



Left: In this kitchen, designed by Crystal Kennedy, Pacific Northwest Cabinetry, in Milwaukie, OR, note the addition of the multipurpose counter placed in front of the window. Installing cabinets in front of a window can be a workable solution – as long as a person can access the window to open it. Photo: Courtesy of Wellborn Cabinet

Below: Wall cabinets are minimized because of window placement, ceiling beam constraints and appliance locations. At times, a straight run into the return wall provides accessibility. Photo: Courtesy of Wellborn Cabinet

# “BIG”

Creative planning can help kitchen designers come up with small space solutions that feel and function like their big kitchen counterparts.

# Small Kitchens

By Ellen Cheever, CMKBD, ASID

With the new consumer focus on “downsizing,” smaller, smarter homes will likely be the new construction norm in the future. Clients planning to renovate will select designers who can manipulate existing spaces, avoiding costly room additions.

While the interest in small homes is not new (several great books have been written about smart, smaller homes), wonderful kitchen examples are hard to find.

Last September, I went on a kitchen tour sponsored by the NKBA Puget Sound Chapter. On the tour, I saw wonderful small kitchens we can all learn from.

Additionally, I recently judged a Wellborn Design Competition, and was inspired by several examples of great small spaces. One in particular from the Portland area caught my eye. So join me in studying several solution-slanted successful kitchens created by Pacific Northwest professionals.

## PLANNING STRATEGIES

Before we study these award-winning solutions, here are several ideas that these designers employed in their projects:

■ **Make sure you understand the client's priorities.** Do not assume “downsizing” means “downgrading.” Train yourself to never say, “You can't have,” or “I can't do...because...” Replace such negative comments with, “Together, I think we can find a way for all





Left: In this kitchen designed by Joseph Irons, CGR, GMB, CAPS, CGP, Irons Brothers Construction, Shoreline, WA, and Terence Tung, CKD, reorganizing the walkway was possible by grouping the primary prep and cooking center in a tight U on one side of the room. *Photo: Scott Chytil, Scott Chytil Photography, Bellevue, WA*

Right: The designer worked carefully with the angled archway leading from the kitchen to the adjacent dining space. *Photo: Scott Chytil, Scott Chytil Photography, Bellevue, WA*



Below: An additional run of cabinetry was added in the dining area, creating an entertainment center – and a spot for all that liquor! *Photo: Scott Chytil, Scott Chytil Photography, Bellevue, WA*



of your requests to be met. We just need to prioritize equipment, thinking about staging activities, planning multi-tasking spaces and possibly moving some activities out of the core kitchen floor space area.”

■ **Look outside of the boundaries of the existing kitchen to determine if other rooms can “give up” some square footage.**

1. Can a laundry room become part of the kitchen, rather than a separate room?

2. Can a coat closet be relocated, downsized or share floor space with a pantry?

3. Can a buffet, entertainment center or other special-purpose section of cabinetry be placed in the adjacent dining room?

4. Can a dining room adjacent to the kitchen become part of the kitchen activity zone or do “double-duty” as the library, home office or other center of activity?

■ **Find alternatives to a freestanding table or island.**

Banquettes or bench seating with table and chair combinations have been growing in popularity over the last several years. Islands are being replaced with peninsulas, saving one 36" to 48" walkway on one side. Minimize walkway space anywhere, everywhere, whenever possible!

■ **Eliminate visual chaos.**

To make a space look bigger, keep the design details understated. The more activity in the overall surface selections or materials used,

the smaller the space will appear visually. I believe this is one of the reasons we have seen such a growth in popularity of quartz countertop materials. Their monochromatic aesthetic is much more subtle than the active pattern movement found in natural stone slabs.

Think carefully about proportion as well. In smaller spaces, mantel hoods should be replaced with interesting – but much smaller in scale – decorative metal and glass ventilation systems. Try to minimize the “bulk” of professional-looking cooking equipment. Major manufacturers are introducing much more streamlined appliance designs that work well in small rooms. Try to integrate the refrigerator so that it does not extend into the room. One solution that has worked for me is recessing the freestanding refrigerator into an adjacent utility or laundry room.



