



# FROM CRAMPED GALLEY TO SPACIOUS GOURMET

ARCHITECT BRUCE DONNALLY GRACIOUSLY REINVENTS THIS SEATTLE KITCHEN

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**T**hese days, kitchens serve many purposes in family life that far exceed our need to cook dinner. In fact, they are frequently the most-used rooms in houses for relaxing, entertaining, and focusing on family and friends. But especially in older homes, kitchens are often cramped and poorly laid out for how we'd really like to use them.

"Lots of people have houses where things are not blunderously bad—just annoyingly inconvenient," notes Seattle architect Bruce Donnally, adding that the kitchen is often the worst victim of bad design choices, which "add up to something very sub-par and a room that doesn't come up to the full potential of the space."

Although he is well known for large commercial projects like symphony halls and art galleries, Donnally's real love is helping residential clients realize the spatial opportunities that exist within their homes by creating design solutions to improve the flow of the rooms.

Such was the case with one retired professional couple, owners of a 1940s-era home magnificently situated on a cliff overlooking Puget Sound. Both love to cook but felt trapped in a small galley-style kitchen in the back of the house, with no view of the water or connection to the dining and family room where they spend most of their time. "More than 30 percent of the space they had was poorly used," notes Donnally. "With bad window placement, it was dark, even on a bright day."

Before beginning the design process, Donnally engages his clients in dialogue first, making special note of their preferences and priorities. "Rather than starting from a preconception of how a project should look and trying to hammer it into that box, it's much better to let the opportunities present themselves and work forward," he comments. "The challenge is to make the leap from listening to developing a solution that fits naturally into their lives."

By removing some interior walls, Donnally was able to reconfigure this client's kitchen, dining, and family areas into an open and connected area that centers on the unobstructed view to the west. Today, the space is colorful and vibrant, thanks to the architect's understanding of how to maximize natural light. "A mix of daylight from opposite directions—north and south or east and west—introduces the full spectrum of color in a space," he counsels. "A combination of direct, warm yellow sunlight from one side and indirect, cool blue sky color from the other makes the room feel considerably more alive."









## HERE ARE A FEW OF BRUCE DONNALLY'S FAVORITE PRODUCTS, MATERIALS, AND DESIGN IDEAS FOR KITCHENS:

Honed soapstone counters are heat and stain resistant and don't reflect light into your eyes from under-counter lights, which can be especially dangerous when using knives. Periodic finishing with mineral oil will give soapstone a dark, soft luster.

A strip of sliding windows between the counter and the upper cabinets along exterior walls provides a great source of natural light. Add a row of planter boxes right outside the window for fresh herbs.

A continuous Plugmold™ strip of electrical outlets along the wall just below the wall cabinets provides a convenient receptacle location every six inches and avoids having outlets right in the middle of a decorative backsplash. The Plugmold™ strip is most usable if angled down at 45 degrees.

Cork tile provides cushioned resilience to ease leg strain, is non-absorptive (think of wine bottle corks), and is a renewable resource.

Häfele™ makes terrific hardware, including a step stool that disappears under the toe kick of any base cabinet, and a corner cabinet storage unit that consists of two wire storage bins; when you pull the first basket out, it pulls the other one out of the back corner and into the door opening for access.

Lighting is critical in kitchens because the tasks are so specific. Place under-cabinet lights as far forward as possible. Over sinks, put a pair of overhead down lights on either side of the bowl so a person leaning over the sink doesn't cast a shadow.

Trash management has become involved enough to warrant a dedicated cabinet with three or four plastic wastebaskets for sorting glass, paper, and food waste. Arrange pull-out trash bins to one side of the sink and the dishwasher on the other to facilitate a scrape, rinse, and stack process during cleanup.

Donnally also worked with pendants and other low-voltage sources to bounce light in the room. "Can lights are inexpensive and throw pools of light on the floor," he says. "But you have to get light up onto the ceiling to lift a room's spirit. Otherwise you have a room that feels oppressive and gloomy."

Cabinets made of honey-colored English sycamore with lively fiddleback figuring, soft honed soapstone counters, and cork floors give the room a relaxed and quietly elegant look and feel. "I like to select a palette that takes advantage of each material's natural attributes and aging and lets them be what they are," Donnally says. "I find this creates an enduring sense of quality and beauty. Faux materials—trying to make laminate look like stone or vinyl look like wood—are a stage set approach to design that rarely fools the eye up close and suggests an underlying pretentiousness about status and image."

Corner cabinets with hidden wire bins and a step stool that recesses into the toe kick of the base cabinet are features that maximize space and provide easy access to dishes and the pantry. Donnally laid out casework and appliances to accommodate his clients' daily habits of food preparation, cooking, serving, and after-meal cleanup, so there's no wasted foot traffic in the kitchen—just streamlined efficiency from station to station.

Today, the back wall of the couple's once dark and narrow galley kitchen invites the outdoors in. A glass wall of French doors opens to an ivy-covered courtyard set with a small trickling fountain, which serves as a cool green backdrop to the center island and the warmer tones within. "We just treated the ivy like a big piece of wallpaper," says Donnally with a grin. ■