
The Heart of a Forever Home

NARI RotY Awards 2026

Category: Residential Kitchen Over $200,000

Project: The Heart of a Forever Home

Introduction

This 1939 Colonial was envisioned as a forever home that could support the homeowners through retirement while welcoming children, grandchildren, overnight guests, and large family gatherings. At the center of that vision was a kitchen capable of supporting everyday routines, several cooks, and gatherings of 20 or more.

Because the kitchen was central to the comprehensive renovation, its design needed to accomplish more than improving a single room. It would become the organizing heart of the main level, strengthening the relationship among cooking, living, entertaining, and service spaces.

The design bridges the home's Colonial architecture with modern-day style and function. Traditional proportions, cabinet profiles, and millwork create continuity with the original house, while cleaner lines, expressive tile, sculptural lighting, and contemporary planning introduce a fresh perspective. The result is a kitchen where old and new feel naturally connected.

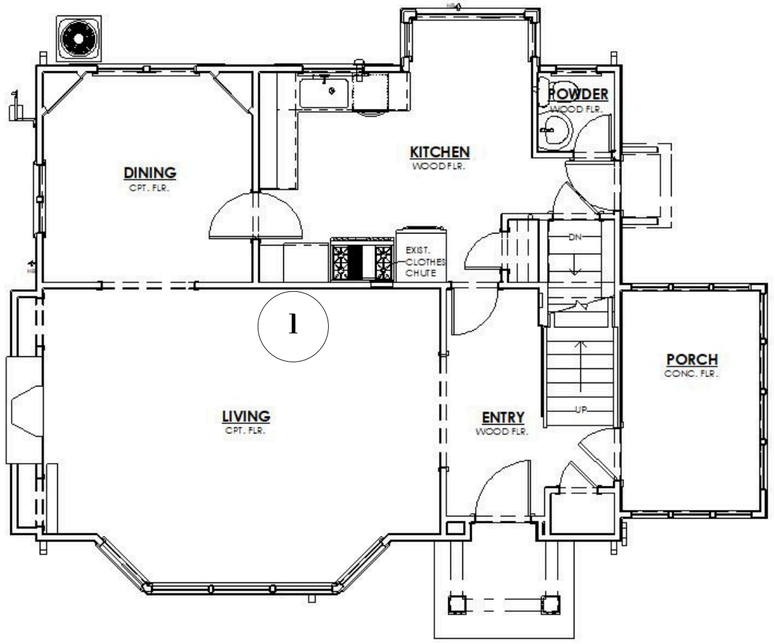




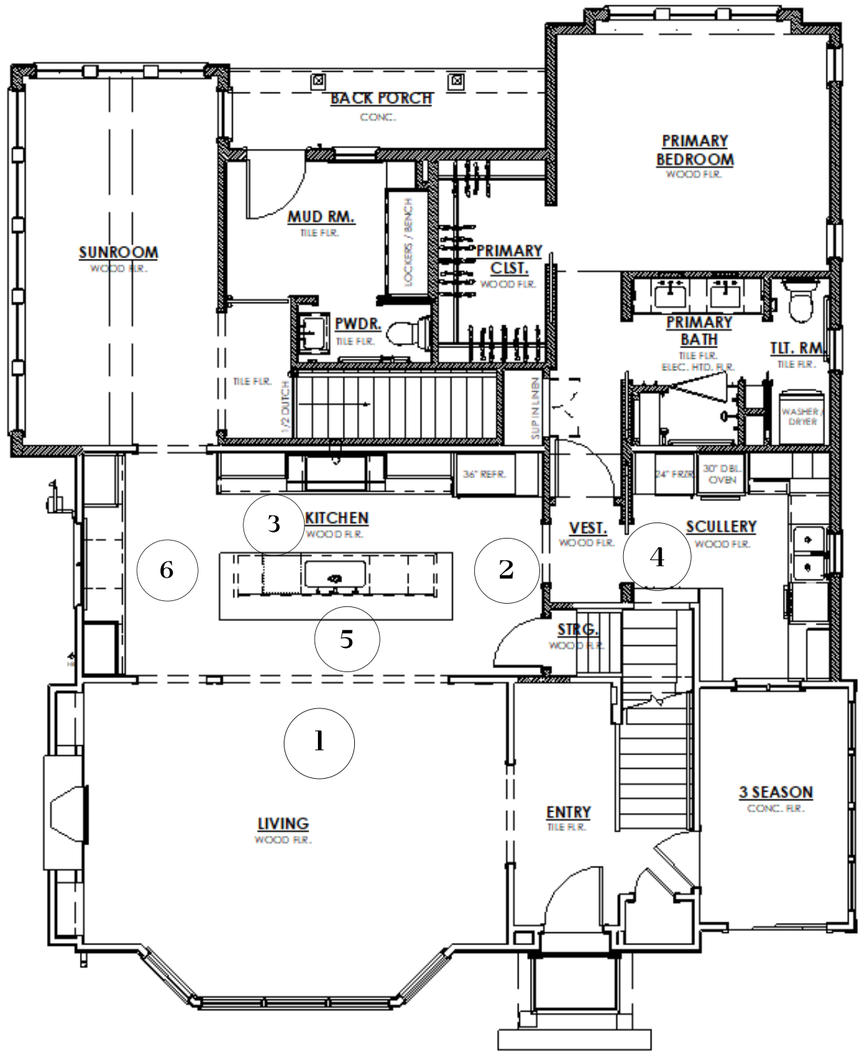
Client's Needs & Solutions

- **NEED:** A stronger connection between the kitchen and surrounding living spaces for everyday interaction and family gatherings of 20 or more.
  - **SOLUTION:** A major load-bearing wall was removed to open the central living core. The new connection improves sightlines, natural light, and movement between the kitchen, living room, and adjacent gathering spaces.