Above: Designer Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD artistically concealed the structural posts that needed to remain in the space. A good solution to a challenging space: creating a ‘large’ kitchen in a ‘small’ home. Photo: Courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA

(acceptable for local building codes) allows the footing and foundation footprint to remain intact. This is an affordable way to add a small extension, which can result in big gains in size.

Another project by Marie Lail Blackburn that I had the pleasure of actually standing in during the tour is an example of a small kitchen that dramatically increased in size when the designer was able to expand into adjacent spaces.

### DESIGN SOLUTIONS

When challenged with a small space that needs to feel “big” to get the sale, consider these space stretching approaches:

- **Think vertically.** Rather than standard 24"+ base cabinet depth, increase walk space by replacing traditional wall and base cabinets with 12"- to 18"-deep tall storage cabinetry. This eliminates lost backsplash wall space, while increasing walkways.

- **Whatever the room's shape or size, plan multi-tasking areas.** For example, a small kitchen cannot accommodate a freestanding table that you walk around that is only used for dining. Counters/tables need to serve for prep/dining/computing/etc.

- **Move away from the idea of full-sized, single-purpose appliances.** A tiny kitchen with a double oven doesn't work. However, a small kitchen with a drop-in or



Left: Here, Blackburn left the small awning windows and creatively used cabinets with roll-up doors. Note how she added a spot for a couple of bottles of wine. Photo: Courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA

### CASE STUDIES

To illustrate some of these creative ideas for smaller kitchen spaces, let's look at four Pacific Northwest kitchens that provide unique design solutions.

The first kitchen, created by Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, in Seattle, WA, features elements that make it extremely efficient, including:

- Investing in a functional corner storage system;
- Locating the dishwasher away from the corner so that it's accessible;
- Using crisp contemporary appliances;
- Using 12"-deep tall cabinets

(rather than 24"-deep base and wall combinations);

- “Stealing” space for the eating counter by extending it around into an adjacent space.

