

Nancy Henry and Bruce Campbell reconfigured the back of their home to end up with a kitchen that brings the outdoors into their 1911 bungalow.

JENNIFER BRINKMAN



## Let There be Light!

*The kitchen was the darkest corner in the Henry-Campbell bungalow. Now it's a sunny family space. By Jennifer Rabin*

NANCY HENRY ISN'T A GEOLOGIST, BUT GET HER TALKING ABOUT HER NEW countertops and you might mistake her for one.

"It looks like slate to some people, but it's actually a type of metamorphic rock," says Henry, with a slight North Carolina lilt to her voice. "First you have the sedimentary rock, then igneous. Metamorphic is the stage beyond igneous. It's been squeezed under pressure over time, so it's a little harder."





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# [transformations]

The object of her affection is called Pietra del Cardoso, a highly compressed, gray Italian sandstone with a matte finish, taken from a quarry near Cardoso, Italy. It's the kind of rock that inspires new culinary pursuits. "I've been experimenting with pies!" says Henry, who recently had a pie crust problem but solved it by rolling out the dough onto the nice, cool surface of her new countertop. Key-lime chiffon and double-crust apple pies ensued.

More than any other part of the kitchen remodel, finding the right counter surface was Henry's labor of love. Not a fan of the polished granite found in many modern kitchens, she wanted something that had the low-maintenance properties of granite, but that had a look more befitting the 1911 craftsman home she shares with husband Bruce Campbell and their year-old daughter Miranda.

For Henry, the daughter of a busin man who moved the family every years, and Campbell, who moved ev three weeks with his surveyor-fat! this big, beautiful house was the first : of roots when they moved in 17 ye ago. A couple of years ago, when He and Campbell decided the 3,000-squ foot space was a little big for their far of three, they considered their option

"We looked at smaller houses, but didn't make financial sense to do size," says Henry. "It would've beer even trade to get a smaller house of s ilar quality." Committing to stay in house for at least another six years, t decided to redo the 10-foot-3-inch 11-foot-8-inch kitchen.

Henry and Campbell have alw made "dinner-party kind of meals" they wanted to have room in kitchen for Miranda to join them. '



were always competing for counter space in the kitchen," says Campbell. "It used to be a one-person show." With only one small south-facing window and a semi-solid door leading to a dark mudroom (left) that, in turn, obscured the view to the backyard, the kitchen was one of the darkest rooms in the house.

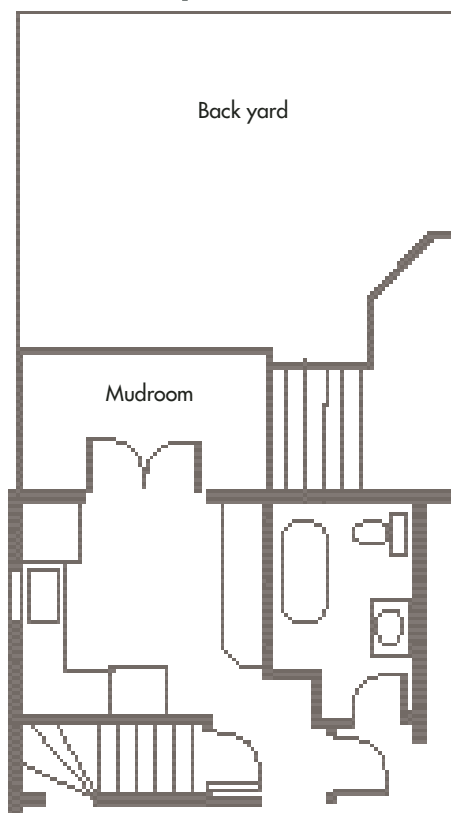
Their contractor, Tom Champion, the owner of Tom Champion Builders in Portland, suggested they hire designers Alexia Zerbinis and Keyan Mizani, the husband and wife team behind eM|Zed design LLC. "We're not do-it-yourselfers by nature," says Henry, "and we couldn't do a project this size and have it go as well as we wanted without a designer."

With a strong sense of the house's past in mind, the two couples set out to create a kitchen that could stand the test of time, not to mention the occasional dinner party for friends and neighbors.