- **NEED**: A kitchen that could accommodate several cooks without overlapping work paths or congestion.
  - **SOLUTION**: Dedicated preparation, cooking, and cleanup zones were organized around a generous island. The new layout provides seating for five or more and comfortable circulation on every side.
- **NEED**: Additional space for appliances, storage, preparation, serving, and cleanup without overwhelming the main kitchen.
  - **SOLUTION**: A previously underused area was transformed into a concealed scullery. This secondary work zone handles overflow tasks and storage, allowing the main kitchen to remain organized and welcoming during large gatherings.
- **NEED**: The kitchen needed to feel connected to the home's 1939 Colonial architecture while bringing modern-day style and function into the space.
  - **SOLUTION**: Cabinet profiles, trim, windows, warm wood tones, lighting, and carefully selected materials blend the new kitchen with the original house. An updated layout and contemporary design elements bridge old and new, creating a cohesive kitchen suited to modern-day living.

Kitchen Floor Plan Transformations



Before Floor Plan



After Floor Plan

Floor Plan Solutions

1): Remove the load-bearing wall between the kitchen and living room to improve sightlines, daylight, and connection. Position the kitchen in the center of the home to allow for easy flow from one room to the next.

2) Organize the island, cooking wall, workstation sink, and storage so several cooks can work without crossing paths.

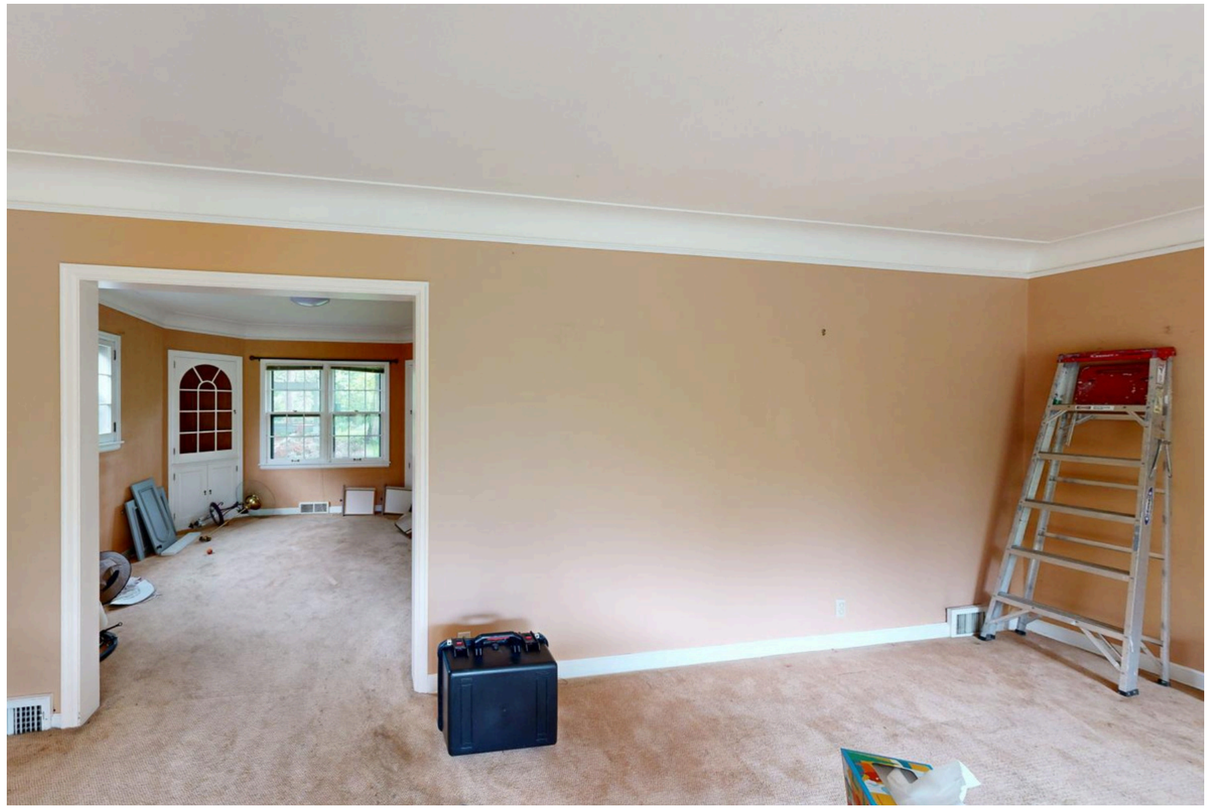
3) Multiple-Cook Workflow: Dedicated prep, cooking, and cleanup zones allow several family members to work together.