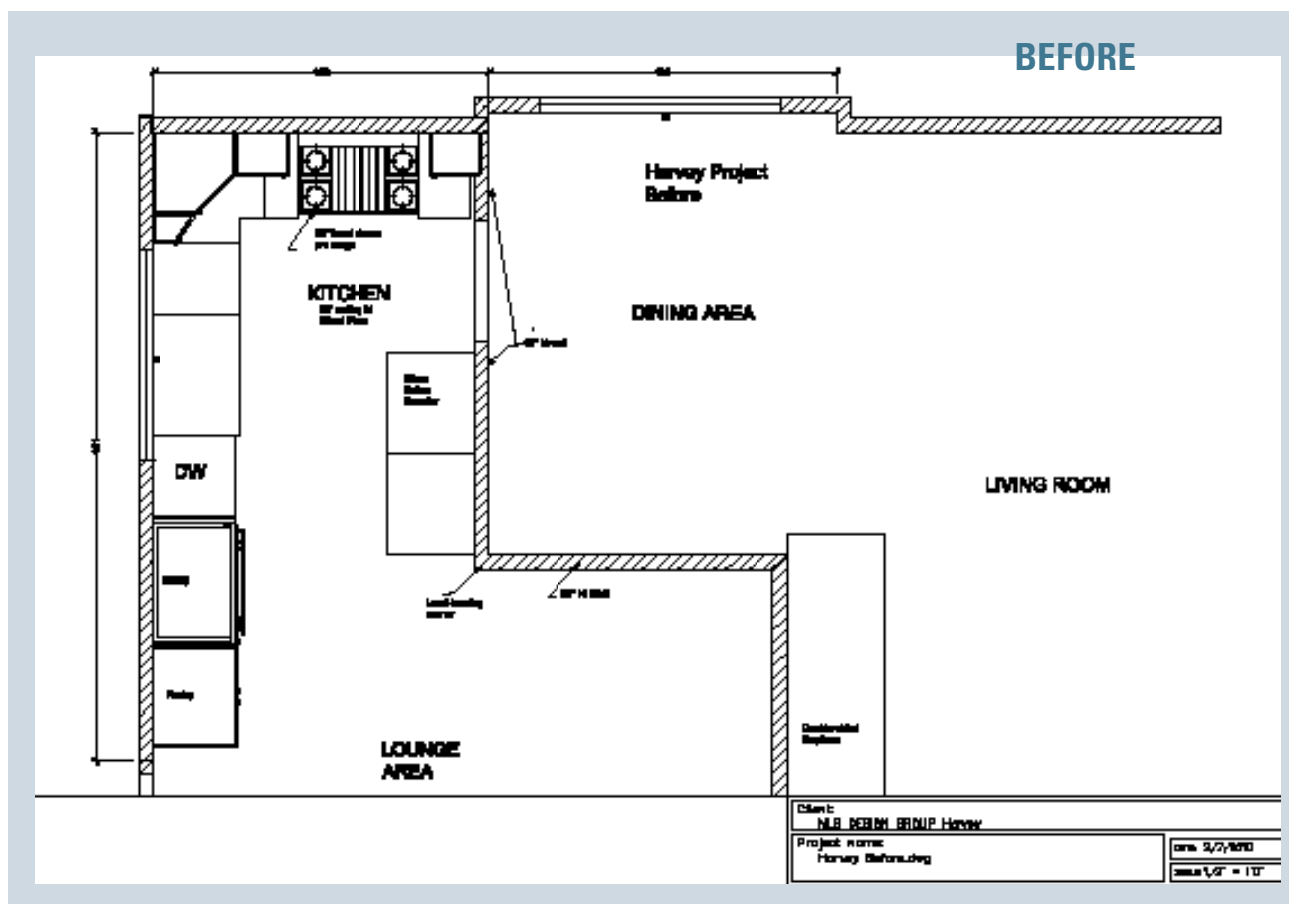
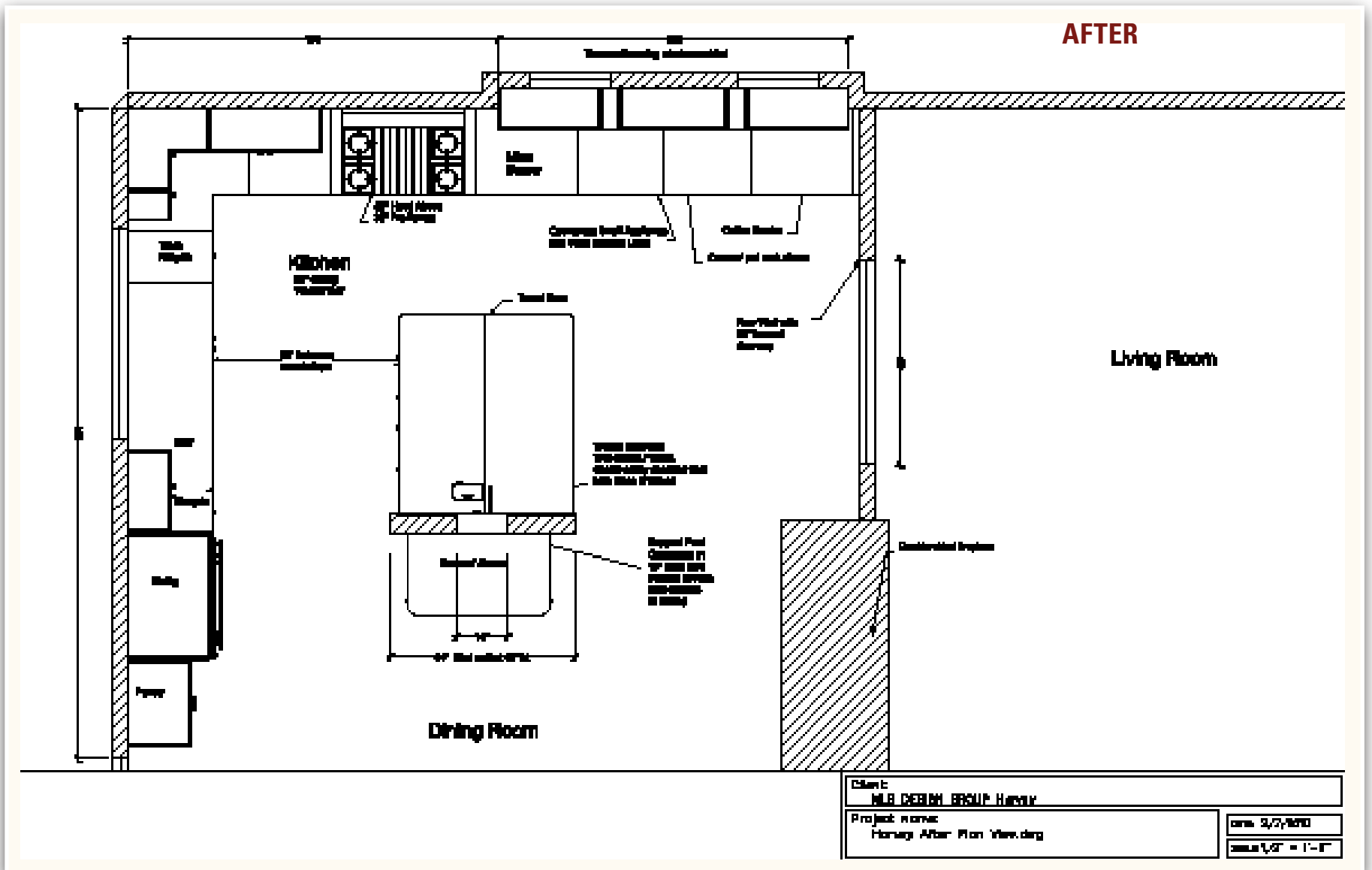
Another member of the NKBA Puget Sound Kitchen Tour, Joseph Irons, CGR, GMB, CAPS, CGP, with Terence Tung, CKD, revitalized a small kitchen in a 1930s Tudor home without sacrificing the personality of the home. Although the “footprint” of the kitchen could not be dramatically changed, the clients had three objectives:

