

## DESIGN

# Design Solutions: Right Combination

*Allen Construction unites an isolated kitchen addition with a dimly lit, unused mudroom and the original dining room.*

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*Photos: Jim Bartsch*

After living in their home for 15 years, the owners decided they were ready to do something for themselves. Their family entered the house through the garage as opposed to the front door, like many other families, but the existing space was anything but inviting. The original owners added a kitchen onto the home and converted the old kitchen area into an oversized, awkward mudroom.

“When you entered the house through the garage, you came into a nonfunctional space that was hard to put furniture in,” says Ryan Cullinen, director of preconstruction for Allen Construction, a full-service remodeler in Santa Barbara, California. “Nothing quite looked like it was meant to be there, and [the

## Master Design Awards 2019 Kitchen More Than \$150,000 | Bronze

### Company Information

Allen Construction  
Santa Barbara, Calif.  
buildallen.com

### Project Information

**Name:** Two Disparate Rooms Become One  
**Location:** San Luis Obispo, Calif.  
**Square footage:** 496  
**Total cost:** \$180,115

### Product Information

**Tile:** Walker Zanger  
**Lighting:** Restoration Hardware  
**Paint/stain:** Sherwin-Williams  
**Cabinetry:** DeWils  
**Countertop:** Cambria  
**Sink:** Rohl  
**Faucet:** Brizo  
**Range:** Wolf  
**Exhaust hood:** Wolf  
**Refrigerator:** Sub-Zero  
**Dishwasher:** Asko

*BEFORE*

existing mudroom] was very dark because it was far away from any windows.”

The clients wanted to merge the minimally used mudroom with the isolated kitchen addition and produce a new, open

kitchen integrated with the rest of the home. They also sought to update the finishes and create a space with professional-grade appliances where they would be able to cook together. Allen Construction responded to the challenge by melding two disparate areas into one.

## Natural Look and Feel

At the time of their addition, the original homeowners incorporated what was an exterior wall of the house into the kitchen. They connected this new space to the mudroom by cutting a doorway through that wall, making it the only access to the kitchen; as a result, the kitchen became closed off. If someone wanted to communicate with other areas of the home, they had to leave the room.

“The existing space was so chopped up,” Cullinen adds. “[The clients] were living with a kitchen that was a completely separate room that you had to enter through a standard, interior man-made door in order to access it. When they came in through that garage door entrance, they wanted the [kitchen] to be visible and bring light into this awkward space and give the space some purpose.”

The homeowners knew they would have to open it up, but they were not sure of the feasibility or how wide they could make the opening. “The husband had an engineering background—he built bridges in South Africa—so he understood at least the components of what might be feasible and what might not be,” Cullinen says. “They couldn’t visualize how to connect the two spaces, so it looked and felt natural because the existing building was anything but that—it was so separated.”



With a 12-foot vaulted ceiling, the kitchen would be difficult to connect to the dining area, which had an 8-foot ceiling and no windows. The new design would also need to accommodate existing windows and exterior doors because the homeowners did not intend to replace any of them in the renovated space. The wall between the kitchen and mudroom would have to come down initially.

To open the wall, the company added a new support beam hidden in a drop ceiling and supported by two 2-foot wing walls that hold relocated plumbing, electrical and HVAC lines. “We did have to add some additional plywood on both sides of the wing walls to meet our shear requirements,” Cullinen notes. “In order to reroute the plumbing from upstairs over to those wing walls, we had to drill holes through the existing floor joists. During the design phase, we got

permission to pull back some of the drywall to see what was there. We found 2 by 8 joists, which are undersized for running a waste line through.

“We ended up having to get an engineering detail to double up with an engineered piece of lumber on every single joist that we drilled through in order to get that [accomplished],” he adds.

### Special Highlight Piece

The new, larger kitchen with varying ceiling heights—and opening to the dining room—begged a number of questions about where to position the island and the cabinetry. Should there be two separate islands or a big one? How could the company make a welcoming transition between the kitchen and dining room? It took four or five renditions before they all selected a final layout.

A single 4-by 14-½-foot island that runs down the middle of the kitchen emerged as a functional solution. To create more connections, the company built two



seats into the end of the island, facing the dining room, so anyone could converse with others in the kitchen or the dining room. A custom-design buffet—with glass cabinets above—now provides an inviting view from the dining room.

The clients even requested a live-edge wood countertop for the buffet area. “That was sourced locally from an eccentric guy in the Santa Barbara Hills area,” Cullinen recalls. “He comes and picks you

up in his little pickup truck; you jump in the back of it, and you drive about a mile down this unpaved road and go into a lot where he has all these amazing slabs stacked up. They mill everything by hand right there. Everything's negotiated with cash on the spot.

“We were looking for different places to source it, but all the options to ship from Los Angeles and other places that were a bit farther away were astronomical in price,” he continues. “So we were able to find this locally, then touch it up and do finish milling on site with our carpenters.”



Another personal feature that draws attention from the dining area to the kitchen has been a 2- by 2-foot recessed, illuminated niche displaying the clients' prized Murano glass sculpture. “While traveling through Italy, they had found a piece that was really special to them and had it shipped back over here. They knew the one thing that they wanted to accomplish with this remodel was to somehow find a way to highlight that piece. They weren't sure if it should be in the kitchen.”

During the design and preconstruction, the homeowners also complained about the kitchen addition being cold despite having two heating registers. “We went into the crawlspace to investigate and learned that although they ran ducting and

registers in the new space when they did the addition, they never connected it to the existing house system. They just had loose ducts sitting under there.

“The clients had a real sense of humor too,” Cullinen adds. “I don’t know if it was their son [but] someone left one of those Halloween skeletons in the crawlspace underneath [the kitchen]. I had never seen our project manager so scared as when he got back out of that space [after seeing it].”

## Keeps Looking New

Without a strong connection to the rest of the house, the kitchen was an isolated area with a large and unused adjacent mudroom. The project made use of the



abundant natural light, expanded the kitchen and added elegant finishes. Upgraded appliances and uber-efficient cabinets have helped the clients achieve their goal of creating a pleasant space where they can enjoy cooking together.

They even sent the company photos of themselves using the new kitchen and appreciate how it allows multiple people to inhabit the space, Cullinen notes. The homeowners also did not realize that moving the sink to the east window could improve their mornings so much. An existing bay window where the sink was previously located has been turned into an attractive breakfast nook.

“The other thing we got good feedback on is we used a product from DeWils Cabinetry called the Fenix Collection,” he adds. “It’s a thermally heated material that allows you to buff out scratches and marks that get on the cabinetry. They have a dog and other animals, so they said the cabinetry has been incredible; it’s held up well and keeps looking new.”

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## **DESIGN SOLUTIONS KITCHEN**