

# Angling for IMPROVEMENT

**A thoughtful kitchen and bath design reimagines the space to provide modern updates while staying true to its Arts & Crafts style**

**W**hen remodelers need to stick within the footprint of an existing structure, sometimes their best solutions are the result of looking at things from a different angle, and that's certainly the case with this kitchen makeover in Berkeley, Calif. Here, designers with Oakland, Calif.-based Custom Kitchens By John Wilkins saw an opportunity to create new visual flow by breaking with the strict rectinularity of the previous floor plan. The end result is an airy space in harmony with both contemporary space requirements and the home's overall historic charms.

Those who've been fortunate enough to live in an original Craftsman or Arts & Crafts style home relish their details — for instance, the built-in glass-doored bookcases and room-circling picture rail — that simply don't exist in modern construction. However, this affection can be tempered by hair-pulling frustration with kitchens designed with anything but modern-day functionality in mind. Such opposing emotions certainly challenged this Berkeley family, when more than a decade's experience with their aging space finally opened their

minds to a more contemporary — and usable — design.

## KITCHEN MAKEOVER

"The kitchen was absolutely non-functional, in dire need of renovation," says designer Joy Wilkins, not mincing words. She says she has seen any number of homeowners in similar situations, weary of overloaded counters and illogical layouts, but fearful of the disruption even the most needed makeover might cause — and she's ready with reassurance that the process will be far less painful than prospective clients might

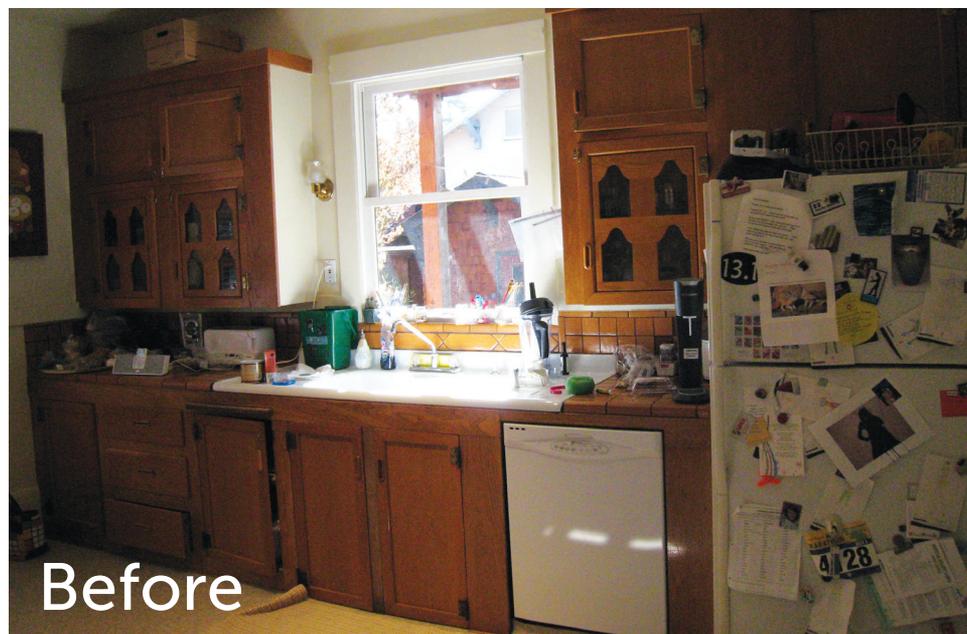
anticipate. "Because we're a design-build company, we're able to time things really well. We work as a design team."

This team, which also included designer Karmela Ignacio and project manager Eric Jackson, offers a clearly outlined, phased approach to the design and construction process, which helped put these homeowners at ease. A first meeting at the home by designers and project manager

The remodel used angles and open space to create a contemporary, functional design.



After



Before



**COMPANY INFORMATION**

Custom Kitchens by John Wilkins Inc., Oakland, Calif. [customkitchens-ca.com](http://customkitchens-ca.com)  
 Full-time employees: 16  
 Average annual revenue: \$3-5 million  
 Annual remodeling projects: 150-200  
 Residential: 95 percent  
 Commercial: 5 percent  
 Single-family: 100 percent  
 Design-build: 100 percent

**PROJECT INFORMATION**

Date completed: July 2013  
 Square footage: 352  
 Project cost: \$205,000

**PRODUCT INFORMATION**

**Kitchen**  
 Cabinets: Bentwood Kitchens  
 Countertops: Natural stone  
 Sink: Elkay  
 Faucet: Grohe  
 Range: Wolf  
 Exhaust hood: Zephyr  
 Refrigerator: Sub-Zero  
 Dishwasher: Bosch

Washer/dryer: Maytag  
 Microwave oven: GE  
 On-demand water heater: Rinnai  
**Bath**  
 Cabinets: Bentwood Kitchens  
 Toilet: Kohler  
 Shower faucet: Kohler  
 Sink: Kohler  
 Sink faucet: Kohler  
 Marmoleum  
**Interior**  
 Doors: Medallion  
 Flooring: Dal Tile

**Flooring:** Natural hardwood  
**Lighting:** Juno, Rejuvenation, Tresco  
**Home Technology**  
**Lighting control system:** Lutron

gives the team a chance to scope out the project's broad outlines and offer some ideas. Then once a design retainer agreement is signed, the team can put pen to paper (or electrons to a display) to create a formalized proposal. Having the project manager involved from the start helps ensure the proposed costs accurately reflect construction as well as countertops.

The added input on the construction side was particularly important in this project,

given the need to remove the load-bearing wall dividing the kitchen from the adjacent utility/laundry area. This move created elbow room for Wilkins and Ignacio to widen the over-sink window and the back door, and add a three-quarter bath, without sacrificing a dedicated laundry room.