- Relocate the kitchen walking path so it did not pass through the middle of the kitchen.

- Create a more open feeling between the rooms.

- Add storage for the homeowner's expensive liquor collection.

Crystal Kennedy of Pacific Northwest Cabinetry, a competition winner in the Wellborn Design Contest, created a very functional small kitchen by adding 24" onto the existing home. Oftentimes, such a small addition can be accomplished without major exterior changes. Much like a bay window, a small “bump-out” addition can be accomplished under the existing roof overhang. Cantilevered construction



Above: In this very traditional before plan, a lounge area was adjacent to the kitchen, with a doorway that leads to a dining area just off of the living room. *Floor plan: Courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA*

Top: In the solution conceived by Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, one load-bearing wall stays in the center of the space. It is attached to the island on one side and the owner's furniture piece on the other. The lounge area was 'traded' for the dining space. The new dining room contains a wall of cabinetry serving as the family library. The existing dining space then became a dramatic part of the kitchen. *Floor plan: Courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA*

freestanding range (featuring a whole-sized oven) can be easily coupled with a microwave/convection oven combination.

■ **Use the backsplash.** This is the most wasted space in a kitchen. Utilizing storage systems designed for hanging shallow items allows this area to replace a drawer bank.

■ **Reintroduce yourself to improved downdraft ventilation systems.** Too often, we settle for a microwave/hood combination in a small kitchen because we remember past downdraft system engineering that didn't exhaust well. New equipment does a much better job.

■ **Learn about the functionality of induction cooktops.** They provide countertop as well as a cooking surface. (Some appliance experts predict that this type of heat transference will replace space-consuming high BTU-rated gas burners for surface cooking in the future.)

