

TRUE BLUE

A small Montclair kitchen gets a big makeover in the client's chosen hue. Result? An award winner!

By Haley Longman Design by Tracey Stephens Photos by Wing Wong/MemoriesTTL



The owners of this classic Montclair central hall colonial had lived there since the '90s, when their now-adult kids were little. But in 2018, it was time to redo their kitchen, as it needed a smarter layout and more functionality. The couple hired Tracey Stephens of the eponymous Montclair firm after they liked the work she'd done on their across-the-street neighbor's kitchen, and Stephens got right to work improving the room's overall flow.

"The traffic pattern was through the middle of the kitchen, and the two work areas were separated by a walkway," she says, adding that the fridge was on the back staircase landing to the basement. The new layout widened the opening from the dining room to the kitchen, created L-shaped countertops and brightened the entire space by relocating the sink under an enlarged window on the back wall. "Now there is lots of space to spread out on either side for prep," Stephens says. "Two people can work and not interfere with each other."

The blue palette was the couple's decision—it is one of their favorite colors and echoes the blue-green leaves on the preexisting dining room wallpaper, which you see when entering the kitchen from the dining room. The traditional cast-iron double Kohler Riverby sink was also the owners' preference, but Stephens gave it a nod to the contemporary with the Grohe Minta Touch touch-sensor faucet. Other notable transitional elements include coastal gray quartz countertops by Caesarstone and porcelain floor tiles by Wayne Tile Company, both on the more modern end, while Shaker-style white cabinets and traditional 3-inch-by-6-inch subway tiles, in Mayan blue instead of standard white, veer toward the classic.

Speaking of tiles, the backsplash and tile were a meticulous and synergic decision. "Above the range are tiles from Motawi Tileworks—they're handmade, hand-glazed and made to the exact size of the pattern so there are no cuts involved," the designer says. "Each slab is consistent with the others but has a unique look."

Stephens says that this kitchen was "a very smooth project from beginning to end." It even won her an American Society of Interior Designers award in the Residential Small Kitchen category. "I designed all the features I would include in a large kitchen but on a smaller scale," she says. Examples include a pull-out pantry that is 24 inches wide instead of the standard 30 to 36, as well as more intentional storage, such as a blind corner swingout drawer by Kesseböhmer for pots and pans.

During the pandemic, Stephens and her team also worked on this family's second-floor bathroom, and who knows? There could be more rooms to upgrade soon, given that both Mom and Dad are now working from home.

"It has been very collaborative, which is my favorite way to work," says the designer. "I love clients like these."

This page: Where the range is now was previously the spot for the sink, which overlooked the neighbors' house and driveway. Now, a vintage-style pendant from House of Antique Hardware and an enlarged window overlooking the yard illuminate the room—and present a much better view. Opposite page: The homeowners had to give up their kitchen table in the renovation, but got tons more counter space and storage in return. "They decided it was worth it because the dining room is just steps away," says designer Tracey Stephens.

