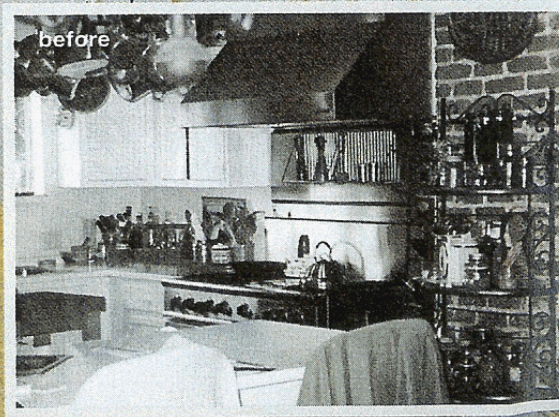




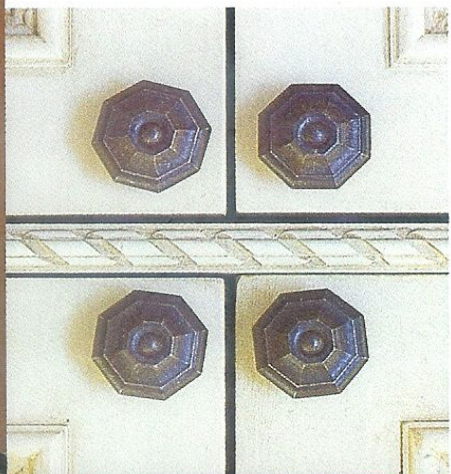
# flavors of tuscanay

by helen thompson photography by michael jensen produced by heather lobbelt

Without changing the footprint of an elegant 1920s Italianate house, San Francisco designer April Sheldon turned a "just-plain-ugly" kitchen into a cook's delight, bathed in golden light and memories of Italy.



**INSET:** A low ceiling kept hanging pots and pans hovering annoyingly near head height. **THIS PHOTO:** The open kitchen now has a generous-size island with storage. A stove flanked by detailed columns and tiles is reminiscent of a European hearth.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: Designer April Sheldon incorporated the homeowners' Italian pottery collection into the new design and used many pieces as color references when choosing tile, such as the blue and white checkerboard mosaics. The rope-motif cornice along the vent hood repeats a similar pattern in the crown molding and cabinet detail. The faucet over the stove is a favorite timesaver. The Italianate home demanded a more elegant kitchen.

Built when kitchens were meant to be neither seen nor heard, this 1920s Italianate residence never moved with the times. "The house is fabulous and did not deserve the kitchen it had," San Francisco designer April Sheldon says.

Stuck at the back of the house, the kitchen space was a haphazard cluster of rooms: cooking and food prep area, a utility room, a half bath, and an awkward nook used as a breakfast room. Even an oh-so-1970s attempt at modernization was 25 years out of date when homeowners Tim Moulton and his wife, Kathy Eldridge, (now deceased) arrived in 1997.

No matter where they looked, things were dismal: "There was very bad brown linoleum on the floor," Tim recalls. Other unappealing features included metal sliding doors out to the

deck and a dreary approach to one of the kitchen's best features—a parklike view.

Most oppressive of all was the 8½-foot ceiling. "Years ago, someone had installed a new toilet upstairs and didn't know where to put the pipe," Tim says, "so they routed it through the kitchen and concealed it by lowering the 9½-foot ceiling by a foot."

The couple, both avid cooks, functioned through a combination of ingenuity and imagination: "I had five chopping boards that I would haul around because there was no surface to cut on," Tim says. To get the kitchen in working order, the homeowners called in Sheldon, who had helped redecorate their living room a few years earlier. Her approach: "Things fall into place when they're simple."

Tim assisted by charting out everything he and Kathy wanted on graph paper. Meanwhile, Sheldon assessed the room's failures, which included obvious problems of space and light. By gutting the space and removing the wall separating the utility room and bathroom from the kitchen, the room grew by 25 percent.

