

Bright Spot

Architect Sandra Vizthum creates a new light-filled kitchen and family room for an old house in Vermont.

BY NANCY E. BERRY PHOTOS BY ERIC ROTH

Architect Sandra Vizthum used the footprint of an older addition to create new spaces for an old Montpelier farmhouse.



On the ancient post road to Montreal sits one of Montpelier's oldest houses, an 1800s Cape with hints of Greek Revival flourishes. The original structure is in pristine condition. Two large rooms off to each side of a center stair hall provide ample light through antique window openings. In the more recent past, the home was expanded by 1,000 square feet to accommodate modern amenities—a den and garage in 1950 and an “Olde German style” family room in the 1970s. These new spaces, tacked onto the back and side of the house, took away the dining room’s sole source of natural light.

Paulette Fiorentino-Robinson and Steve Robinson had thought of moving from the old Cape, they disliked the additions so much. They approached architect Sandra Vitzthum, a third-generation Vermont native with a great sensibility for creating thoughtful new spaces on older structures, to redesign the rooms. “These really were ill-conceived spaces,” says Vitzthum of the twentieth-century additions. “They seriously compromised the original house.” The couple wanted the interiors to connect more cohesively to each other as well as to the gardens and pool. “The house needed a mudroom, more kitchen storage, and a dining area that didn’t feel like a dark cave,” says Vitzthum. She set about

planning the new design within the existing footprint of the mid-century additions. Paulette wanted an open airy floor plan filled with natural light. She also wanted to keep a traditional look to the rooms to honor the age of the original structure.

“It was like putting a 3-D jigsaw puzzle together,” says Vitzthum in regard to creating new spaces that would work for twenty-first-century living. Vitzthum began her layout by relocating the new kitchen to where the dark dining room used to be. The original space had 7’6” ceilings and no windows, making the room dark and gloomy and not a place Paulette wanted to entertain. It took a bit of convincing on Vitzthum’s part to get Paulette to agree to the new kitchen in this placement because of the room’s dark stigma. Vitzthum explained that this was a central location, and she wanted to bring the kitchen back to the heart of the home. To open the spaces up to one another, and to the light, Vitzthum took down walls between the old dining space, den, and family room. “You can stand at any point in the new plan and look through to the other spaces and even outdoors,” says Vitzthum. The low ceilings were removed to expose beams and offer a lofty atmosphere. “We took the rooms down to the studs and rebuilt all the floors so they would be level,” says Vitzthum. The airy



The kitchen dish cupboard has glass cabinets as well as glass at the back of the shelf to allow for more light through the pantry skylights. A stairwell in the dish and storage pantry leads to a laundry room.



structure is articulated with posts and beams that provide visual transitions between the different rooms.

Paulette and Steve love to entertain, so the kitchen had to be not only functional, but also comfortable and aesthetically pleasing. Vitzthum created ample workspace by incorporating a center island as well as two additional serving peninsulas between the dining room and family room. The counters also act as dividers between the spaces. An old powder room was converted into a dish pantry with open shelving for additional storage space. And to further the transparent feel in the kitchen, the kitchen shelving has two-sided glass cabinets that look through to the new pantry where the cellar stair wall used to be.

The north wall of the kitchen houses a Sub-Zero fridge behind a custom panel door and two wall ovens. The stove is located in the island; under-counter island drawers hold pots and pans. The cabinets are traditionally inspired, with Vitzthum's signature substantial bracket detailing. Vitzthum often designs cupboards with open shelving reminiscent of freestanding furniture into her designs. "These tricks can really give a kitchen an older feel," she says. The demolition revealed the Cape's original post-and-beam frame, which Vitzthum kept exposed for an added sense of age.

Not only were walls taken down and windows added, but skylights also were introduced to the pantry to offer more natural light. To further brighten the space, the color palette was kept light and ethereal. The floors, a unifying element throughout the new space, are blond maple; countertops are pale green granite; and upper cabinets are painted white, while the lower cabinets are

Opposite: Appliances are tucked into the north wall of the kitchen. Vitzthum kept original beams exposed to pay homage to the home's age.

Left: The farmhouse kitchen sink looks into the light-filled family room. Below: The dining room is now where an old 1950s addition used to be. The windows overlook the terrace and gardens.



white with a touch of greenish blue. The ceiling is also painted a creamy white with a touch of pink. "Pink helps create peace and harmony within the space," notes Vitzthum. The walls throughout the kitchen, pantry, and family room are also painted white, completing the ethereal look.

A dining room takes the place of the 1950s den, and opens up onto the terrace and gardens. Two windows were added on the north side of the room for additional light. The family room now has three south-facing windows overlooking the pool. Vitzthum added beadboard to the cathedral ceiling for texture in the family room. She also had the chimney rebuilt and resurfaced. Again, additional windows next to the fireplace were added to wash the space in light. Vitzthum incorporated bookshelves and a window seat into the space, as well as a state-of-the-art audio and sound system concealed in the walls. For more energy-efficient rooms, she also specified radiant floors and super-insulated the walls to R-40 and the roof to R-60. "You can achieve just as much light, utility, and beauty in a traditional design as you can in a modern design," Vitzthum points out. And the addition to this old Cape proves just how well it can be done. **NOH**

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