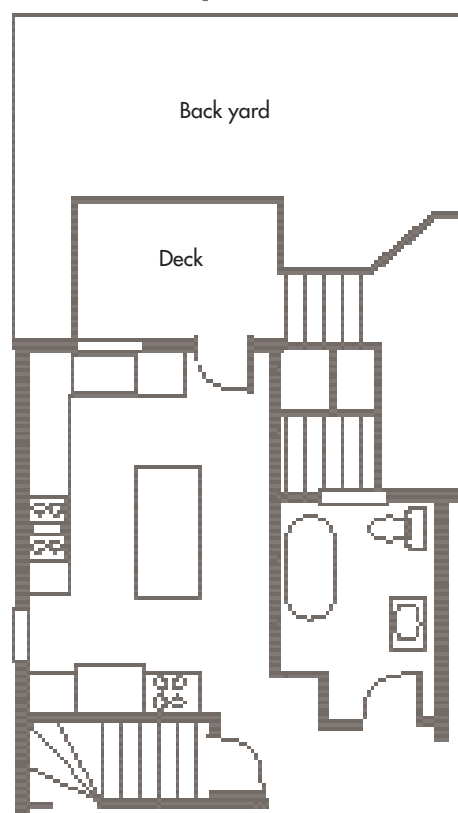
Maintaining the integrity of the house was an important part of the makeover. "We've lived here long enough to appreciate the house's strong architectural heritage," says Campbell. "We wanted to do something in the new kitchen that would outlive us rather than just put in a kitchen *we* like. We owe it to the house and to whoever lives here after us."

The designers had to look no farther than the mudroom to gain the square footage they needed to give the kitchen a true makeover. The big idea was to add the mudroom's additional 80 square feet to the relatively square kitchen, ending up with a larger kitchen with new windows that would flood the space with natural light and give the family direct access to their backyard. The new space would also allow the design team to reconfigure cabinetry and appliances to improve the function-

## floorplan before



## floorplan after





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## DESIGNERS' EYE:

ALEXIA ZERBINIS AND KEYAN MIZANI SOLVE THREE OF THE HENRY-CAMPBELL FAMILY'S DESIGN DILEMMAS



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**“How do we make the ‘dog-leg’ from the dining room to the kitchen more inviting and less of a squeeze?”**

**Seen & noted:** The doorway from an elegant dining room [left] deposited you in a stairway landing-like space that forced you to skirt a cabinet-covered wall [far left]. “The cabinets projected two feet into the kitchen, so you had to squeeze diagonally through a chopped-up vestibule,” says designer Keyan Mizani. “It made you go, ‘What is going on here?’ You literally had to do a double side-step to go into the kitchen.”

**The big idea:** Open up the bottleneck vestibule into the kitchen and make the space more welcoming *without* the expense of relocating the bathroom.

**The solution:** “We removed the cabinetry along that wall to create a clearer circulation through the kitchen,” says Mizani. “We also dropped the ceiling 9 inches, in part, to conceal an angled beam above the vestibule that added to the jumbled feeling. Finally, we inlaid on the diagonal a red square into the cork-colored Marmoleum floor to add a welcoming touch of color and to clue you to move diagonally through the space.”

**“Do we have to scratch a center island off our must-have list since our remodeled kitchen will be on the narrow side?”**

**Seen & noted:** A not-so-big center island is one of the room’s most endearing focal points. Centered atop a red “rug” of marmoleum, the madrone-topped island features an eating bar on its beadboarded and bracketed side, and seven doors and drawers on the side nearest the cooktop. You know the piece is new, but something about it says vintage, too.

**The big idea:** Think small! “On this project, the width of the room was only 11 feet 6 inches, so it was either a small island or no island,” says designer Alexia Zerbinis.

And borrow a few 1911 design details. “The center island, like the entire kitchen remodel, was designed to include old-fashioned details that we picked up from the built-in cabinetry throughout the house,” says Mizani.

**The solution:** A narrow island, detailed like a piece of furniture, that leaves the couple 3 feet 6 inches of clearance space around it—enough so they can easily pass each other.



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**“I like the low-maintenance, nonstaining properties of granite, but its surface is too ‘flecky’ for my taste. Got any other ideas?”**

**Seen & noted:** The charcoal countertops in the Henry-Campbell kitchen are a lovely watery-veined . . . *what?* Honed granite? Marble?

**The big idea:** Install schist countertops. Schist is a highly compressed Italian sandstone. “Schist has some of the visual characteristics of marble, except that the veining is more watery,” says Zerbinis. “Nancy gets the credit for the choice of countertop and for researching how many treatments of sealer it’d take to get the schist dark enough to play off of the crimson-stained mahogany cabinetry.”

**The solution:** Henry selected Pietra del Cardoso schist, which comes from near Cardoso, Italy. “Visually, it’s more restful to Nancy’s eye than the flecking in granite, which had the countertop traits she was after,” says Zerbinis. The designers chose to use slate rather than schist for the backsplash to keep a mix of design elements. (“A big slab of the Pietra extending from the stove to the vent would’ve felt monolithic,” says Mizani.)



ality of the kitchen—starting with the way you entered the room.

“When you walked into the old kitchen, you were looking at the side of a wall, which was lined with upper and lower cabinets that projected 2 feet into the aisle,” says Mezani of the zigzag pathway. “It felt like you had to wiggle your way into the kitchen.” The designers had to be particularly creative in rethinking the floorplan because of a bathroom on the other side of the wall, which meant that the width of the kitchen couldn’t be altered.

