

Home



The kitchen in a 1940s Scotch Plains Colonial, left, was enlarged by removing a wall to add room from an adjacent dining room. The layout was then reconfigured by interior designer Swati Goorha, who devised a peninsula-style seating area set at an angle to more efficiently use the long, narrow space. The original smaller kitchen with adjoining dining room is seen below. Left: Andrew Pitzer Photography; Below: Courtesy of Swati Goorha

N.J. MAKEOVER

GO WITH THE FLOW

It took 'outside-of-the-box thinking' to rework choppy first-floor layout



Kimberly L. Jackson
For The Star-Ledger

The smaller house in Scotch Plains had a lot of potential for a couple who wanted to downsize from their previous eight-bedroom Dutch Colonial in South Orange.

But there were a few problems with their new home. The bathrooms were dated, the kitchen was too small and its 1940s layout was a head-scratcher.

The owners were confident in their ability to bring in professionals to renovate the two full bathrooms in the two-story house, but they needed more guidance when it came to the cooking and dining areas.

"We were a little more puzzled on what we wanted to do with the kitchen," said the husband, who preferred to remain anonymous in discussing their home of two years. "The issue was, 'What can we do with this space? What are our options?'"

So they brought in New Providence inte-

rior designer Swati Goorha, who was up for helping them with a kitchen redesign as well as improving their home's overall layout.

"The entire space was awkward, choppy and dark," said Goorha. The view in from the front door was to a coat closet. And if you wanted to get to the family room on the other side of the closet, you'd have to go through a nearby powder room with two doors.

If you came home hungry, there were so many steps to the kitchen. You could go through the powder room and down the stairs into the sunken family room, then up more stairs into the kitchen. Or, you could walk from the entry to the living room to the dining room to the kitchen.

"It was not the most comfortable way of moving around the house," the husband said.

Among her recommended adjustments, Goorha felt the home could be brighter, more open and more accessible with fewer walls. First, the coat closet would be removed to create an entrance hall that now gives the homeowners a more uplifting view from their door. The sunken family room would be converted to a dining room.

"Now when you open the door, you have this beautiful, open space that looks into the dining room. It makes the entry more welcoming, and the first impression is much more dramatic than walking into a closet."

Next, the powder room door to the family-room-turned-dining-room was closed off. "Now the powder room looks bigger because it doesn't have all those doors," Goorha said.

The change to the entry also improved access to the enlarged kitchen. Without the closet, the new dining room and kitchen can be accessed from a relocated staircase near the front door.

What had been the dining room helped enlarge the kitchen. Removal of a wall between the adjacent rooms made it easier to reconfigure the kitchen.

For the eat-in kitchen they envisioned, there wasn't room for a free-standing center island. "An L-shaped island would have cut off the flow of the space, and it would be very awkward to walk around," Goorha said.

"We had this long, narrow space, and we needed a place for people to sit." So she devised an unconventional alternative in a custom-built, peninsula-style island set on a diagonal. This would maximize open space, make use of the kitchen more efficient, and facilitate movement through the kitchen to the short stairway down to the new dining room.

The idea wasn't an easy sell. So Goorha taped a shape on the floor, outlining the size and placement of the peninsula. The home-

owners could walk around the taped area to get a sense of how it would affect their use of the kitchen. With this visual aid, they agreed to the change.

"The island can now accommodate three to four people for an intimate dinner or function as a food setup area for larger parties," Goorha says. It also has cabinets for added storage.

Initially, the homeowners wanted black cabinets. But in a home with pets, Goorha believed a more forgiving color would be better.

"It's like wearing a black sweater," she said. "If you have a dog, you will see dog hair." And maybe paw prints and dust, too.

Her clients weren't fans of gray, but they warmed to using its darkest shade.

"We used dark kitchen cabinets with a light backsplash, countertops and floor to brighten the space and hide the inevitable pet hair," Goorha said. Even the floor's ceramic tiles have a mottled pattern selected to conceal any pet footprints that might otherwise show between cleanings.

The homeowners say the new kitchen layout is their favorite part of their home's redesign. They consider the entire project a splurge. "We did not cut corners," the husband noted. However, they decided to keep their existing dining room furniture. They sanded each piece down and refreshed with coats of Benjamin Moore's Advance interior paint.

With the conversion of their family room to a dining room, the couple decided to use the living room as a space for relaxation and gatherings in their home for two. They also have a sunroom and backyard deck, both off the kitchen and both with access to a patio.

They've put up eight hooks to hang coats when they come in from the garage, and they consider their home's problems solved.

Goorha says the most challenging part of the project was reworking the first-floor layout of the 1,732-square-foot house to facilitate fluid movement through its rooms.

"I had never really walked into a house that looked like that," she said. "It took me awhile to sit down and work out all the issues." In the end, all the challenges that required "out-of-the-box thinking" made the project among her most satisfying. "You can actually see how the issues were addressed."

To submit your renovation for consideration, email home@starledger.com with your full name, email address, phone number and town/city. Attach "before" and "after" photos of what you renovated.

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The details

What they renovated: The kitchen, dining room, half bath and entrance hall of a 1940s Colonial house.

Who did the work: Swati Goorha Designs, RNJ General Home Improvement in Orange, general contractor; Functional Design Studio in Scotch Plains, installation of cabinets and counters.

How long it took: About eight months, including preliminary interviews with designers and contractors from January to August 2017.

What they spent: \$109,200

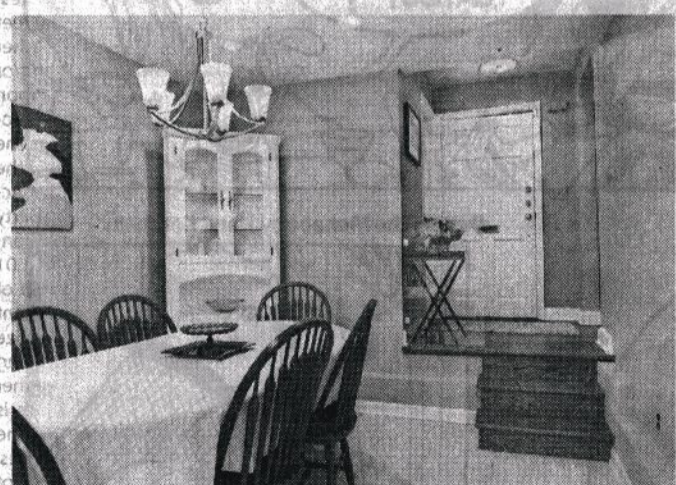
Where they splurged: The couple, who downsized from a large home, considered the entire project a splurge.

How they saved: They kept their existing dining room furniture.

What they did themselves: They sanded down and refinished the dining room furniture, including chairs a corner cabinet and a banquette seating area.

What they like most: The functionality of the new kitchen layout.

What they'd have done differently: Order windows earlier in the project plan.



Goorha turned a sunken family room, above, into a dining room, at top, and removed a coat closet to give the room direct access to the front door. Top: Andrew Pitzer Photography; Above: Courtesy of Swati Goorha