

## A family space long overdue for an update goes from drab to cheery

By Meaghan O'Neill  
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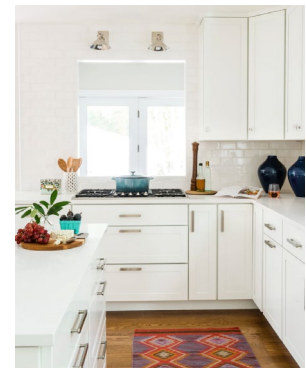
To transform a run-down kitchen into a modern marvel, Emily Pinney of Pinney Designs added a multipurpose island with work surface, storage, and dining space for the Ruhl family in Rhode Island. The island is topped in walnut and Caesarstone quartz; the legs were custom-made of acrylic.  
- Jessica Delaney

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Just a few hundred yards from the banks of the Barrington River on a peninsula jutting into Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay, Melissa Ruhl and her husband, Charlie, found the home where they wanted to raise their family. The 1914 Colonial Revival house is walking distance to the library, just a mile from the beach, and in a charming neighborhood. "I knew I wanted this street," says Melissa. It was 1999, and she and Charlie had recently moved from Ohio and had been renting a house in Barrington, Rhode Island, when the 3,300-square-foot residence in the town came on the market. But the cutest house on the cutest street in the most adorable neighborhood had one glaring problem: "Our kitchen was really bad," says Melissa. Two decades later, they finally decided to fix it up. "I don't know why we waited until our oldest kids were in college," she says, referring to their 19-year-old twins, a son and a daughter. They also have a 15-year-old daughter, who lives at home.

The existing kitchen, with its early 1980s decor, may not have been pretty, but it functioned. "We always ate dinner together, every night," says Melissa. Still, the low counters, funky kidney-shaped table extending from a row of cabinets, and yellowing wallpaper needed an update. In addition, an inefficient passageway from the covered porch to a deck gave the family a spot to drop bags and boots but didn't maximize space.

(Continued)



The cooktop has a downdraft vent rather than a hood, which made it possible to insert the cutout in the wall between the kitchen and mudroom beyond.  
- Jessica Delaney



Subway tiles with alternating depths add texture to a backsplash.  
- Jessica Delaney

Next, for help with the interior design, she turned to Emily Pinney, owner-principal of Pinney Designs in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The goal was to create a sophisticated kitchen that would respectfully integrate with the century-old residence. When Melissa said she wanted Shaker-style cabinets, Pinney and project manager Katherine Elliott suggested cabinets with a shallow profile to deliver the more contemporary look she sought. Melissa also wanted a pristine white kitchen, but one that was a warm family space. The 4-by-9-foot island provides that balance with a walnut countertop for the dining section and crisp white Caesarstone quartz for the work zone.

“With so much white, we needed color and warmth,” says Elliott, who used molded plywood barstools upholstered in orchid leather around the island. Melissa’s embrace of the bold color choice inspired Pinney and Elliott to take more chances selecting custom acrylic legs for the island and an oversize Jonathan Adler Regency-style chandelier. The 42-bulb statement light is like a fun piece of jewelry that dresses up the space without overwhelming it.

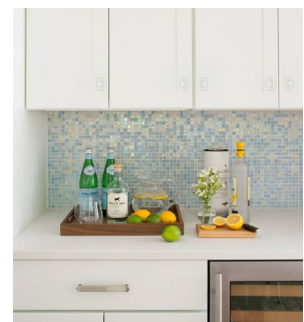
Pinney and Elliott brought in more color via a custom backsplash of half-inch tiles behind the bar area. “It has an ombré feel and a little bit of glam,” says Elliott of the green, blue, and purple pattern that subtly shimmers. The wall between the kitchen and what was the covered porch was pushed back about 3 feet, bringing the functional area of the kitchen to 338 square feet. Above a new gas cooktop, the designers left an opening that mimics a window and looks into a sleek and efficient 100-square-foot mudroom, carved from the former porch.

Although pushing back the wall didn’t add a huge amount of square footage to the kitchen, linking the space to the back of the house significantly improved flow. To make this structurally possible, Sheridan Associates installed a 23-foot steel beam above the ceiling. The passageway closets were removed, the shed ceiling repainted, and a skylight replaced. Now it’s a sunny sitting area with a cozy settee that’s open to the kitchen. “Before, the spaces felt totally disconnected,” says Michelle Richards, project manager at Sheridan. “Opening it up made a big difference, so that it really feels like an eat-in kitchen.”

Client and designers also discussed opening up the wall between the dining room and kitchen, but Melissa preferred to keep the two separate. Ultimately, they decided to widen the narrow doorway to the dining room and install pocket doors with glass panes — a solution suggested by the Ruhls’ 15-year-old daughter. They mimic original doors that lead from the dining room to the entry and allow light to filter into the kitchen from the south-facing front of the house. The family is thrilled with the overhaul. “It felt claustrophobic before,” says the Melissa. “Now it’s the perfect little gathering place.”



Stools upholstered in custom orchid leather add a pop of color; an acrylic-on-canvas painting by Priscilla Hayes of Boston and East Boothbay, Maine, complements the color scheme. – Jessica Delaney



A shimmering tile backsplash adds color and shine behind the bar. – Jessica Delaney



A passageway was converted into a sunny sitting area. – Jessica Delaney



Enclosing a porch made it an efficient mudroom; the slate-look ceramic-tile floor is in a herringbone pattern. – Jessica Delaney