

Minimalist changes

A country
house looks
to Asia for
an inspired
kitchen

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The secluded feel of one Albemarle home is signaled by the two large urns that flank the driveway. “It’s like you’re entering this quiet park,” says kitchen designer Karen Turner. The house itself, a low-slung dwelling that sits amongst trees, has an equally serene feel. When the owners bought the property in 2011, they knew had some work to do to make the interior—particularly the kitchen—match that hushed, understated tone outdoors.

Just inside the front door is a wide hallway, and previously, doorways opened on both sides almost as soon as one entered. “This was very chopped up,” says the owner. Turner helped reconfigure the layout so that the first portion of the hallway is unbroken by doors. “We tried to create balance and alignment with the doorways. It allowed this hallway to have furniture, and turned it into a really gracious entry.”

One of those old doors led to the kitchen—a cramped, galley-style cook space closed off from the rest of the house. Now, arrival in the kitchen

happens via the dining room, and there is a sense of entering a special and distinct space.

“The house presented itself as having an Asian flavor,” says Turner—a feel that appealed to her clients, who have traveled widely and especially appreciate Southeast Asia. “We set about making the inside look like it went with the outside.”

“The feeling you get here is very peaceful,” says the owner. She wanted the renovation to honor that feeling and heighten the connection to the beautiful outdoor surroundings. With Shelter Associates as the contractor, Turner recommended opening up the wall between the kitchen and dining area, creating an adjacent breakfast nook, and enclosing a small screened porch to function as sitting area and mudroom.

Once the wall was removed, says Turner, “It was easy to get alignment.” A large center island defines the kitchen layout, providing seating for the owners’ frequent guests while protecting cooking space. Cabinets wrap around the room on two sides and continue into the breakfast

nook, which is outfitted with a bar sink, fridge and wine cave.

“This is an intimate, traditional place to have breakfast,” says Turner. The nook is distinct from the much more formal dining room, with windows but no doors to the exterior. But the team greatly enlarged the doors that connect the dining space with the porch outside, creating nearly a full wall of glass that lets the views and light pour into both dining room and kitchen.

These rooms are generously proportioned, with high ceilings, but they feel inviting and comfortable thanks to the thought behind every detail. One example might escape the conscious notice of many visitors, but ties together the whole public wing of the house: There was already a transom window above the doors that lead to the porch from the living room. Turner realized that the transom should repeat in the dining room and again over the cased opening into the kitchen. That subtle move “created continuity,” says Turner.



The quiet, Asian vibe arises through material and color choices. Black granite countertops echo black stools and chairs, and the simple, minimal backsplash is made from the same stone. Calm, neutral paint colors from Farrow & Ball help cabinetry, walls and trim blend and recede. An existing hardwood floor needed only refinishing.

The cabinet pulls and knobs are made from German bronze and have an aged look. “It goes with this feeling of being settled,” says Turner. The brassy tone shows up again as the inside finish on two large black pendant lights, sourced from Visual Comfort.

Cabinets, built by Willis Woodworks in a Shaker style, are aesthetically quiet but include many conveniences, from tray storage to under-counter bar fridges disguised as drawers.

Ultimately, say both clients and designer, the true star of the show is the outdoor environment. “We were trying not to compete with nature,” says the owner. “I had a riotous house before; I’m trying to be more minimalist. And I do feel more peaceful in this space.”

The Asian influences can be seen in the kitchen’s material and color choices: black granite countertops and backsplash echo black stools, chairs and pendant lighting; a neutral paint color helps walls and cabinetry blend in.