

unmuddling well done: *the* PROCESS

The biggest project in our 1790 farmhouse would be the kitchen, located in a narrow extension between the original house and the barn (now a garage and bedrooms). The connector, which was there by 1830, probably held a woodshed and summer kitchen. The 1970s owners added a bump-out; another renovation came in the 1990s. By now, the remodeled extension detracted from the integrity of the historic house.

BY AMY MITCHELL | PHOTOS BY ERIC ROTH



LEFT Amy Mitchell is an old-house owner, a wife and mother, blogger, and an interior designer based in New Hampshire. **BELOW** The bump-out extension, now the keeping-room part of the kitchen, is flanked by the original old house at left and the barn-turned-garage on the right.



ABOVE The renovation reclaimed the old summer kitchen extension as the kitchen proper, and imagined the bumped-out addition as an enclosed former porch. **INSET** The 1990s peninsular galley wall, 15' long with built-in ovens and a closet, had bisected the narrow room.



BEFORE

Good planning: I'm an interior designer,

but I still needed a team. Vermont's **Sandra Vitzthum**, much-published in OHJ, was my consulting architect. It was she who saw that "reimposing the historic structure," by reclaiming the old summer kitchen as today's kitchen, would inform the rest of the project. **Kitchen designer Lisa Muskat of LKM Design** was invaluable in designing the implied fireplace alcove for the stove, and other custom details. (Lisa, too, owns a 1790 house, so she gets it.) **General contractor Jim Duval**, of JD Construction in Bow, N.H., understood my vision and was invaluable in carrying it out.



Creating a focal point

This vintage-style, blue-enameled range in an alcove is the single most critical piece of the kitchen, after the raised ceiling and additional windows. The alcove is an important part of the implied history. This space was probably the summer kitchen, with its own hearth. During the Victorian era, inserting the kitchen stove into an alcove helped contain the stove's heat and fireproof the kitchen. • I had long coveted a (priced) European stove. A few years ago, **Aga, venerable maker of English enameled cast-iron ranges, introduced their 48" 'Elise' model**—an updated classic with stainless-steel trim, which costs about \$4000 less than comparable stoves.



IMPLIED LAYERS OF HISTORY

I wanted the kitchen area to be more in keeping with the 1790 house, even though this space is not entirely original: to recapture the footprint and integrity of the historic, narrow ell connector between house and barn; envision the 1970s bump-out as a later screened porch that has been enclosed; imply a hearth alcove for the stove; use wide-board heart pine flooring throughout to match the house. We'd also specify raised-panel cabinets. All this in a workable floor plan, without any adding-on.

W

hen we bought the house about eight years ago, the 1990s kitchen was plenty big, and yet there was hardly anyplace to sit down. A 15'-long peninsular galley wall with built-in ovens and a closet divided the space into two long rectangles; I was forever walking around it. I began thinking of the "keeping room" concept from colonial days: a cozy, multi-purpose space (pre-dating the contemporary open floor plan), built around the hearth.

Our new space would have both a cooking "hearth" and an actual wood-burning stove to help heat the first floor, as is common in New Hampshire. We needed a mudroom, laundry, and pantry. I also wanted to put a master suite where the guest room is (off the barn). I wanted to move my professional office, then an area in the kitchen, to a cottage by the driveway. This was going to take some planning. And money.

The intention was to redo the entire remuddled side of the house: kitchen and bump-out, mudroom, laundry (which was tucked into the barn/garage), the 1970s bedroom and bath. But then we found we would need to remove and rebuild half the roof from the kitchen area because it was not structurally sound. The kitchen budget alone had just doubled. We faced a decision not unlike one many of my clients have faced:

We could proceed as planned, renovating to "get it done," which would mean less attention to the wish list and historical details. Or we could reduce the project scope and get it right. So many times I've seen renovations, and especially additions,



BEFORE

TOP A walnut dry pantry is at one end of cabinets painted in Benjamin Moore's Lace Handkerchief, a versatile light beige; the view takes in the formal dining room beyond. **ABOVE** The previous plan didn't take full advantage of the space, leaving dead-end walls. The refrigerator jutted into the room. **OPPOSITE** The navy blue-enameled stove in its alcove is a strong focal point in the kitchen, cueing historical details and colors in the rest of the space. Under retractable pendant lights, the center island is unfitted and has multiple functions.



ABOVE The boot room is the entry between a screened porch and the kitchen, unfitted and old-fashioned. **BELOW** Pretty fabric panels elevate the bifold doors that hide coats and clutter. Everyday items hang on pegs. The flooring is durable 1/2" brick.



A BOOT ROOM FOR ME

I did a long blog post about the difference between boot rooms (English) and mudrooms (American). I concluded the difference is . . . the Atlantic Ocean—kind of like sneakers vs. trainers, custom vs. bespoke. Although the post is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, my point is that the English boot room is a lived-in, devil-may-care space in muddy colors, with unfitted benches, hooks for coats, hunting equipment—all slightly shabby. On the other hand, Americans have turned mudrooms, some with an infinitude of space, into optimistic, obsessively planned organization rooms with built-in compartments. In either case, it's a place to come in from outdoors. Durable floors and finishes are a must. We don't have a lot of space, but we do have icy, wet, and muddy weather. Furthermore, our budget was tapped out. Therefore, our boot room takes inspiration from England, with an indoor-outdoor floor, a closet to hide stuff, vintage pieces, and lots of pegs.



where more emphasis was placed on capturing square footage than on maximizing a smaller space with better planning. I wouldn't be satisfied with half-done. As the kitchen is paramount for our family, we decided to wait on the master suite.

