

FIT FOR A CROWD

Making more space in the room everyone gravitates to

By H.M. CAULEY
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As anyone who's ever hosted a party knows, most guests wind up in the kitchen.

"It's where people socialize now," said Jerome Quinn, CEO of SawHorse, an Atlanta-based renovations firm. "But three generations ago, they were in the living and dining room, and houses were designed to separate those rooms from the kitchen. I remember going to dinner at an aunt's house and nobody went in the kitchen. Now you can't keep people out with a Rottweiler at the door." The shift to casual living and entertaining has put more emphasis on the kitchen as a gathering space. New homes sport keeping rooms, casual living areas next to the food-prep area where the kids can do homework or watch TV while Mom and Dad get dinner on the table.

But many older homes weren't built to accommodate a crowd around the stove. Quinn and his crew work with homeowners to create more elbow room using the resources available, starting with a budget.

"We've learned to grab every square centimeter to expand the kitchen," said Quinn. "For some people on a tight budget, you can't afford to go outside the footprint, but there may still be some areas to expand. The most economical way to do it is to take a different look at the space adjacent to the kitchen."

Turning a dark and boxy kitchen into a naturally lit space with room to socialize was the goal of Ed Minchew. The east Cobb engineer contracted with SawHorse to put in two French doors, a granite-topped island and breakfast bar that seats six.

"I've had a couple of small dinner parties for eight or 10 people, and it's worked out very nicely," said Minchew.

Making more elbow room

Older homes have several spots that can be reconfigured to open the kitchen and make room for dining and socializing:

- **The butler's pantry:** These small storage areas between the kitchen and dining room don't usually get much day-to-day use and can be reworked to become extra space for the kitchen.
- **Breakfast nooks:** Many of Atlanta's charming older homes were built with cozy corners where two people could enjoy breakfast. As cute as it is, it's not an efficient use of the space.



Photos courtesy of SawHorse
[\(ENLARGE\)](#)

Before: The original kitchen (above) was narrow, with the stove in the wrong place. A wall was moved to create more kitchen and dining space (below).



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After



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Before: This curved island (below) allows for the seating of six, without having to move an existing wall. In the original kitchen, the workspace separated the food-prep area from the breakfast area (above).



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After:

- **Porches:** An existing porch or laundry area off the kitchen can be reconfigured.
- **Family rooms:** Many traditional ranch houses have family rooms adjacent to the kitchen. There may be a wall or pass-through between them that can be opened up to create an open, flowing space.
- **Build out:** If the budget allows, the kitchen can grow outside the home's original footprint. In these cases, city setback rules and the topography around the house must be considered.

Just what is a keeping room?

Traditionally, a keeping room was an area off the dining room or kitchen where the family gathered before the evening meal. Many of today's new homes feature keeping rooms adjacent to the kitchen, where comfortable seating, a fireplace and views to the outside provide a place for family and friends to congregate.

In older homes, integrating a nearby family room into the kitchen area creates the same feel. It may require removing walls or opening up little-used areas such as butler's pantries or breakfast nooks.

Creative contemporary approach

"We had to be very creative, tying the elements together in what was a very contemporary house," said Jerome Quinn of the kitchen project completed in Ed Minchew's east Cobb home. The goal was to eliminate a workspace that divided the food-prep area from the breakfast area. At the same time, Minchew wanted to add glass to let in natural light. A solid wall with one sliding door was transformed with two French doors overlooking the back yard.

Removing the Corian counter opened up the room, allowing the construction of an island with a sink and V-shaped breakfast bar big enough for six.

"SawHorse came up with the idea of turning the counter, otherwise we would have had to relocate walls," said Minchew. "By curving the island, I got the additional footage that will seat six without having to move an existing wall."

Finding 'new' space

The kitchen eating area of this Chastain Park house was cramped, with little space for guests to move around. The stove was also in an awkward location, in the path of traffic.

"This was a narrow kitchen, next to a very large living room the family didn't use very much," Jerome Quinn said. "We moved a wall between the kitchen and living room to create more usable space in the kitchen."

The far end of the living room became a spacious eating area. Moving the dining table out of the way opened up the space for an island with cooktop.

The area now has plenty of elbow room, making it more comfortable for family members and guests gathering there.