

This New Old House

A Victorian home gets the kitchen and breakfast room it long deserved

BY TATE GUNNERSON
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The old kitchen (inset) had dated finishes and an awkward layout. In the new one, white-painted cabinetry and marble countertops brighten the space. Contemporary iterations of old-style hardware, subway tile, light and plumbing fixtures, and a farmhouse sink add warmth. [Photo Gallery](#)

SIZE *594 square feet*
TYPE *Kitchen*
LOCATION *Highland Park*

Some collaborations were just meant to be: When a Highland Park woman hired a local designer whose work she had admired in a magazine to help create a new kitchen, breakfast room, and mudroom in her home, she and her family also got a friend out of the deal.

“She says she met her best friend in a magazine,” says KitchenLab owner Rebekah Zaveloff of the busy wife and mother who hired her. “We have the same energy level, pace, and collaborative nature.”

By the time the homeowners contacted Zaveloff in early 2006, the family had lived in the 6,500-square-foot 1880s Queen Anne Victorian for nearly seven years. In the original layout, the kitchen was separated from a small den by an enclosed staircase; the new arrangement involved relocating the staircase and joining the two spaces. The den would become a breakfast area, with French doors leading to a new deck outside. The homeowners hoped Zaveloff could help them create an inviting kitchen with plenty of storage and a study area for their two young children.

The challenge here and throughout the renovation was to come up with a design and finishes that would work for a modern family but also honor the architectural integrity of the gracious old house.

“The kitchen and den desperately needed to be brought back to the elegance of the rest of the house,” says Zaveloff. “The house flows amazingly, but the kitchen felt very compartmentalized.”

Architectural elements of the home’s foyer served as a jumping-off point for cabinetry and millwork in the kitchen and breakfast room. “The original molding, paneling, and stairs were the inspiration,” Zaveloff says. “Nobody had painted the trim, so all the character and details were there.” New woodwork incorporates wide moldings, beadboard, and recessed panels in doors, wainscoting, and other surfaces, making for a richly textured look.

Zaveloff’s most inspired touch—one she devised with the help of Chad Boomgaarden, an architect she works with—was to replace the enclosed stairway that had separated the kitchen and den with a built-in two-sided desk. A structural support post was clad in handsome woodwork, with a matching decorative column added for symmetry.



A vintage table from Architectural Artifacts was cut down to fit the breakfast room. Bertioia chairs and crisp-lined pendant lamps keep the mood light. [Photo Gallery](#)

“The desk was a way to deal with the existing architecture,” says Zaveloff. “Creating a big great room wouldn’t have been in the style of the house.”

The vintage tile backsplash on the desk is the kind of detail that can make a new element look comfortable in an old house, as is the salvaged barn wood used for the desktop. “It’s incredibly important that we layer back in ‘found’ pieces, whether they’re antiques, reproductions, or in this case a healthy mix of both,” Zaveloff says. “I’ll often double back to make sure we have the right balance between old and new.”

In this house, old doors from the original kitchen were used in the new mudroom, where an antique chandelier adds a touch of glamour; the rustic vintage table in the breakfast area, cut down from a larger one, is juxtaposed with contemporary Bertioia chairs, icons of mid-century design. In the kitchen proper, reproductions of classic subway tile, decorative hardware, light and plumbing fixtures, and a farmhouse sink coexist comfortably with a restaurant-quality range and other state-of-the-art appliances.

When Zaveloff and her client weren’t shopping, they were e-mailing each other ideas and product suggestions. The designer encouraged the homeowners to trust their instincts and to buy smaller accessories they loved (“We’ll find a home for it”). Zaveloff believes a house and the pieces in it should tell a story. “You don’t want to second-guess yourself, because creativity will go out the window,” she says.

The result of the yearlong project is a hospitable home that stayed true to its 19th-century roots while incorporating good ideas from more recent eras. In addition to updating the kitchen and gracefully integrating it with adjacent spaces, the new friends furnished other rooms with contemporary and vintage pieces they found together. The project completed, Zaveloff still spends lots of time at the house.

“It’s the kind of place where you can have a really elegant dinner party or walk in through the side door and open the fridge,” says Zaveloff. “When I’m there, I don’t want to leave.”

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Design: KitchenLab, 773-495-4383, kitchenlab-chicago.com.
Architecture and engineering: Boomgaarden Architects, 1315 Central Ave., Wilmette, 847-226-3230, boomarch.com. **Construction:** Grimsley Group, 1116 W. Barry Ave., 773-935-6500, grimsleygroup.com. **Kitchen:** Cabinetry, KitchenLab custom cabinetry. Cabinet hardware, Deltana, Studio 41, 2500 N. Pulaski Rd., 773-235-2500, shopstudio41.com. Pratt & Larson, 555 N. Franklin St., 312-467-9590, tilegallerychicago.com. Shaws Original Fireclay Apron sink, Custom rohlhome.com. Stools, Tolix, The Conran Shop, conranusa.com. Custom desktop, American Barn Company, 3808 N. Clark St., 773-327-1560, americanbarncompany.com. Tile on desk backsplash, Architectural Artifacts, 4325 N. Ravenswood Ave., 773-348-0622, architecturalartifacts.com. Crystal desk pulls, Anthropologie, 1120 N. State St., 312-255-1848, anthropologie.com. Lighting, Circa Lighting, Idlewood Electric Supply, 114 Skokie Valley Rd., Highland Park, 847-831-3600, idlewoodelectric.com. Countertops, KitchenLab. Appliances, Plass Appliance, 45 Skokie Blvd., Northbrook, 847-579-0160, plassappliance.com. **Breakfast area:** Table, Architectural Artifacts. Pendants, Visual Comfort, Jayson Home & Garden, 1885 N. Clybourn Ave., 773-248-8180, jaysonhomeandgarden.com. **Mudroom:** Green penny tile, Ann Sacks, Merchandise Mart, 312-923-0919, annsacks.com. Chandelier, Marco Polo, Harbert, Mich., 269-469-6272.

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