**Mizani and Zerbinis knew the challenge would be mixing so many different finishes in a not-so-big room.**

Mizani and Zerbinis took out the offending cabinetry, reorienting the new cabinetry in the space and adding a center island. “By doing cabinets in a U-shape, and putting a bar counter in the center island, it created a clear circulation zone for the room,” says Mizani.

To take full advantage of the circulation zone, Mizani and Zerbinis moved the sink to align with new windows that overlooked the backyard. The fridge was relocated to where the stove had been. A new cooktop was placed beside a new fridge on the other side of the center island. “There were some very unfortunate relationships in the existing kitchen, like the fridge had been next to the sink,” says Zerbinis. “They were breaking all the work triangle rules.”

In order to make the kitchen feel like it belonged in the house, something needed to be done about the color scheme. “I love color!” says Henry, whose kitchen was a self-proclaimed “god-awful” mixture of electric salmon and green. Funky and eclectic in its own right, it was no longer a reflection of how she and Campbell wanted the space to

look. But Henry felt strongly that she didn’t want to go monochromatic either.

“Nancy told us she didn’t want a homogenous look,” says Mizani. “She wanted a mix of materials. You can respect that when you see the rest of the house, which is filled with eccentric pieces and interesting things. So we decided to create a kitchen that didn’t

feel out of place with the rest of the house, one that had a lot of old-fashioned details but that also had a variety of materials within it.”

Mizani and Zerbinis knew the challenge would be mixing so many different finishes in a not-so-big room. “It’s a reasonable size, but it’s not a rambling kitchen with cabinets everywhere,” says

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# [transformations]

Mizani. “When you put a lot of variety in a space that’s basically a box, all you do is emphasize how small the space is because things pop everywhere. It took so much energy to orchestrate all the different materials into a design that looks simple.”

The designers chose mahogany cabinets for their reddish warmth (“It’s brighter than the quarter-sawn oak in the rest of the house, but it feels related,” says Mizani) and carried the red through as an accent, which shows up in the Marmoleum floor and on the island’s butcher-block top made of sustainably harvested madrone. To quench Henry’s thirst for color, the red is offset by the island’s green, farmhouse-style beadboard and the soothing yellow of the walls. The more outrageous color schemes can be found in the ceramic plates Henry and Campbell picked up in



Costa Rica, which are displayed in niches in the cabinetry.

Enter the Henry-Campbell kitchen today and four red Marmoleum squares, inlaid on the diagonal, establish a clear path across the cork-colored

**The design team combined a mix of materials—slate, mahogany, madrone and schist—in a masterly way.**

Marmoleum that covers the rest of the floor (except for the “rug” of red Marmoleum on which the island is centered). The red diamonds act as arrows, establishing a clear path through the kitchen, whispering to your feet which way to go.

The designers repeated the rotated-square motif in two other places for continuity: on the slate backsplash above the cooktop, and on the skirtboard of the new exterior deck. The deck reconnects the family with their previously neglected backyard. The trick was that the mudroom roof was significantly lower than the kitchen roof.

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To remedy this disparity, Mizani and Zerbinis did something slightly unorthodox: They raised the height of the ceiling where the mudroom used to be with a gable (*right*), and lowered the height of the kitchen ceiling 9 inches to meet it. This unified the joined spaces and concealed an existing beam that contributed to the feeling of a choppy passage through the kitchen. “The new ceiling still feels relatively high because the room now gets so much natural light,” says Zerbinis. “And 8 feet 6 is 6 inches taller than modern construction; it’s just lower than the ceilings in the rest of the house.”

And as for the new wall of windows, both Henry and Campbell agree that



sometimes be difficult to deal with because it comes in low and is fairly harsh, but that it was perfect for this longish kitchen. “It penetrates deep into the room,” says Mizani. “Late in the day, when Nancy and Bruce are in the kitchen cooking dinner, the light comes in and splashes through wine bottles and hits their glasses and makes those little spark-

watching the light move through the new kitchen is the one thing that gives them the most day-to-day pleasure. Mizani and Zerbinis point out that west light can

ly things you see on the Mr. Clean box.”

The design team moved the outside steps from the mudroom over slightly, to accommodate a stoop, providing a more graceful transition to the backyard. They also designed a new patio, flanked by a waterfall and a trellis, which to Campbell, who spearheaded the outdoor portion of the project, was full of possibility.

“Bruce really wanted a place to plant,” says Mizani. And plant he did. The backyard now drips with ferns and five varieties of passion flower vines, which seem indigenous to the Henry-Campbell backyard, their flowers exploding like tiny, purple suns.

Campbell also has a prized Meyer lemon tree that he can spy from the kitchen while preparing for a dinner party with Miranda. Henry is off to the side, rolling out crusts on her beloved countertops, looking at that little tree, dreaming of lemon-cream pies. □



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