. A couch fits in the nook along the side wall, giving guests a place to relax in the dining room and still chat with the cook. In the center of the photo, a new doorway connects the kitchen with the screened porch. Photos taken at B on floor plan.*

sides, and forged a strong visual connection between the two spaces.

Faux beams create order and mask multiple ceiling heights

Annexing a portion of the family room to expand the kitchen meant that we had to remove a bearing wall and replace it with a beam. That's straightforward enough, but there was a wrinkle: The upstairs plumbing lines took up enough space to require the family-room ceiling to be a little lower than the kitchen ceiling; and a portion of the space fell below the one-story roof with yet another lower ceiling height. Rather than lower the rest of the ceiling in the expanded kitchen to match that height, we mimicked the new structural beam with two faux beams equally spaced the length of the kitchen. The spacing of the beams focuses attention on the windows and creates an underlying rhythm that turns the kitchen into a series of spaces rather than an unrelieved shooting gallery.

Although it's a single component, the kitchen island has what appears to be two distinct parts: a 7½-ft.-long, 36-in.-tall farm-style table and a taller freestanding cabinet that's 2 ft. 6 in. long. Both have 2-in.-thick maple butcher-block tops. The table has room for four stools situated out of the main work area and facing south toward views of the backyard. The island's tall cabinet houses a microwave, conveniently located near the refrigerator, where it is used mostly for reheating leftovers. Three milk-glass pendant lights over the island are on a dimmer switch, so they can be dialed up for homework and down for dinner. The pendant lights ("Sources," facing page) have a satin nickel finish and alabaster glass.

Colors, materials, and related details tie it all together

When it was built on spec in the 1970s, Mark and Jamie's house had all the developer details of the day: diagonal-shaped glass windows, chunky floor tiles, ornate dark-stained wooden screens, and plastic Tiffany knock-off pendant lights. The effect was akin to a '70s pizza parlor. Mark and Jamie wanted something much different, but not too sleek or modern.

We replaced the tile floor with a timeless red-oak tongue-and-groove strip floor finished with oil-based urethane varnish. The warm color of the red oak is carried upward to the doors and drawers of the base cabinets, which are made of quartersawn red oak.

The palette changes above the base cabinets, where stained oak gives way to lighter finishes in paint, tile, and laminate counters. Jamie originally had her mind set on granite counters, but I asked her to take a look at the new generation of laminates. Durable

Choosing **laminate over granite lowered the cost** of the counters by $10,000, allowing us to upgrade appliances.

Style follows tile. *Inspired by the pleasing curves of the border tiles, the upper-cabinet brackets and the window casings echo the shape with curves of their own.*

SOURCES

Laminate counters
www.nevamar.com
Pattern FS5001

Pendant lights
www.dolandesigns.com
Model #622-09

Wall tile
www.usctco.com
U072 Snow White Bright

and affordable, laminates have come a long way in recent years, with an astonishing array of colors and patterns to choose from. We found a pattern that Jamie liked, Nevamar Alpine Fissure ("Sources," above), predominantly pale green with flecks of color that pick up the colors of the stainless steel, oak, and tile. Installing laminate instead of granite lowered the cost of the counters by $10,000, which in turn allowed us to upgrade the appliances to a Sub-Zero refrigerator, a Viking stove, and an Asko dishwasher.

Jamie picked the classic white subway tile that we used for the walls above the counters. The 3-in. by 6-in. glazed tiles ("Sources," above) were installed in a horizontal running-bond pattern. Their curvy border tiles inspired a couple of other trim details (photo top right). The curved brackets that support the upper cabinets owe their proportions and shapes to the border tiles, as do the beaded window casings.

The upper cabinets have divided-lite glass doors proportioned to echo the windows. Glass cabinet doors are an excellent detail for adding pattern and depth to a room, and they also are a subtle way to get an undercurrent of color and texture from the dishes, glassware, and boxes of macaroni stored on the shelves.

Incidentally, the upper-cabinet doors are made of medium-density fiberboard (MDF), which is more dimensionally stable than solid wood. The doors are less likely to swell and shrink with seasonal changes in humidity, a real problem in Minnesota. As a result, the paint is less likely to crack at the joints in the doors. □

Rosemary McMonigal is an architect in Minneapolis. Special thanks to design-team members Jennifer Hilla Schlag, Melissa Steinberg, Curtis Martinson, and Braden Construction. Photos by Charles Miller, except where noted.

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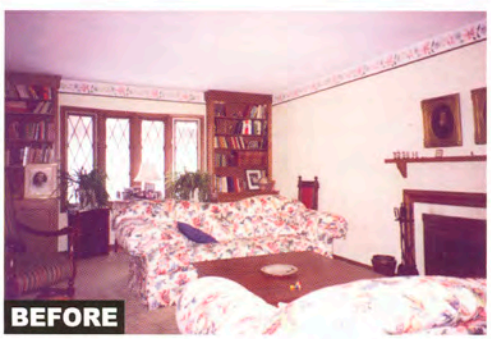
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