

Now they're cooking

Renovation boosts form, function of Pocket family's kitchen

By Bob Masullo -- Bee Staff Writer

Published 2:15 am PST Saturday, December 18, 2004

For nearly 19 years, the Livaich family - Marianne, Gary and children Emily, Joseph and Michael - made do with a kitchen that seemed to be shrinking.

"It was fine when we first moved in," says Marianne. "The kids were small and we were coming from a two-bedroom house, so it seemed enormous by comparison. But as the kids grew, it just got tighter and tighter. Now they're all college age, and with five adults it was impossible."

But no more. Earlier this year, the Livaiches enlarged, updated and upgraded their kitchen and modified much of the rest of the ground floor of their two-story, four-bedroom, 2,200-square-foot home in the Pocket area.

The Livaiches called on Steve Frkovich Casci of Design Works to come up with a kitchen plan and ideas for modifying the family room, living room, dining room and a small bathroom. Casci specializes in kitchens and bathrooms. Daniel Cardenas was the general contractor on the project. Work took about 10 weeks.

Gary says he and Marianne had talked about enlarging the kitchen "almost from the time we first moved into the house but only got serious about it a year and half ago when the time and the economy seemed right."

The Livaiches' old kitchen had a drop ceiling with fluorescent lighting, ceramic tile counters and a window that looked out on a backyard deck.

"It had no work island, so everything had to be done on the countertops," says Marianne. "The counters were too deep and the extra space was largely useless because it was too hard to get at things you put in the back." Casci called the existing kitchen "claustrophobic." He said Marianne had insufficient space to display her many collectibles "and they were everywhere."

He suggested removing the drop ceiling and taking space from the back yard to widen the kitchen by 4 feet. This gave the room an additional 57 square feet - enough to make a work island feasible.

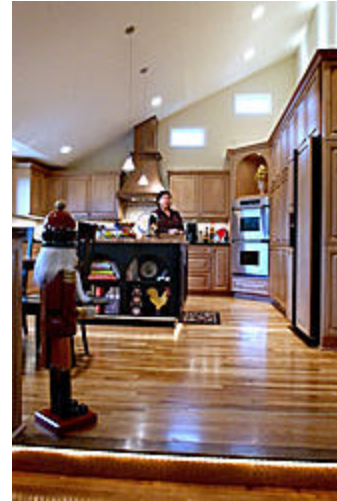
Vaulting the ceiling made the space seem even larger, Casci says. "It also gave me a place to put a pantry (in cabinets separating the kitchen from the living room/dining room space) and a stage for Marianne's collectibles - above the pantry and other cabinets.

Gary, a lawyer by profession and a chef by avocation, wanted a work island for food preparation "because working on the countertops was so limiting." Marianne was afraid a higher ceiling would make the kitchen look too much like one in a townhouse. "But Steve said, 'Trust me,' and we're very glad we did. It turned out better than we had hoped," she says.

The new ceiling follows the natural lines of the house, gradually going up from 8 feet to a high point of 15 feet. Two small windows were put in the upper reaches for light as well as for appearance. Recessed lights in the ceiling illuminate the kitchen. The new cabinets are maple with a natural finish. Lower ones are topped with polished black granite with matching backsplashes. The work island is topped with butcher block. Electric outlets for the countertops and work island are nowhere to be seen. There are plenty of them, but all are hidden beneath the edges. A copper top matching the copper hood over the cooktop covers a new wet bar that separates the kitchen's breakfast nook from the family room. A handsome new dark maple table fills the nook. The bar has a sink, as does the work island and the main counter. The kitchen has gone from one ceramic all-purpose sink to three specialized stainless steel sinks. All major appliances are new: a six-burner DCS cooktop; two Dacor convection ovens (one on top of the other); a Bosch dishwasher and a KitchenAid refrigerator. The Livaiches are not big fans of microwaves, and Marianne definitely did not want one on a counter or hanging from a cabinet. But she agreed to have one put in the work island, virtually out of sight, "for the few times we'll use it."

"What I like most about the new kitchen is its openness," she says. "You can have several people in it, all of them doing some work, and not feel cramped. Before, you felt cramped with two people."

Adds Gary: "The new kitchen has made it so easy to prepare a meal, it is hard to believe."



The vaulted ceiling gives the kitchen a sense of openness. Two small windows were added for light and for appearance. In the foreground, the step from the kitchen to the family room was accentuated with a copper edge and lighting.

Calling the design "absolutely perfect," he notes that it was a community effort. "We worked very closely with Steve. He had the big ideas, but he listened to us. We had a lot of input." As for the other rooms:

- In the family room a built-in wine rack was installed in the wall where there formerly was a dry bar. Dark wood around the fireplace was painted white to make the small collectibles that had been housed there more visible. A step from the kitchen ("that people were always tripping on," according to Marianne) was made more visible by installing lights along the top of the riser and a copper edge.
- The living room and dining room floor plans have been flip-flopped, allowing for more spacious dining. The rooms had no wall dividing them, so basically this involved moving furniture. However, new lighting fixtures were installed, including a chandelier over the dining room table and recessed lighting in the living room.
- White oak hardwood flooring has been added throughout the ground floor.
- A small guest bathroom was painted and new tiles installed on the floor and countertops.

Before and After

Project: Kitchen expansion and remodel plus modifications in family room, living room, dining room and guest bathroom.

Included: Kitchen was expanded by 4 feet and vaulted ceiling was added; granite countertops, maple cabinets, a pantry and work island with butcher-block top were installed; all appliances were replaced with new ones.

Floor plans of living/dining rooms were flip-flopped, making dining room larger, living room smaller; hardwood flooring, new lighting, built-in wine rack were added; tile replaced in guest bathroom.

Cost: More than \$100,000

Time to complete: 10 weeks

Designer: Steve Frkovich Casci of Design Works

Contractor: Daniel Cardenas



Before the remodeling project, the Livaich kitchen, with its lowered ceiling and crowded counters, was called "claustrophobic." Photo courtesy of Marianne Livaich above picture

The butcher block-topped island is one of the key features of the new kitchen. The work island has a sink and plenty of storage space, in addition to being the hiding place for the microwave. Sacramento Bee/Owen Brewer. right picture

