

your guide to community, culture & cuisine

# merrimack valley magazine



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## open wide

The illusion of greater kitchen space  
with no change in square footage



by **Beth Daigle**  
photos by **Kevin Harkins**

Nothing appeals to me more as a homeowner than open space. But this luxury has not existed in my traditional 1980s North Andover colonial until now.

A recent kitchen overhaul provided me with an open and airy floor plan that I find comforting and functionally inviting.

The kitchen had been given a facelift after we bought the house in 2001. It was fine, but some of my aesthetic choices had been questionable at best. In particular, the teal green Corian countertops were screaming for change. The original dark and dated oak cabinets, which had been painted white, were chipping and in need of an update. This kitchen had served my family well for 10 years, but we were ready for something new.

A creature of habit, I did not want to give up any of my existing rooms and, from a budget standpoint, a build-out was not in the cards. Nancy Hanson of Heartwood Kitchen & Bath Cabinetry in Danvers was brought in to assess the kitchen's potential while assuring that the sunroom and dining room remained unique spaces.

"Five to 10 years ago, when money seemed to be abundant and home prices kept increasing, it was very common to see people add on to their house, either to relocate their kitchen into a larger space or to just expand it," Hanson said. "I find that now, people are taking a step back and realizing that they really don't need more square footage; what they want is a better flow and to utilize the space they already have."

Much to my surprise, knocking down the sunroom and dining room walls was the solution. This option would allow for an open layout with all the features we wanted and enough storage for a family of four. Utility with understated elegance was the ultimate goal.

"Most people remodeling their kitchen today are looking for a roomy, casual space, which is suitable for their busy, everyday lives, as well as for when they entertain," Hanson said. "People want to be able to serve up meals quickly, and very often they will eat their meals at an island or peninsula, since it usually requires fewer steps. This is particularly true with breakfast and lunch."



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**Cabinetry:** Quality Custom Cabinetry. Design Services by Nancy Hanson. Heartwood Kitchen and Bath Cabinetry Danvers, Mass. [www.HeartwoodKitchensAndBaths.com](http://www.HeartwoodKitchensAndBaths.com)

**Contractor:** Testa Building and Remodeling LLC North Andover, Mass. | [TestaBandr@Comcast.net](mailto:TestaBandr@Comcast.net)

**Lighting:** Hubbardton Forge - over sink and dining room. Design Lighting and Electrical Supplies Inc. North Andover, Mass. | [www.DesignLT.com](http://www.DesignLT.com)

**Sink & Faucets:**  
Sink: Kohler - stainless steel.  
Faucet: Fanke - satin nickel.  
Fixtures, etc. | Salem, N.H. [www.FixturesEtc.com](http://www.FixturesEtc.com)

**Appliances:**  
Refrigerator: Sub-Zero.  
Oven, microwave drawer, cooktop and dishwasher: Wolf.  
Baron's Major Brands Appliances | Salem, N.H. [www.BaronsMajorBrands.com](http://www.BaronsMajorBrands.com)

**Countertop:** Granite - supreme white. Greater Boston Granite | Lowell, Mass. [www.GreaterBostonGranite.com](http://www.GreaterBostonGranite.com)

**Backsplash:** Clear glass tile. National Tile, Inc. North Reading, Mass. | [www.NationalTile.com](http://www.NationalTile.com)

**Island top:** Walnut. Pridecraft, Inc. Custom Cabinetry & Millwork | North Andover, Mass. [www.PridecraftInc.com](http://www.PridecraftInc.com)

**Barstools:** Tempo | [www.AllBarStools.com](http://www.AllBarStools.com)

1. Prior to renovation, the kitchen was dark with one small window and space was tight. The green countertops were the driving factor for change.

2. Opening the wall between the kitchen and dining room allows for better flow and the illusion of more space.

3. Natural light from the sunroom brightens the rooms. Custom white cabinetry further enhances the open and airy feeling. Ceiling height cabinets create the impression of taller ceilings. The extension of base cabinets plus the multi-functional island provides ample storage. Dark, oil-rubbed bronze hardware pops against the clean white cabinets and complements the island top.

4. Extra storage is gained from cabinetry on the dining room side where the raised height conceals the cooktop and food preparation areas. Glass-front doors with interior lighting display crystal and fine china.

The final step in the design process was to determine if all of the grand ideas laid out in consultation were structurally doable. Jim Testa, owner of Testa Building and Remodeling in North Andover, gave us the go-ahead, and then he and his team proceeded to make our vision a reality.

Testa's high-quality kitchen work, cleanliness and attention to detail was impressive. His guidance in thinking through particulars such as the placement of outlets and the symmetry of the glow cast by under-cabinet lighting was valued, as many such items can easily be overlooked.

"Details often go unnoticed until something isn't right, and then it sticks out like a sore thumb," Testa said. "I spend a lot of time with my customers and subcontractors laying out new cabinet locations so that all the details can fall perfectly into place."

Making well-thought-out and efficient choices was critical in moving the process along. Choosing materials and placing orders early helped us avoid unnecessary delays. My reconstructed kitchen was operational in six weeks and complete in eight.

"When a major project is well-scheduled, it decreases the time a customer has to spend without a kitchen," Testa said. "Trying to be respectful of the fact that homeowners are living through a remodel is important to me. I try to be as timely, neat and organized as possible."

Living through any kitchen renovation is a challenge, but the payoff is worth it. My original 240-square-foot kitchen is now unified with the sunroom and dining room, without taking over either. The new combined space of 552-square-feet creates a fantastic setting for a quick bite at the island, a formal dinner in the dining room or a cocktail party where guests can mix and mingle in any of the three rooms without feeling like they're away from the action.

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5. Appliances were chosen for their sleek look, function and long-term usability. The 39-inch spread between counters and island allow for ease of movement for one or more cooks. The 2¼-inch, dark walnut island top offers a sense of warmth and richness. Its matte finish and detailed edge directly offsets the polished, pencil edge granite in cool gray and white tones.

6. The cooktop overlooks the dining room inviting conversation between the cook and dinner guests. An automatic downdraft feature can be raised with the push of a button drawing steam and food odors out of the kitchen.