But it was the kitchen's signature design element, the angled wall, that puts a chef's dream of a Wolf range center stage, which proved the project's big-

gest decision (and arguably its biggest success). "We deliberated quite a lot on that — when you angle the wall, you lose a little space, but we all agreed it added a nice flow," Wilkins says. To help assuage any lost-space worries, she did some math to compare the resulting cubic feet of cabinet space and square feet of countertops still would be sufficient. As it turned out, the owners now have cabinets they aren't even using — a result they couldn't have imagined before

the project began. "They were kind of astonished," Wilkins says.

Providing this surfeit of storage was enabled through a rethinking of the back half of the home's floor plan. Although the original Craftsman-style builders were aces at detail, their room layouts can seem choppy and disconnected to today's homeowners. In this house, for example, the back door, a utility area and toilet room (the closet-sized space included,

## PROJECTS: Kitchen Solutions

simply, a toilet and a door) were separated from the kitchen with an unnecessary wall. Taking down the wall opened up direct access to the outside and added storage and living space. Wilkins even had room to work in a separate laundry room as well as a real bathroom, complete with shower.

While many might jump at the chance to add a shower to a home whose only other bathroom was upstairs with the bedrooms, these homeowners initially were hesitant. “They were wondering, ‘Do we really need one?’” Wilkins says. In response, the designer provided two persuasive arguments.

“It’s going to add to the value of the home, and your teenage daughter is going to take over the room,” she told them. Unsurprisingly, she says, the owners are delighted with the decision. “The whole family is not sharing one shower now.”

### FINISH SELECTIONS

Another early concern was Wilkins’ proposal to eliminate

Removing a wall allowed for enough extra space to install a second bathroom in the home.

an existing window against the wall where the refrigerator now stands. The homeowners worried at the loss of natural light, but the window really only offered views of the driveway and the next-door neighbors’ side wall. The widened over-sink window and full-panel glass back door make up for the lost illumination.

Finish selections, on the other hand, came relatively easily, with designers and clients quickly agreeing on the bright, yet neutral, palette.

“We came up with these color concepts right away, and it just really felt good to everybody,” Wilkins says. For the countertops, the clients selected stone with the increasingly popular “leather” finish. Unlike honed granite, the leathered approach leaves the stone’s pores sealed, so stains are less of an issue. And fingerprints and smudges aren’t the issue they can be with highly polished



Photos: Scott Hargis Photography

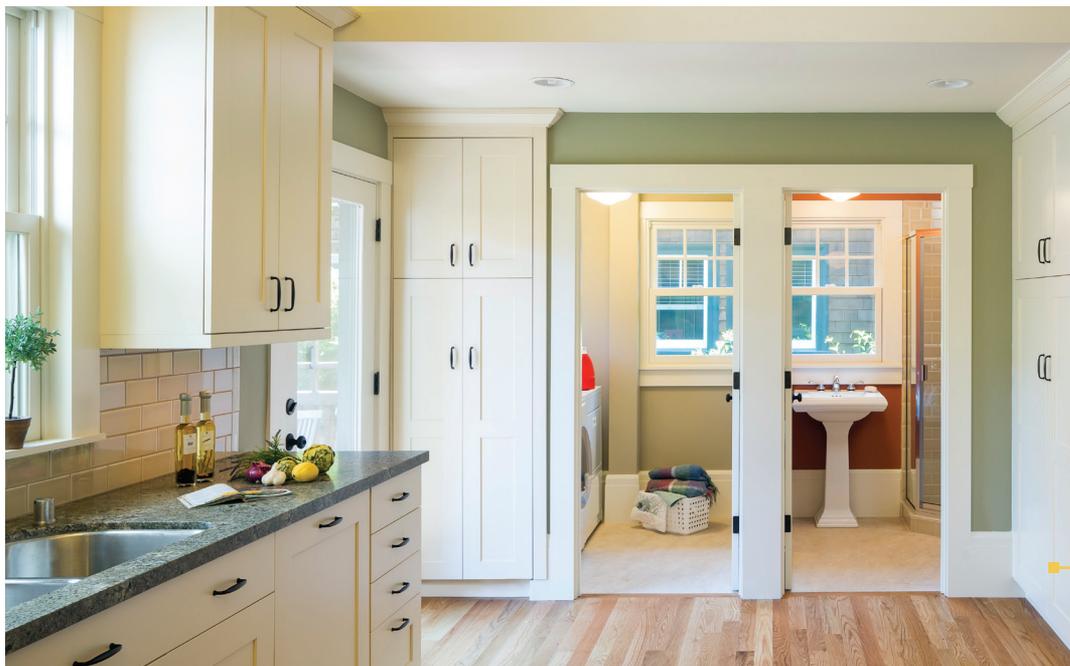
surfaces. Plus, as the designer notes, “It actually has a little texture to it — it goes with the whole Craftsman feel.”

Notable is the absence of ubiquitous stainless steel in the appliances, which would have made an especially large

21st century splash in this otherwise historically sensitive kitchen, given the refrigerator’s substantial size. Instead, the refrigerator and dishwasher are camouflaged to match the cabinets’ inset doors.

As a final nod to the home’s Arts & Crafts history, Wilkins made sure to incorporate a built-in bench, to make a cook’s company more comfortable and provide the family’s daughter a convenient homework perch. In addition to seating, the unit also adds to the room’s storage capacity, with a base that incorporates two pull-out drawers.

“I love to do those benches,” Wilkins says, emphasizing the timeless appeal of such gathering spaces. “People come in and hang out — that’s really one of our trademarks.” **QR**



A separate laundry room and bathroom are located off of the kitchen area.