



A 21st Century Makeover

Hickory wood cabinets fire up Livonia kitchen

PHOTOS BY TOM HAWLEY

Clean and bright: The Grahams created a U-shaped kitchen by enclosing a doorway, but they managed to keep the room bright by allowing light to enter the kitchen from the den through this wall opening. The fruit border adds to the color in the room.

By KEN ABRAMCZYK
STAFF WRITER
kabramczyk@oe.homecomm.net

Greg and Janene Graham were looking for a ranch home in Livonia two years ago, and found one they liked.

The living room led to a centrally located kitchen, adjacent to the rear den. Hallways led to bedrooms.

Even though they liked the location of the kitchen, they didn't like its appearance. "We really wanted it remodeled," said Greg. "The kitchen was really dated."

The Grahams eventually purchased the home, their third, and moved with son Joshua from Westland in March 1999. The kitchen provided the artist's canvas for the couple's first remodeling project.

Janene Graham believes the dark wood cabinets were installed in the 1970s. The cabinets over the stove collected grease and dirt over the years. They wanted to fill the vacant walls with new cabinets and Lucy Susans to provide much needed kitchen storage.

The old kitchen also contained two doors 5 feet apart that led from the living room and hallway into the kitchen.

"We wanted to close off one of them to create a U-shape, rather than the L-shape," Greg said. "They say you should have a 'triangle' with the sink, stove and refrigerator, so you have a way to work around each other and aren't running into each other."

They also wanted a room where visitors could gather when the Grahams entertain.

A game plan
The Grahams sat down and drew up a game plan. At first the couple called several contractors, and received sticker shock — estimates of over \$20,000. They were aghast at the numbers, but realized their kitchen was considered a small job for builders in the midst of a building boom with plenty of contracts — and demand for builders — to go around.

But a friend referred them to Paul Berry, a Detroit firefighter who renovates homes as a side business.

"We sat down and sketched what we thought would work with a U-shaped design and the doorway closed," Greg Graham said. They went to tile stores and kitchen stores, such as KSI, to get a feel for what was there, then met with Berry.

"He knew the standard size of cabinets, and figured it out for the openings for the appliances," Greg said. They went to KSI and ordered Amera hickory cabinets, the top of the line offered by Merrillat, with a cider finish. "Hickory is a little more unique, as the majority of homes have oak and others have cherry," Greg said. "The hickory has a more distinctive grain with the cider finish. We didn't want to go with anything dark."

Berry installed the cabinets at various heights below the ceiling, which created a multi-dimensional effect and allowed the Grahams easy access to dishes and pots stored in upper cabinets. They later installed wallpaper border of grapes and fruit. Crown molding added to the elegance of the cabinets.



New heights: The new cabinets, installed at varying heights, add a multi-dimensional look and bring the top shelves within an arm's reach.

A little more money
Since the cabinets were top of the line, they cost more than the Grahams planned to spend. They also purchased a new range, microwave hood oven and a refrigerator. "Our (old) refrigerator was a little too big, too tall and too deep," said Greg. The earthen tiles and 3-D whitewashed fruit tiles were purchased from Genesee Tile in Farmington Hills. These backsplash tiles complemented the wallpaper border purchased from Border's Outlet in Canton.

Even Joshua helped with his input into the remodeling project. One day after joining his parents on a trip to Home Depot to shop for a new countertop, Joshua listened as his parents discussed their options.

"He said, 'you know what? I like this one,'" recalls Greg who showed me a sample of the green-gray Colorado slate countertop that Joshua chose.

The Grahams added a few extra details in the "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" department to remove clutter that drives most homeowners crazy. Janene stores two bins, one for recycling and another for returnables, in a lower drawer of the cabinets. A few parts purchased from the hardware store hold the bins in place.

Berry finished the job in five consecutive days in October 1999. The whole project, from gutting the kitchen to placing items in the cabinets, lasted about three weeks.

"We gained about three times as much cabinet space," Greg said. "It was nice," Janene added. "I was looking forward to a week without cooking, so I was fine with that."

They spent about \$12,000 on the kitchen cabinets and tile installation, \$1,200 on appliances and \$300 on light fixtures. Once Berry finished the renovations, the Grahams were thrilled with the results. "I was extremely pleased and happy to spend the money to do it," Janene said. "We have a nice kitchen to work in and entertain in."

remove clutter that drives most homeowners crazy. Janene stores two bins, one for recycling and another for returnables, in a lower drawer of the cabinets. A few parts purchased from the hardware store hold the bins in place.

Berry finished the job in five consecutive days in October 1999. The whole project, from gutting the kitchen to placing items in the cabinets, lasted about three weeks.

"We gained about three times as much cabinet space," Greg said. "It was nice," Janene added. "I was looking forward to a week without cooking, so I was fine with that."

They spent about \$12,000 on the kitchen cabinets and tile installation, \$1,200 on appliances and \$300 on light fixtures. Once Berry finished the renovations, the Grahams were thrilled with the results. "I was extremely pleased and happy to spend the money to do it," Janene said. "We have a nice kitchen to work in and entertain in."



Before and after: A doorway once allowed access to the kitchen from the main hallway, but that now holds several cabinets adding more storage space.

Silhouette: This tile adds a regal tone to the Graham kitchen.



Building the perfect project

Do you have a remodeling project of which you are particularly proud? Did you redo your kitchen, basement, bathroom or living room?

We would like to hear from you so we can share your story with our readers about your project, any problems you faced and solutions you developed. We want to share the immense satisfaction you felt once it was completed with our readers.

Send a summary of the project, photos of your home or room and phone numbers of where you can be reached during the day so we can contact you. Send information to Ken Abramczyk, At Home Editor, Cleveland Newsprint, 29151 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150 or e-mail stories as text files and photos as color jpegs at kabramczyk@oe.homecomm.net



REMODELING TIPS

Here are a few tips from Greg and Janene Graham to consider before embarking on that remodeling project:

■ **Have a game plan** — Draw your ideas first. Computer software programs can help homeowners check and see if their concepts are feasible.

■ **Budget what you want to spend** — Try not to venture too far beyond that and adjust your ideas accordingly to fit within your budget.

■ **Shop around** — Get at least three quotes in writing and discuss them thoroughly with contractors. Get references.

■ **Stay focused** — Don't get lost and bogged down with all the design details, materials and varieties now on the market. Match colors, designs and patterns and decide on what you want to use. Consider silhouette tiles, light fixtures, wallpaper border, crown molding and other finishing touches that will give your kitchen its own unique look.

■ **Appliances** — Think about appliances and whether you want to keep current ones, or purchase larger or smaller units. Study whether the refrigerator, microwave oven and oven fit with what you have planned.



Opening up: Greg and Janene Graham and son Joshua relax and enjoy the ambience of a newly remodeled kitchen in their Livonia home. The Grahams installed new Amera hickory cabinets, earthen wall tiles and a Colorado slate countertop.

INSIDE



MARTY FIGLEY
Read up
The winter months are a good time to read those gardening books.
See Garden Spot, Page 3



JOE GAGNON
Dryer problems
The Appliance Doctor answers a reader's question about dryer noises and remembers an old appliance repair shop in Toledo.
See Home Work, Page 4



HOMETOWN LIFE:
Pop-A-Top:
William Grace students are recycling pop tops for kidney dialysis.
See HomeTown Life, page 5