4) A Hardworking Scullery: Overflow prep, appliances, cleanup, serving, and storage move out of the main kitchen.

5) Entertaining Without Congestion: The island seats five or more, with clear circulation connecting the living room, den, and support spaces.

6) Flexible Counterspace - A dedicated wall of cabinetry just outside the primary kitchen workspace provides flexible counter space for serving, entertaining, and everyday use along with extra storage.

Before



Viewed from the living room, the kitchen was hidden behind the dividing wall and reached through a narrow opening. This arrangement separated the cook from family and guests while creating a confined route between the home's primary gathering spaces.

After



From the same viewpoint, the kitchen and island are now directly connected to the living room through a broad structural opening. The expanded sightline supports conversation and easier circulation, while the detailed cased opening maintains the room definition appropriate to the Colonial home.

Before



The original living room was separated from the kitchen, located on the opposite side of the right-hand wall. The limited opening reinforced a series of disconnected rooms and restricted movement, conversation, and views between the home's primary cooking and gathering spaces.

After



Removing the major load-bearing wall created a broad connection between the living room and kitchen. The new opening improves sightlines and circulation while allowing cooking, dining, and conversation to flow comfortably across the central living spaces.

Before



The original kitchen was a narrow, enclosed workroom with appliances and cabinetry lining the perimeter. Limited counter space and tight circulation made it difficult for several people to prepare meals together, while the surrounding walls kept the kitchen separated from the home's gathering areas.

After



The expanded kitchen replaces the confined layout with a generous central island and clearly organized work zones. The island provides preparation and cleanup space, while perimeter cabinetry concentrates cooking, appliance storage, and everyday essentials. Wide aisles allow several cooks to work comfortably without crossing paths.

Before



The original kitchen shared a limited footprint with a separate dinette beside the bay window. Cabinetry, appliances, and work surfaces were concentrated along the perimeter, while the center of the room offered no additional preparation space or built-in seating. The cooking and dining areas lacked connection.

After



The completed kitchen features a long island with seating for five, creating a central place for preparation, cleanup, and gathering. A centered range hood anchors the back wall, framed by wood cabinetry, display storage, and refrigeration. Three pendant lights emphasize the island as the room's primary focal point.

Before



Viewed from within the original kitchen, the sink and dishwasher were positioned along the left wall while the refrigerator stood on the opposite side. The large open floor area led directly into the dinette, but provided no central work surface, built-in seating, or clearly defined connection between cooking and gathering.

After



The completed kitchen establishes a defined working aisle between the custom cooking wall and the island. The island incorporates the sink and an expansive work surface, while cabinetry and the sculptural range hood organize the opposite wall. The opening at the end leads directly into the scullery, extending the kitchen with additional workspace for preparation, storage, serving, and cleanup.

Handcrafted Cooking Wall

The architectural cooking wall was designed as a composition of layers, each element intentionally chosen to complement, balance, and give the others room to shine. Our goal was to create a moment that naturally draws you into the kitchen upon entering the home, while remaining connected to the architecture and character of the surrounding spaces.