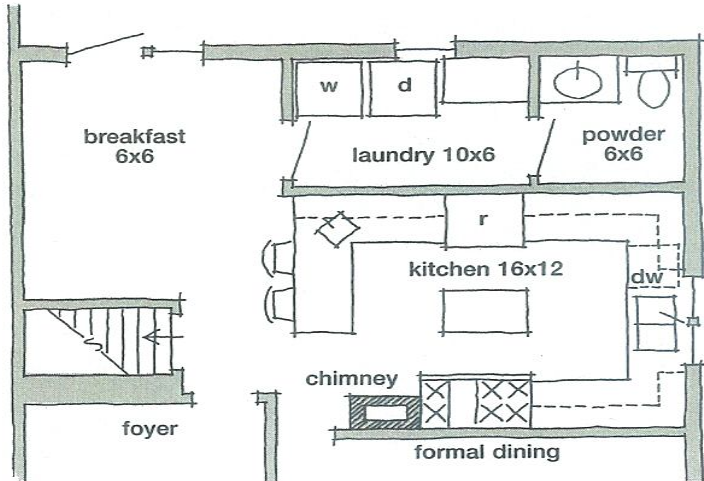


## Finding Your Niche

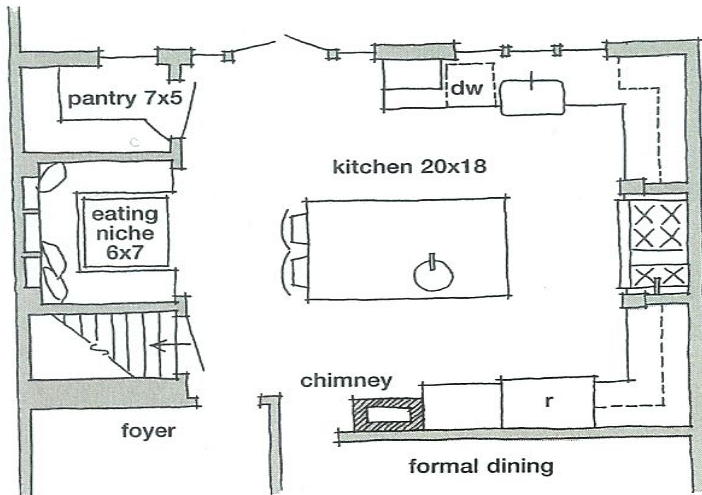
One of the reasons Tim's guests tend to linger in the kitchen is the eating niche April Sheldon designed. "I made it seem like an elegant dining room by adding corbels on either side," she says. A niche works well when space is limited: "The seating is fixed," Sheldon explains, "so you don't need the space behind as you would for chairs." Another bonus is that the banquettes provide extra storage (Tim uses his for holiday dinnerware).

Almost any space can be a good candidate for an eating niche. "I've put them in corners, bay windows, and all kinds of odd spaces," Sheldon says. "You just have to allow about 2 linear feet per person—the bench should be at least 16 inches wide, and the table width can be as narrow as 28 inches for two people." Wall space above is also great for shelving. "It's the one place in the kitchen that you can decorate, hang a wonderful chandelier, or use wild wallpaper," Sheldon adds. "The niche can make a kitchen feel really special."

before



after



ABOVE RIGHT: "One of our big goals," says homeowner Tim Moulton, "was to see the view while we were cooking." By moving the utility room to the basement, Sheldon freed up the back wall for windows and French doors. The new sink—carved from a single chunk of travertine marble—appears to sit on a freestanding cabinet, one of the techniques for making the unfitted kitchen seem less "decorated."

OPPOSITE: New wood floors are made from jarrah—a tight-grain, water-resistant wood from Australia—set on the diagonal. An island with turned legs successfully addresses the owner's desire for a kitchen table.

opportunity like no other room does to use lots of beautiful materials like stone, wood, tiles, and even fabric," she says. Tim and Kathy had collected pottery and tiles from Italy, and Sheldon incorporated them into her design. "I felt that a compilation of materials was just what the room needed to make it look homey."

Without changing the home's footprint, Sheldon coaxed a new wall of windows and French doors, twice as much cabinet space, a luxurious stretch of prep space, and two eating areas out of the once-cramped room.

"We had always wanted a kitchen where we could entertain," says Tim of the 350-square-foot room. "I never expected it to look this good."

But to Sheldon, beauty and practicality are inseparable. "Before, it was this grim space that we thought of as separate from the rest of the house," she says. "Today, it's the place where everyone loves to be." ■

Interior designer: April Sheldon  
For more information, turn to Sources on page 115.



The couple's goals for the renovation were informed by their travels to Italy, including a month in Venice studying with renowned cook Marcella Hazan. Hues of sienna, gold, and yellow became Tim's favorites, and the couple noted that even small kitchens in Italy offered plenty of room to work.

"We love the way the Italians incorporate furniture into their cooking spaces," Tim says. "We really wanted a big table in our kitchen." But Sheldon felt there wasn't enough room: "We decided on a travertine-topped central island and made it look tablelike by adding legs at the corners and a place for informal dining at one end."

Given Tim and Kathy's penchant for Italian style, Sheldon did not want the room to be too slick. "Kitchens offer an



