



All in the family

An updated kitchen for a heritage farmhouse

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VIRGINIA HAMRICK

It's a truism that architects and their clients need to have a good collaborative relationship for a project to go smoothly. But it's not always the case that they're actually longtime friends. When Joel and Betty Loving asked designer Karen Turner to rethink a kitchen in their Fluvanna County farmhouse, the request hardly came out of the blue. Not only had Turner already acted as their architect on another project at their primary home, she's had a personal connection to them for years.

"Our sons have been best friends since they were 5," says Turner. "I knew my son would be out here having dinner" in the very room she was to design.

That made the project personal. What's more, the Lovings' ties to this house run deep: Joel's family has owned the property since the 1860s, when the original section of the house was first built. It is a classic Virginia farmhouse, situated in the heart of a working cattle farm, with views of stately trees and green pastures.

"This truly is a farmhouse," says Turner. "The kitchen needed to have a seamless connection between the house and the landscape."



Generous existing windows along the eastern wall of the kitchen did a lot to provide that connection—barns, fields and a beautiful nearby oak tree draw the eye outside. But inside, the kitchen, which Joel's parents had installed in 1995, "was not visually pleasing," says Turner. "It was a quirky mismatch of elements."

Betty was especially nonplussed by the cabinets' dark finish and the empty space above the upper cabinets. "It didn't feel finished," she says. An odd layout with two islands wasn't helping, either.

On the other hand, the room's size and shape were working well. "I try and make the house give you as much as it can," says Turner. "The kitchen is very central and already interacted with the rest of the house beautifully"—opening, as it does, onto the living room and the dining room. It's not an open plan, but it does have easy flow.

The generous proportions of the room led Turner to propose a galley layout, with a large island separating the main bank of cabinetry from a custom-made farm table under the windows.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 49

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 47

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The kitchen packs in storage without seeming crowded. Turner added a second upper row of cabinets, accessed via a library-style ladder that rolls side-to-side on a metal rail. “The upper cabinets make the room feel finished,” Turner says, “and the beams and soffit make the cabinetry feel grounded.”

In a corner near the table, Turner and Loving considered squeezing in more cabinetry but ultimately opted to fill the spot with a pie safe from Betty’s grandparents: a pitch-perfect piece that lets the room be spacious and harkens to the past.

Turner’s primary aesthetic goal for the new kitchen was a quiet feel. To that end, she created a low-key palette that centers on the unusual blue-gray of the cabinets. “The mountains here can be that nice blue-gray,” she says. “The color palette is inside-outside. The walls are the color of the fields in fall.” A subtle touch: the backs of the cabinets are painted the same color as the walls, letting them recede a little bit more.

Minimal window treatments contribute to the serene feel, as does something else that many visitors wouldn’t consciously notice: None of the finishes are shiny. Metal fixtures are brushed nickel, the soapstone and quartzite countertops are honed rather than polished, and even the paint on the cabinets is a satin finish.

The palette may be contemporary, but the history of the farm is clearly in evidence. Existing heart pine floors give the perfect touch of authenticity, and Turner added ceiling beams that were salvaged from a barn on the property.

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The Lovings eventually plan to move to their farmhouse full-time, and the new kitchen is an integral part of making this house their own. “It needed to feel like ours,” says Betty. And the sons—now in college—have already tried it out. —Erika Howsare

THE BREAKDOWN

Approximately 408 square feet

Cabinetry: Mill Cabinets (Bridgewater, Virginia); Top Knob hardware

Countertops: Austral Dream marble with cherry cutting board (island); Cogswell stone soapstone (perimeter)

Tile: Tabarka from Wainwright Tile & Stone

Paint colors: Benjamin Moore Coventry Grey (cabinets), Bone White (walls) and Decorator’s White (trim); Farrow & Ball Borrowed Light (ceiling)

Appliances: Wolf Sub-Zero refrigerator

Sinks: Rohl apron-front sink (island); Franke undermount stainless sink (wall)

Fixtures: Newport Brass brushed nickel faucets; Rohl pot filler faucet

Flooring: Heart pine

Lighting: Authentic fixtures

Contractor: Kevin Kennehan & Kevin Renigar

Other notable, custom or innovative features: Antique beams pulled from barn on the farm; walnut table and bench made by Tim Fisher