



Timeless UPDATE

A small, dated kitchen in an otherwise dream home led to a redesign made to last with refined, classic style and customized practical details.

When Sarah and Donald Gambril came across the perfect house for their growing family ideally located within walking distance of quaint Crestline Village in Birmingham, Alabama, they didn't let an outdated, closed-off kitchen and dining area turn them away. Instead, they called on River Brook Design & Construction to open up the spaces and create a sleek and simple look with concealed organizational intricacies tailored to their needs, resulting in a hardworking kitchen that is at once sophisticated and comfortable.

"The rooms were small and choppy, and opening it all up allowed us to better utilize the available space with sight lines to the dining and back den, where our children play," Sarah says of the first order of business: removing the wall between the kitchen and dining room. "We wanted it to be updated but timeless. We wanted a traditional feel that would last."

Leigh Misso, co-owner of River Brook, says their primary goal was to dress up the kitchen while making it more practical for the Gambrils, which translated to adding an island with counter seating, a 48-inch range hood, and ample pantry storage. "From the beginning, we really wanted a large island, which is where we generally sit and eat together," Sarah says. "River Brook was able to give us plenty of cabinet space for away appliances and baby gear."



However, these wish-list inclusions didn't come without challenge, given the fixed boundaries of the kitchen. "Since we couldn't gain kitchen space from any adjacent rooms, we were confined to its existing layout while also trying to make it function for the client," Leigh says. "We started with a list of what they use most in the kitchen and what was a priority for them. We then worked backwards to create a place for each item and appliance."

This led to creative elements of convenience, such as a spice drawer near the oven and prep area and a hidden but accessible cabinet for their microwave and coffee maker, something River Brook refers to as an appliance garage. "[It's] a location where small appliances can live and be utilized each day, but not necessarily seen all the time because these areas tend to be slightly messy," Leigh says. "For this family, we concealed them in an upper cabinet with doors that fully retract for easy maneuvering."



To ensure an enduring aesthetic that flows well with other visible spaces in the home, they kept the look clean-lined and classic with interesting neutrals. "The overall [idea] was to incorporate the existing windows, making them more of a focal point in the space, while modernizing the cabinetry design and adding some contrast with the cabinet color," Leigh says.

A rich gray, Worsted by Farrow & Ball, imparts just the right brush of color against the crisp handmade Zellige tile backsplash and Calacatta Villa quartz countertops, while unlacquered brass fixtures warm the cooler tones. Textural tans and organic accents, from woven barstools and a Roman shade to hydrangea intaglios, support the spotlight on the outdoor views and the charming location that drew the Gambrils to the home originally. "This house was perfect for them—we just needed to make their kitchen perfect as well," Leigh says. 

TEXT BY ELIZABETH CZAPSKI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAUREY GLENN



The attached dining room bears a similar simple sophistication with a softer touch thanks to textiles like skirted linen chairs and velvet draperies. Though removing the wall between the kitchen and dining room didn't earn them extra kitchen square footage, it did bring a bit more real estate to the latter. "We were able to make the dining table larger and function better for the client who entertains often," Leigh says of the antique white oak table they sourced specifically for the expanded space. "To add some drama and personality, we selected a large linen drum shade to hang over it."