At the center, a custom range hood anchors the composition. Its subtle arched detail was thoughtfully scaled and positioned to accommodate the homeowners' height, creating a highly personal detail that is both functional and sculptural. Simple trim and molding details add architectural depth without unnecessary ornamentation, while integrated niches on either side of the range provide convenient storage for frequently used oils and spices.





The hood was painted to closely relate to the dimensional, sculptural tile, allowing the two elements to read as one cohesive architectural feature rather than competing focal points. This creates a quiet bridge between the tile and the warm, medium-toned white oak cabinetry.

The tile itself was selected as an abstract expression of the homeowners' love of circles and movement. Its organic forms introduce rhythm and visual interest, while the fire-molded glass on the adjacent cabinetry continues that sense of movement by catching and reflecting light throughout the day.

Together, the materials, lines, shapes, and textures create a cooking wall that is layered but restrained. Each detail has its moment, yet no single element overwhelms the composition. The result is an inviting architectural focal point that draws you in, celebrates the art of cooking, and welcomes you home.



A Buffet Built For Gathering

This built-in buffet is a hardworking extension of the kitchen, designed to support the many ways this home is used and enjoyed. It provides a dedicated surface for serving food and drinks outside of the kitchen's primary preparation and cleanup zones, while the butcher block countertop offers additional prep space when needed. Thoughtfully planned drawers and cabinetry provide overflow storage for linens and tablecloths, a second or even third set of dishes, large platters, serving pieces, and everyday snacks.

Its location is equally intentional. Positioned just outside the primary work zone, the buffet allows family and guests to gather, serve themselves, and linger without interrupting the cooks. It creates a natural transition between working kitchen and gathering space.

The finishes were selected to provide a deliberate juxtaposition to the more architectural language of the main kitchen, while offering a subtle nod to the past. Tea-cloth café curtains, schoolhouse-inspired sconces, cup pulls, and a warm butcher block countertop bring a sense of nostalgia and familiarity to the space.

Together, these details give this single wall a distinct personality while making it one of the most versatile and hardworking elements of the kitchen.



Concealed Storage, Revealed Detail

When closed, the solid wood doors create a composed wall of cabinetry that frames the window and conceals everyday kitchen and serving items. When opened, the matching cabinets reveal shelving for dishes, glassware, baskets, and small appliances. Blue patterned tile lines each interior, adding a layer of color and craftsmanship that is visible only when the storage is in use.







Function Driven Appliances & Fixtures

Every appliance and fixture was selected around the homeowners' daily routines and the kitchen's workflow. A 48-inch induction cooktop accommodates multiple dishes while providing a safer, responsive cooking surface.

The frequently used refrigerator is located in the main kitchen, while the dedicated freezer is positioned in the adjacent scullery. Separating the appliances preserves valuable space in the primary kitchen while supporting everyday use and entertaining.

Carefully proportioned to the island, the integrated workstation sink provides generous space for washing, drying, and organizing dishes. Its oversized basin contains items awaiting cleanup, reducing visible clutter and preserving the kitchen's welcoming appearance.

Finished appliance fronts, rather than full paneling, break up the expansive cabinetry and introduce a subtle contemporary element that balances the character of the 1939 home.





Entertaining From the Kitchen Out

The open kitchen is thoughtfully supported by the living spaces that surround it. A direct visual and spatial connection to the living room allows the kitchen to remain connected to everyday life, while the adjacent den provides additional flexibility.

Designed to function as a breakfast nook for everyday use, the den can also transition easily into a dining space when entertaining.

Generous walkways surrounding the kitchen create natural circulation through the home, allowing people to move freely between spaces without interrupting the work of the kitchen.

The result is a kitchen that feels open and connected not isolated as a single destination, but integrated into the way the homeowners live, gather, and entertain.

A Balance of Warmth & Restraint

The material palette balances the warmth and character of the original Colonial home with the durability required of an active kitchen. Mid-tone stained white oak cabinetry, light quartz countertops, sculptural dimensional tile, painted architectural millwork, unlacquered brass hardware, and carefully scaled lighting work together to create a layered, cohesive space.

Simple cabinet profiles, thoughtfully proportioned trim, and restrained transitions allow the new materials to feel naturally integrated with the home's 1939 architecture rather than competing with it. Pattern and color are introduced in intentional moments, from the textured tile at the cooking wall to the unexpected blue tile concealed within the storage cabinets.

These quieter discoveries add personality while allowing the overall palette to remain timeless and connected to the character of the original home.










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