■ **Integrate chopping/draining/rinsing activities right into the sink design itself.** Rather than assuming these activities need to be accomplished at the countertop adjacent to the sink, look at new 30"-



Above: The eating counter extends out of the kitchen and wraps around into the adjacent space to provide a cozy spot for people to gather for 'in kitchen' dining.  
 Photo: Courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA

Right: Study how the designer replaced traditional 24" base cabinets with shallow tall units. A small-scaled microwave oven fits well. Note the natural surfaces and simple patterns. One stripe of decorative glass tile adds sparkle to the space.

Photo: Courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA



eating area.

■ **Don't overlook the functionality of a corner sink, whether there's a window or not.** Placing a single sink in the corner in a diagonal cabinet allows you to maximize the length of an uninterrupted counter surface on one or both sides of the water appliance. Even if a window is along the counter space elsewhere, don't automatically think you need to tie the sink to the window.

■ **Take another look at tall, narrow pantry pull-outs.** They were first introduced some years ago with wire shelves. Many designers found their clients did not like cleaning these "oven rack" shelf systems. Today, these storage units have a solid "non-skid" surface. Beautifully engineered and of very sturdy construction, they could be just the answer in a small 12" space next to a refrigerator or in another area.

■ **Find extra floor and wall**

hanging system to keep all of her frequently used pots and pans easily accessible. If you have a shallow wall space, think about hanging the pots, pans, lids, pot holders and oven top utensils. This is an excellent way to save base cabinet space for something else. An alternative to the "Julia Child" look: rather than her peg board solution, stack two to four wall-mounted bars with S hooks. The advantage to such bars is that the S hooks are completely free to move in any direction based on what type of utensil they are storing.

■ **As you will see in many small kitchen solutions, shallow, tall pantries are excellent alternatives to wall and base combinations – once your countertop requirement has been met.** The smaller the kitchen, the easier it is to lose things in it – because, when space is at a premium, we tend to pack things onto shelves and cabinets without much thought for how easy they will be to find later. The same goes for worktops, which get cluttered with gadgets, utensils, storage jars and plug-in electrical equipment, so you find that you have to move things just to find space to work on. Tall cabinets can contain clutter better than bases and open counters!

"Big" thinking is a winning approach for designers challenged with existing small kitchens. These Pacific Northwest kitchen solutions demonstrate how to maximize existing square footage, add new small footage economically and "trade places" by reorganizing living/activity spaces adjacent to the kitchen.

to-36"-wide sinks that are designed with food preparation accessories that work within the sink area.

■ **Consider separating the primary refrigerator from its corresponding freezer.** Accessibility to the fresh food storage is the most critical element in a small space. To create the most workable arrangement, the freezer might need to be located in an adjacent space.

■ **Consider shallow base cabinets in some areas.** This may allow you to intersect a wall with a door or other structural element. It's important that you maximize counter space as well as the cabinetry.

■ **Reintroduce yourself to some of the new hardware that allows for pull-out chopping surfaces or pull-out tables.** We first saw these types of "multi-tasking" surfaces in the mid-'80s. One new table system from Häfele America pulls out on legs. It is as sturdy as a free-standing table. I've seen some examples of tables that are at the end of a cabinet run with sliding hardware so that the table can move along the work surface at a 90-degree angle to the counter. Häfele has a great pull system that allows a small counter to be against the wall, then it rolls around on casters to serve as an

space adjacent to the kitchen by installing new stacking washer/dryer combinations. New laundry equipment is very efficient and can handle regular loads as well as hand washables. The high value for this appliance is that the full-sized, front-loading washer and dryer can be stacked on top of one another in a 30"x30" cube.

