

# An Elegant Kitchen on a Budget

Savvy owner-remodelers share their thrifty shopping strategies

BY ALEX NERLAND

**M**y wife and I didn't really know if we were looking for a house project, yet there I was, touring a bunch of properties toward the end of 2008 with a real-estate-agent friend of mine. When I walked up the stairs of one particular two-unit building, I was blown away by the Victorian facade, the 12-ft.-tall ceilings, and the incredible amount of work it needed. The brick foundation was in terrible shape, to the point that the central post supports looked more like a Jenga game in progress than actual supports. Every wall in the upper unit had to be scraped, sanded, and replastered. The downstairs toilet flushed into the garage, and most of the walls had fist-size holes or bigger. There was even a 120-lb. pit bull prowling the backyard.

It was beyond what I thought I had energy for. I showed it to my wife, though, and she said that we had to buy it. The plus side, Lisa said, was that no room in the building had ever been renovated, so we could start with a blank canvas. After



## MODERNIZING THE PLAN

Buried at the back of the house, the original kitchen was a relic from another time, when kitchens were supposed to be out of sight. Meanwhile, the front of the house had several underused public spaces waiting to be put to better use. Rationalizing the floor plan with a rerouted hallway and putting the kitchen where the dining room used to be made room for another bedroom and brought the kitchen into the heart of the house.



Before



After

0 4 8 16 ft.



**The kitchen moves into the parlor.** The original house had a pair of parlor rooms separated by tall pocket doors. The street-side parlor was a sitting room, the other a dining room (photo above left). In the revamped space, the pocket doors have been removed, the hall is redirected to enter the kitchen (photo left), and the lower sashes of the double-hung windows are shortened (photo above right).



all, you can't simply add 12-ft. ceilings to a project. What we could add was sweat equity, our own sense of design, and a willingness to hunt down bargains on fixtures and building materials that would make the project economically feasible for us (sidebar, facing page).

Besides the obviously poor condition of the building, there were big problems with the floor plans of the two flats. We planned to occupy the upstairs unit, where the kitchen was in the back, the dining room was in the front, and that mythical chamber peculiar to the Victorian house—the fainting room—was too small to be used as anything other than an office.

### Flip the plan into the 21st century

Our revised plan for the upstairs flat takes the kitchen out of the back of the house, where the Victorians tucked them behind closed doors, and places it right in the heart of the house. It now occupies the dining portion of what had been half of the double parlor (floor plans, p. 33). To unify the reconfigured common living area, we took out the big pocket doors that closed off the two parlor rooms and annexed the fainting room to make it our new dining room.

We converted the hall closet, along with about a third of my son's too-deep closet, into a powder room. We also rerouted the hall through what would be the new kitchen. This yielded enough usable space to carve out a laundry room and a closet in the old hallway. The final stroke was to convert the old kitchen into the master bedroom and to rebuild the old sunporch into a spacious-feeling master bath (see pp. 90-91).

Ultimately, we transformed a three-bedroom/one-bath flat into one with four bedrooms and 2½ baths, grouping living areas up front and four bedrooms together in the back. The new plan wrings maximum utility out of every bit of our 1900 sq. ft. □

Alex Nerland is a designer/builder in San Francisco. Photos by Charles Miller, except where noted.



**Custom hood extracts kitchen vapors.** A 36-in. Kobe hood liner insert wrapped in drywall and crown molding echoes the details found throughout the house. The wall behind the range is clad with an easy-to-clean layer of tempered glass.



Inset photo above: courtesy of Alex Nerland

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## Stretching the budget

Shopping online opens a universe of money-saving possibilities for the patient owner-builder, with much emphasis on patient. You've got to be able to swoop on a good deal when it comes along, even though it may be months before it gets worked into the project. Lisa and I frequented a number of websites and some local big-box and outlet stores on the lookout for components that would combine to make a contemporary kitchen that would feel right in a Victorian house. We were looking for high quality at good prices. Here are the highlights.

**\$2500 NXR SIX-BURNER RANGE** We bought the previous year's model from Gourmet Appliance Outlet in Oakland, Calif., at a \$1000 discount. This range performs as well as those that cost twice as much.

**\$2500 GRANITE COUNTERTOPS** The prefab-stone industry has come a long way in the past 10 years, with a much greater selection of stone, edge treatments, and dimensional variety. (For more on prefab counters, see pp. 102-103.) We found leather-finished gray/black granite for less than \$2500. This price included a fabricator recommended by our supplier (CornerStone Home Design in South San Francisco). The cost worked out to about \$100 per lin. ft.

**\$64 KITCHEN CHANDELIER FROM LAMPS PLUS** We got lucky on this one. The \$579 fixture was returned and marked for clearance at \$64. The chandelier prongs were slightly bent, but not enough to present much of a problem.

**\$800 OVEN HOOD** We splurged a bit on a 700-cfm, 36-in. Kobe hood insert. I built the rest with stock crown moldings, drywall, and a 2x4 frame (inset photo, facing page). We bought it from VentingDirect.com.

**\$550 BOSCH DISHWASHER** We got a significant discount on model #SHX33M05UC/50 at our local appliance store because the dishwasher had a ding in the back. It still came with a warranty. Many appliance stores sell slightly damaged goods such as this one. Sears has nearly 50 such scratch-and-dent outlet stores in North America.

**\$2300 REFRIGERATOR** Because of our refrigerator's location in a hallway, we needed one on the slim side. A standard-depth refrigerator can be in the range of 35 in. deep. We needed a counter-depth model. At the time, they were commanding a premium price, and we had to pony up \$2300 for our choice, a 36-in.-wide French-door KitchenAid refrigerator with the freezer on the bottom from HomeEverything.com. At least it came with free shipping. To illustrate what competition can do, at this writing the same refrigerator goes for \$1550 at the same site, still with free shipping. Incidentally, "counter depth" is a variable number. Ours is 29⅞ in.

**\$200 CABINET PULLS AND KNOBS** These were a bargain at Overstock.com. We found pulls for \$2 per pull and \$1 per knob (vs. \$5 per knob and \$8 to \$10 per pull elsewhere).

**\$120 PENDANT LIGHTS OVER BAR** The stock Home Depot pendants cost \$40 per light.

**\$149 KITCHEN FAUCET** Stock Home Depot faucet off the shelf.

**\$200 KITCHEN SINK** Dawn is a Chinese maker of heavy-gauge sinks that compare in look and feel to much more expensive ones from other manufacturers. We just turned the sink around during installation so that the "Dawn" isn't easily visible.

**\$70 OVEN BACKSPASH** Tempered glass made by a local window fabricator.

**\$20 SPICE RACKS** The wall-mounted spice racks on each side of the oven back-splash are from Ikea.

**\$9473 TOTAL**

