

New lighting, appliances and color schemes can update a kitchen to make it more practical, while also preserving and even enhancing a retro feel.



Vintage Style

Modernizing an Outdated Kitchen With Contemporary Function, While Maintaining Retro Charm



BY MEREDITH ERICKSEN OF TUSCAN BLUE DESIGN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARY KATE MCKENNA PHOTOGRAPHY



WHEN SARAH LEBHERZ FIRST BOUGHT HER CLASSIC 1920s-ERA ROW HOUSE IN HISTORIC DOWNTOWN FREDERICK A DECADE AGO, SHE LOVED THE VINTAGE CHARM OF HER TINY KITCHEN, with its 1950s General Electric stove and steel Geneva cabinets. Over time, however, she realized she was ready to make some much-needed updates.

“The old linoleum floor was yellowed and had some cracked tiles,” she says. “The lighting was terribly inadequate, and I was really tired of the peach-colored Formica. I also found myself not wanting to cook as much because the layout

didn’t work well, and I didn’t have enough countertop space.”

With that realization in mind, she asked us to help update her kitchen with 21st-century functionality, without losing its retro appeal.

THE KITCHEN PLAN

From the start, there were two key parameters: a specific budget and unique renovation constraints, including the narrow width of the kitchen and walls it shares with another living space. To maximize



Updated cabinetry and a sleek metal island gave Leberz a new passion for cooking and entertaining friends.

the budget, we kept the sink and stove in their original locations and created a functional layout with a center island.

To execute the plan, we enlisted Frederick-based Harmon Builders, the general contractor who handled construction, cabinetry, and customization. The team approach served Leberz well. “I had a great deal of trust in both the designer’s and the contractor’s experience and their ability to help me make the best decisions,” she says. “It took a lot of pressure off, since I didn’t have to figure out every detail on my own.”



OLD AND NEW

The goal was to blend the old and new, reuse many of the vintage elements and create a fun ‘50s vibe, while maintaining the original 1920s architectural details, such as the wide moldings around the windows and doors.

Harmon Builders helped tie old and new together. “We wanted new cabinetry to blend with the old,” says Paul Harmon,

CEO of Harmon Builders. “The simple, flat-paneled wood cabinet doors reflect the original metal doors in the kitchen. This was an aspect adapted to help manage the budget, but also to maintain the 1950s cabinets’ simplicity. We also fabricated sleek, metal-gray legs for the new island, which is a clean, utilitarian accompaniment to the retro-inspired kitchen.”



Light-colored paint, orange curtains and a new piece of artwork by the window gives Lebherz's kitchen an eclectic feel that brightens the space and also captures her personality.

To create this charming, retro-style kitchen, we made budget-friendly decisions—such as

want that vintage feel, you can look for one at a salvaged building supply shop.)

“WHEN I FIRST COME INTO THE KITCHEN, I STILL CAN’T BELIEVE HOW MUCH LIGHTING I HAVE—IT MAKES EVERYTHING SO MUCH BRIGHTER.”

—Sarah Lebherz, Homeowner

recycling existing elements—that allowed us to splurge on new details that create a wow factor.

REUSE THE OLD

- The first thought might be to replace an old porcelain sink. But if you are fortunate enough to have one, consider having it resurfaced instead, as we did with this project. (If you don't have a porcelain sink, but still

- In this project, the existing metal cabinets were in great condition. They just needed to be refreshed with a new coat of paint.
- With a little elbow grease, vintage cabinet hardware can be cleaned and polished to look like new again. For this kitchen, we mixed and matched the cabinet hardware, keeping the old and using some new.

INTRODUCE THE NEW

- Two repurposed metal cabinets were used to create a new functional workspace island with seating for two.
- A new custom hutch with open shelving and a countertop adds charm and extra storage.
- To increase the function in the kitchen we added specific storage spots for spices, wine, sheet trays and more.

CREATE A FOCAL WALL

- The splurge in this design is the aqua Big Chill range and hood. These are the impact pieces in the space and the generator for the focal wall.



Keeping the existing porcelain sink was one way the Tuscan Blue designers incorporated the old with the new to create the vintage look Leberherz was looking for.

- A bold stripe of colorful glass tile accents budget-friendly, classic, white subway tiles.
- Open space around the window creates a clean look and lets in light. Tip: Keep your focal wall simple. Highlight one or two main elements and then let the other pieces become secondary.

HARKEN BACK TO THE CLASSICS

- A new Marmoleum® floor is an eco-friendly nod to the past.
- It's easy to create a fun pattern or border with multi-color tiles and a



little inspiration. Click-in-place tiles, like the kind used in this project, “float” on the floor and are easy for do-it-yourselfers to install.

MIX-AND-MATCH LIGHTING

- Good lighting is one of the most important design elements in a kitchen. Start with recessed task

lighting to illuminate the workspaces. Tip: Just a few recessed fixtures make all the difference. Don't fill your ceiling with recessed lighting.

- Add in accent lighting. We used retro-style pendants over the island to add a pop of color.



AFTER

The aqua Big Chill range and hood vent creates the perfect '50s look while designating a central focal point.

- A sleek, cylindrical pendant over the sink enhances the '50s flair. Tip: Not all the decorative lighting fixtures need to match but they all do need to complement each other. Look for similar lines, shapes, colors.

BIG CHILL RANGE TAKES CENTER STAGE

According to Leberz, “I was sad about removing the old '50s stove, so I definitely wanted to maintain that vintage feel in the new kitchen. I also wanted to reuse some of the metal cabinets, and I wanted the layout to make more sense for cooking.”

The inspiration piece for the kitchen renovation was the cheerful



BEFORE

aqua Big Chill range and hood vent, which creates a '50s look and helps set the color scheme and design details.

THE RESULTS

Sarah Leberz is thrilled with her new-old kitchen. “I love the new layout and lighting! It is so easy to cook and move around from task to task. I also love my stove—both the way it functions and how it looks. My kitchen is now clean and bright, and I love the pops of orange color.”

She adds, “I have definitely been cooking more in the new space, both for myself and for entertaining. The new island offers a cozy spot for friends to gather while I’m cooking.” **FM**

Meredith Ericksen is the principal designer/owner of Tuscan Blue Design (www.tuscanbluedesign.com), an interior design studio located in historic Downtown Frederick. Special thanks go to Harmon Builders (www.harmonbuilders.com), a general contractor also located in Frederick.