



Thomas Buckborough & Associates

Fine Residential Designers and Remodelers

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Perfect 10 - Big Impression

by Wendy A. Jordan

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Even people with small houses want to live big. They can do so with your help—and I'm talking about help of a kind you may take for granted. Most owners of small houses are limited more by lack of innovative remodeling ideas than by lack of space. That's where you come in. Sure, you have the technical skills to reconfigure their homes. But so do a lot of other contractors. To stand apart from your competition and really help your clients, it's important to bring creative ideas as well as construction know-how to the table.

Here's an example of what I mean. The kitchen-dining-family area of this 1,600-square-foot house in Acton, Mass., had obvious problems, with not-so-obvious solutions. All the rooms in the 1960s house were small and cut off from each other. As the homeowner says, the area was "too small, too dark, too segmented and compartmentalized" for everyday living, not to mention for parties and holiday get-togethers. Yet when she and her husband contacted Thomas Buckborough and Associates, Concord, Mass., about remodeling the space, they had only one idea about how to fix it: Take out the wall separating the kitchen and dining room.

Thomas Buckborough, CKD, CR, opened their eyes to more exciting possibilities. In fact the homeowner tells her friends that "buying" his creative thinking was the best investment of the project. "His ideas are worth so much more than we paid. We never would have come up with the ideas without his help."



Before

...the area was "too small, too dark"...

...take out the wall separating the kitchen and dining room...



After

Without changing the sizes of the rooms, Buckborough expanded how they function and feel. He did open the wall between the kitchen and dining room, but instead of removing it entirely he replaced a ticket-window-sized pass-through with a full-width opening. The granite-topped peninsula in the opening is high enough to hide kitchen clutter but low enough to work as a buffet.

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Expansive and sociable, the opening links the two rooms, extends sight lines and shows off the bright, remodeled kitchen. Stripped of the dated, pine wainscoting, the dining room looks fresh and contemporary too. Buckborough replaced the kitchen's sheet vinyl flooring with sealed oak floors that match the dining room floor, adding class and strengthening the connection between rooms.

Around the corner Buckborough punched out another wall, this one boxing off the kitchen from the, um, what was that room? A tube of space 10 feet wide and 21 feet long with a massive fireplace, the room merely channeled traffic from the mudroom to the family room. The homeowner says Buckborough asked, "What do you do with this area?" When she said, "Nothing," his creative wheels began to turn. "I always look around for spaces that are being underused or not used," he explains. This one, which he dubbed the hearth room, was "a prime candidate" for remodeling, he adds, because of its location.

The opening Buckborough carved out of the hearth room wall has a gentle overhead curve. A granite-topped eating counter in the opening curves into the hearth room, echoing the curve above. Though the curve is shallow, it's enough to make room for four people to sit, eat and socialize at the counter. In fact, the counter effectively expands the kitchen, transforming the hearth room into the eat-in kitchen zone the homeowner wanted but had no kitchen space for. "Having enough seats for the kids and their friends makes a huge difference," the homeowner says.

That wall opening also lets the homeowner connect with family room activities and conversation when she's in the kitchen. And it establishes a kitchen-based command central. Buckborough made legroom for stool seating on the kitchen side of the counter so that the homeowner can work there, eat there, and talk there with her kids when they have lunch at the counter. With that command point, says Buckborough, the kitchen is "much more connected to the rest of the house."

Originally the skimpy kitchen doorway opened right into the stove. The entry point was not only awkward, but also dangerous for young children. Buckborough solved that one by closing off the entry and creating a larger, more gracious one next to the peninsula. The new entry is handy to the refrigerator, so the kids can grab a snack without cutting through the kitchen work triangle. There is a "beautiful flow" now, says the homeowner, from the kitchen to the dining room to the living room beyond.

New finishes make the kitchen itself light and fresh. Since there is no wall space for pictures, the backsplashes display colorful tiles, including florals, which pick up the terra cotta highlights of the granite. Instead of new cherry cabinet doors, which were beyond the homeowner's budget, Buckborough painted the old doors off-white to blend with the tiles. The homeowner finds the bright, coordinated look a joy. Distinctive pendant lights, augmented by under-cabinet lighting and a couple of recessed fixtures, fill the room with light. "I love the drop lighting," the homeowner says. Dimming the under-cabinet lights adds a pleasing touch when guests come to dinner.

Finally, the homeowner had always wanted more workspace and storage in the kitchen. The peninsula made room for it, featuring extra counter space as well as drawers and a pull-out trash bin. Ample and convenient, the new workspace in the kitchen get a silver medal from the homeowner. "I can access everything I need to by spinning around," she says. The gold medal goes to the open, free-flowing plan of the remodeled rooms. "I can't tell you how much this has changed the house," the homeowner says. Not an inch of space was added, but "it looks and feels like a home that's far larger."



Before



After



Seating on kitchen side of eating counter