This was to be the forever kitchen in our forever house. It will remain as long as I live here; no redos or updates, for reasons of budget, sanity, and avoiding waste. I would skip trends and look toward classics that would enhance the house. Of course, I would put my own twist on tradition, particularly when it came to such ephemera as lighting and wallpaper.

I'm pleased that all **10 of my earliest must-haves** made it through to the completed project: **1. the scenario** of a "converted porch" where the 1970s roof had to come off, to further the idea of layers of time—a screened porch later winterized; **2. wide-plank pine floors** to match the house; **3. a stove alcove**, in honor of this house that had at least six working fireplaces; **4. a free-standing, furniture-like dry-foods pantry** in the main kitchen; **5. a center table** rather than an island; **6. marble counters** (Parisians don't complain about etching!); **7. a plate rack** near the dishwasher for our most-used tableware; **8. a pot rack** over the range, part of maximizing storage; **9. rise-and-fall pendants** on a counterweight over the center table for maximum flexibility; **10. painted finishes**, to carry over the house's palette.



pantry/laundry redo

Now this space functions for storage, and as a butler's pantry and laundry room. The washer and dryer, economically hidden behind simple café curtains, are recessed into space under the stairs, freeing up the aisle. • I wanted upper cabinets to feel open, yet we don't have lots of pretty barware for display. Linen-backed open doors with wire insets lend just the right lightness and informality. • My favorite grassy green would have been too much in the kitchen, which has sight lines to formal rooms, but here it's perfect.





TOP LEFT A custom plate rack near the dishwasher was on the very first wish-list. **ABOVE** The fireclay sink is another splurge: "It just feels and sounds different from porcelain on cast iron. I gave up my first-choice, more authentic faucet in order to justify the sink's expense." **LEFT** The blue Aga stove is beautiful and practical, backed with tile and a convenient pot rack.

“Marble was one of my coveted splurges. **Danby marble** has a lower than usual absorption rate; so far, mine **has not absorbed any stains**, not even from raspberries. The **inevitable soft etching** fits the aesthetic.”

The previous laundry space, carved out of the old barn behind the kitchen, was a mash-up of washer and dryer, a builder’s castoff sink cabinet, and a naked toilet. (But we have a powder room nearby.) Now it functions as a larder, a butler’s pantry, and a laundry room. Fitted with alcohol- and lemon-proof soapstone counters, it’s also our wet bar. (My handsome husband makes the best cocktail between Boston and Montreal; if his job goes bust, we’re opening a speakeasy off I-89.) Economically and historically hidden behind simple café curtains on a rod, washer and dryer are ingeniously inserted into space under the stairs, freeing up the aisle. (The linen, about \$8 a yard, came from Joann Fabrics.) The tall cabinet beyond is

also recessed to allow storage of deep laundry baskets. Unlacquered brass hardware feels good in hand and will acquire a patina.

Here, the walking space ranges 36"–40". In a newer house, I’d recommend at least a 42" aisle, but in a 230-year-old house, you take what you can get. Nevertheless, I can open all the doors with room to spare.

My favorite color is green, and this bright grassy green works in a smaller, enclosed space. Look closely at the apparently historical, small-print paper in the room: another twist on tradition. (It’s a good man who doesn’t object to pink puppy-dog wallpaper in his bar!)

AMY MITCHELL is principal of **Home Glow Design**, dedicated to “helping time-strapped and style-confused homeowners transform their forever houses with classic style, quality, and comfort to stand the test of time.” She just launched a twice-yearly, eight-week, on-demand class for homeowners: <https://homeglowdesign.com/themethod/>



ABOVE Family spaces merge seamlessly in what was once an awkward, narrow ell. Beyond the seating area is the screened porch flanking the attached barn.
INSETS (left) The previous eating counter blocked sight lines and traffic. (right) The owner's antique table and reproduction ladder-backs were beloved, but it was time to let them go.

NOT ALL KITCHENS HAVE ISLANDS

The reasons people give for “needing” an island may be the result of showroom propaganda. A place for the Cuisinart pop-up, an under-counter wine rack, an extra freezer drawer, a trash compactor? Do we really need all of these?

An island can mess up the circulation pattern (too many steps around it!) or block the open oven door. My rule: If you don't have room for a 30" island with a minimum of 42" around it (48" is better), skip it.

A traditional center table

in the kitchen is cozy and multi-functional. Use it for prep and eat in the dining room, or take meals here, in real chairs rather than on stools. My table is solid cherry and heavy enough to use as a work table. Its finish is indestructible.

It was hard to find a table 34" deep and up to 80" in length (American tables tend to be 30" deep). So I imported this one from England. It has a utensil drawer, which is invaluable given my limited storage in the kitchen proper.