■ **If you haven't seen the movie *Julie & Julia*, do enjoy it!** Or, go online to the Smithsonian and take a look at Julia Child's original kitchen. In her small Connecticut home (where she filmed her original TV shows), she used a peg board wall



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A member of the NKBA Hall of Fame, Cheever gained prominence in the industry early on as the author of two design education textbooks. She manages an award-winning design firm, Ellen Cheever & Associates, and has been part of the management team of several major cabinet companies.

This article is part of a quarterly series of "Designer's Notebook" articles, which will continue to run throughout 2010 exclusively in Kitchen & Bath Design News.



### 4/10 RUNOVER TEXT BELOW:

#### CAPTIONS

##### Photo 1 - DID NOT USE

Designed by Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, this kitchen features 12"-deep tall cabinets with family blackboard on the left hand side.

*Photo: Courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA*

##### Photo 2 - USED ON PAGE 64

Study how the designer replaced traditional 24" base cabinets with shallow tall units. A small scaled microwave oven fits well. Note the natural surfaces and simple patterns. One stripe of decorative glass tile adds sparkle to the space.

*Photo: Courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA*

##### Photo 3 - USED ON PAGE 64

The eating counter extends out of the kitchen and wraps around into the adjacent space to provide a cozy spot for people to gather for 'in kitchen' dining.

*Photo: Courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA*

##### Photo 4 - USED ON PAGE 58

In this kitchen designed by Joseph Irons, CGR, GMB, CAPS, CGP, Irons Brothers Construction, Inc., Shoreline, WA, and Terence Tung, CKD, reorganizing the walkway was possible by grouping the primary prep and cooking center in a tight U on one side of the room.

Note how the curved seating area slightly extends into the adjacent dining area. *Photo: Scott Chytil, Scott Chytil Photography, Bellevue, WA*

##### Photo 5 - USED ON PAGE 58

The designer worked carefully with the angled archway leading from the kitchen to the adjacent dining space.

*Photo: Scott Chytil, Scott Chytil Photography, Bellevue, WA*

##### Photo 6 - - USED ON PAGE 58

An additional run of cabinetry was added in the dining area, creating an entertainment center – and a spot for all that liquor!

*Photo: Scott Chytil, Scott Chytil Photography, Bellevue, WA*

##### Photo 7 - USED ON PAGE 59

In this kitchen, designed by Crystal Kennedy, Pacific Northwest Cabinetry, in Milwaukee, OR, wall cabinets are minimized because of window placement, ceiling beam constraints and appliance locations. Although a corner cabinet may be a possibility, at times, a straight run into the return wall provides

accessibility.

*Photo: courtesy of Wellborn Cabinet, Inc.*

##### Photo 8 - USED ON PAGE 59

Sometimes the design is only possible by ignoring an existing window. Note the addition of the multipurpose counter placed in front of the window. Installing cabinets in front of a window can be a workable solution – as long as a person can access the window to open it.

*Photo: courtesy of Wellborn Cabinet, Inc.*

##### Photo 9 - USED ON PAGE 62

In this very traditional before plan, we see that a lounge area was adjacent to the kitchen, with then a doorway leading to a dining are just off the living room.

*Floor plan courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA*

##### Photo 10 - USED ON PAGE 62

In the solution conceived by Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, one load bearing wall stays in the center of the space. It is attached to the island on one side and the owner's furniture piece on the other. The lounge area was 'traded' for the dining space. The new dining room contains a wall of cabinetry serving as the family library – important in the former lounge. The existing dining space then became a dramatic part of the kitchen. *Floor plan courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA*

##### Photo 11- USED ON PAGE 60

Designer Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD left the small awning windows and creatively used cabinets with roll-up doors – oftentimes, reserved only for appliances. Note how she added a spot for a couple of bottles of wine!

*Photo: courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA*

##### Photo 12 - USED ON PAGE 60

Here, Blackburn artistically concealed the structural posts that needed to remain in the space. Rather than an island – a peninsula is created. A good solution to a challenging space: creating a 'large' kitchen in a 'small' home.

*Photo: courtesy of Marie Lail Blackburn, CMKBD, MLB Design Group, Seattle, WA*