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Before-and-after transformations

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JANUARY '09
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THE TRANSFORMATION of an interior space from drab and dark to fresh and exciting can have a profound effect on a home and its inhabitants. When reimagining an outdated kitchen for a husband and wife, interior designers Claire Ownby and Rachel Koepke quickly recognized the room's inherent deficits and constrictions.

BY JOHN ROARK | PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE THOMPSON

"The homeowners love to entertain and envisioned the space as a natural extension of the rest of the house," recalls Ownby, a *Phoenix Home & Garden* Masters of the Southwest award winner. "The kitchen was boxed off from the rest of the house and not conducive to socializing or interaction."

The room was uninviting not only because it was antiquated from a design standpoint. It also lacked unity with the rooms adjacent to it. And for a couple who loves to welcome friends and neighbors for interactive dinners, spirited gatherings and spontaneous get-togethers, it was essential that the kitchen be both accessible and inviting.

“The original floorplan may have worked 20 years ago when the house was built, but for the way we live and entertain, it no longer made sense,” says the husband. “When you were in the kitchen, it was impossible to interact with anyone who wasn’t in there with you. It had very poor workflow between the sink, cooktop and refrigerator. For us, it was illogical.”

Ownby and Koepke started by breaking the space wide open. Obtrusive walls were removed, the island was expanded considerably, and a counter-height peninsula bar with unobstructed access to the living room was added. Shuttered windows and slider doors became an expansive picture window, flooding the space with natural light and welcoming in backyard views. Uninspired maple cabinetry was updated with white Shaker-style facings, and sand-colored ceramic flooring became a welcome alternative to the original the dark marble.

The designers also incorporated streamlined features that add efficiency. The peninsula holds a wine refrigerator and a separate beverage cooler; plus ample bar storage; on either side of the stacked oven and microwave, pocket doors conceal countertop appliances, a pantry and coffee bar; and beneath the quartz countertops, drawers within drawers consolidate utensils, dishware and sundries.

The remodel represents a mission accomplished for the homeowners. “The kitchen now has great working spaces, and the house now feels like a new home,” says the husband. “Whether we’re fixing cocktails or cooking dinner, our guests are now a part of what’s happening, not apart from it.”

For more information, see Sources on Page 142.



Once an isolated room that discouraged interaction and efficiency, the transitionally modern kitchen is now bright, open and cheerful, and a natural gathering place when the homeowners entertain. Removing dividing walls and adding a counter-height peninsula provides an uninterrupted view from the living room, through the kitchen to the backyard. Reclaimed barn-wood shelving adds a rustic touch to the picture window.

BEFORE & AFTER GALLERY



LEFT Soffits added to the kitchen’s boxy feeling; dark flooring gave the room a heavy, claustrophobic vibe. The exterior wall’s shuttered windows and sliding door limited views of the backyard beyond.

FAR LEFT A wall separated the confined kitchen from the adjacent living room to the left, creating a barrier between the spaces. The tiny island had room for little more than a cooktop. Standard maple cabinetry was outdated and uninspired.



“The original floor plan may have worked 20 years ago when the house was built, but for the way we live and entertain, it no longer made sense.”

—the homeowner

a quiet place

EVERYONE NEEDS a way to wind down from time to time. Your escape may be yoga, Tai Chi, meditation or just sitting in a quiet spot to unplug from the world. But doing so in nature can restore you in ways a controlled indoor environment might not always provide and a dedicated garden retreat may just be what you need to take your discipline to a whole new level.

“Just a few moments of quiet contemplation works wonders on health and sense of well-being,” says landscape architect and *Phoenix Home & Garden Masters* of the Southwest award winner Donna Winters, who has designed several soothing garden spaces for her

Phoenix clientele. “The goal is to create a proper mindset, a place to be in comfort without distraction. The plantings are simple and quiet to encourage you to focus on how you feel when you are in the space.”

In a yoga space or meditation garden there is typically an element of privacy, the sound of water, an open area for a yoga mat or meditation platform, and an object or plant to create a focal point, such as a tree, a Buddha or a symbolic sculpture, says interior designer Claire Ownby, also a *Phoenix Home & Garden Masters* of the Southwest award winner, who helped design a Japanese Zen

Designed by architect Nick Tsontakis, this yoga garden incorporates exposed aggregate concrete and Portuguese limestone tile. Two bonsai-shaped plants—an olive tree on the left and a myrtle bush on the right—bring a calm simplicity to the setting. The clean lines of the metal water feature provide a focal point against the natural desert backdrop.



SCOTT SANDLER

BY NANCY ERDMANN



GARRETT COOK

garden for a Scottsdale client. She notes that other embellishments, such as boulders and meandering beds of river rock, can also add a calming presence.

Whatever the size of your yard, there is always room to create a place that promotes mental and spiritual well-being. Here are some tips for creating an outdoor sanctuary of your own.

DESIGNING YOUR SPACE

Location—Whenever possible, choose a quiet spot that’s protected from the wind, sounds of traffic or dogs, and sprinkler heads that may inadvertently go off. “Having the area secluded from other parts of the garden so there is an element of privacy and disconnection from the rest of the home is ideal,” says Ownby. You want enough room to be able to stretch out your entire body. And unless you like to sweat, stay away from bright, sunny areas, as your body can often get heated up during exercise.

If you don’t have a secluded spot, you can create one by planting a hedge of tall-growing shrubs or lining up large potted plants to form a living wall, adding a standup screen or trellis, or even hanging curtains. Remember to orient your setting so that you are looking at something pleasant as opposed to a blank wall.

Plants—Fill your outdoor den with scented bloomers such as lavender, jasmine and chamomile, which are said to ease headaches and tension. Gently flowing ornamental grasses or feathery foxtail fern provide a soothing essence, while shade-loving evergreen shrubs, such as gardenia or Japanese boxwood, keep the look simple. For height, there’s noninvasive bamboo, a strong but



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flexible grass, or horsetail reed; both have a Zen quality about them.

Finishing touches—Blue and green hues can relieve stress, so consider this when selecting containers, mats, rugs, pillows and wall paint. The natural shades of rocks and pebbles add an earthy element to the setting, while white-blooming plants, twinkle lights and candles provide a soft glow. Add a little music (you can always bring out your cell phone and earphones), and you’re ready to detach from the world and retreat into your garden of serenity.

Note: If you love the idea of practicing yoga or Tai Chi outdoors, but don’t have room in your yard, Desert Botanical Garden offers yoga and Tai Chi classes throughout the year in open-air and covered areas, depending on the weather.

For more information, see Sources on Page 142.

TOP AND ABOVE
Privacy, minimal visual distractions and room to stretch make this courtyard an idyllic spot for yoga, Tai Chi or meditation. Simple plantings, a bed of river rock and a trio of obelisks add to the tranquil vibe. An outdoor shower provides a refreshing cool-down.