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Kitchen chemistry

One way to get more light into your kitchen – blow out the back of your house

By Catherine Osborne
Photography by Lorne Bridgman

What's great about Victorians is their storybook character – pitched roofs, shuttered windows, red bricks, wooden floors. But modernizing them can easily strip them of their character; plus, they almost never have enough cupboard space. When a young couple found their dream cottage in the city on Parkdale's Melbourne Avenue, the focus was on keeping the century home's charms but creating a kitchen that didn't look out of place. They brought in architect Jim Campbell of Rockside Campbell Design to help figure out how a kitchen with just 17.3 square metres of floor space could double as a social hub for large dinner parties and social gatherings – the goal was to seat 10 comfortably.

To make room, they tore the old kitchen out and then punched out the back of the house, replacing it with an oversized sliding glass door over three metres in height. Trimmed with Spanish cedar and using lift-and-glide hardware, the two-pane opening leads to a deck and backyard. To avoid the flatness of a bank of cupboards, they came up with a wall of cabinets that jut in and out like stacked boxes. "We talked about it having a 3-D Mondrian look," says the client about the asymmetrical grid of 27 cupboards above the counter that reach almost to the ceiling. Cubbies were built in, too, providing areas for displaying art and shelving books. Another 18 cupboards are below.

Opposite The 17.3-square-metre kitchen can easily seat 10.
Right The goal was to build an entirely new kitchen without spoiling the character of a century-old home.



The flow of the kitchen is unique, considering its galley-like layout. There's no bottleneck. To keep the prep area separate from dirty dishes, two sinks were installed: one close to the refrigerator and stove, the other next to the dishwasher.

Campbell custom designed the dining table and bench using Spanish cedar encased in a steel frame. At 3.1 metres in length, it runs along one side of the kitchen from end to end. "From the beginning we had the idea that we wanted to destroy the sense of a kitchen," says Campbell. "When you enter the room you're not looking at a kitchen; your eye travels along the tabletop and goes all the way back through the glass door and into the garden." It took some guts, Campbell adds, for his clients to blow out the back of their house, "but the connection between inside and out is so much stronger."

Opposite Forty drawers and cabinets made of quarter sawn Western Douglas fir veneer were custom built by Jeremy Van Severen of Coates Creek Cabinetry.

Below left Cubbyholes help break up the flatness of a bank of cupboards while also providing places to store books and display objects.

Below right Stove by Bertazzoni and toaster by Cuisinart. The red countertop is quartz and the flooring slate.

Bottom left Designed by architect Jim Campbell, the Spanish cedar and steel frame dining table spans over three metres in length.

