

Kitchens

A Sunset Design Guide



inspiration + expert advice

Easy Ideas
That Work

Case
Study

The Butler's Influence

THIS PAGE The kitchen cabinets were designed for maximum storage but also to reference the style of the original cabinetry in the adjacent butler's pantry (opposite).

OPPOSITE PAGE The butler's pantry is typical of its era, with a built-in hutch for linens and serving pieces opposite a service counter with integral sink.



BELOW The homeowner knew right away she wanted an antique stove and found this one at the website of a nearby refurbisher.

RIGHT, TOP The owners debated about an existing awkward closet but decided to convert it to a food pantry behind a ribbed-glass pocket door with reproduction handle.

MIDDLE There are no fixed-shelf lower cabinets anywhere in this kitchen, Eby being an advocate of big drawers with full-extension glides.

BOTTOM The tile counter goes a long way toward making the new kitchen feel authentic. The new drawer pulls match the originals on the pantry's built-in.





When the new owners of this early-20th-century home on a former naval base found the house, it had been empty for 10 years, ransacked of all doorknobs and light fixtures. The Navy—no longer maintaining it as an officer's home—had long ago torn out the original kitchen cabinetry and replaced it with ill-fitting metal cabinets. But somehow the butler's pantry remained intact. Armed with a notebook of magazine photos and following the lead of the original pantry, the couple worked with general contractor and cabinetmaker Brian Eby to re-create what might once have been.

The Elements

- **Cabinets:** Painted custom frameless cabinets with combination of frame-and-panel and ribbed-glass fronts
- **Additional Storage:** Pantry closet and butler's pantry
- **Hardware:** Brass bin pulls, cut-glass knobs, and brass turn-locks
- **Counters:** White hex tile; butcher block beside stove; steel in butler's pantry
- **Backsplash:** White subway tile, with niche over stove
- **Sinks:** Single-basin ceramic main sink; integrated steel sink in butler's pantry
- **Appliances:** Refurbished antique stove; stainless-steel refrigerator; white dishwasher
- **Flooring:** Refinished Douglas fir subfloor
- **Finishing Touches:** Neutral palette; school-house lights; heirloom tea-towel cafe curtains



Q+A: Brian Eby talks about creating an efficient and authentic new kitchen in an abandoned naval officer's residence.

Being a cabinetmaker, when you saw the dingy metal cabinets in the kitchen of this stately old home, did you relish the chance to restore it to glory?

I was really excited, yes. I've never gotten to work on an ex-military base before. I loved the house and its scale, and it seemed like it'd be a fun kitchen to restore.

Was there ever any question about preserving the butler's pantry?

No, not really. I mentioned it at one point, thinking we could remove the doorway between it and the kitchen, which would give us a nice open floor plan. But the owners wanted to keep the two separate spaces, and they were very fond of the glass hutch. Plus it was the only original work in that part of the house so they were happy to see it stay.

And what about the little pantry off the main kitchen. What was that originally?

It was a closet that served the same function but it didn't have any cabinetry—just some awkward shelves. It almost looked like cold storage. But the window in there was original and we wanted to preserve it.

So, between the two pantries and the tall upper cabinets, this space pretty much has the storage angle covered. And you've fitted the lower cabinets entirely with drawers.

I tend to steer people toward drawers because it's not always understood that with contemporary hardware you can have even heavy pots and pans in drawers, and we can adjust the drawer

heights to get any configuration you need. You always come out ahead on usability, and there's not as much fatigue as when you're pulling things from the back of a cabinet. I think the drawers make it easier to keep things organized too, because you're lifting things out rather than constantly sliding things past one another. Lots of people want doors with pullouts behind them, but then you have to deal with the doors, and you also lose some width that way.

Is storage always the guiding principle for you when creating a kitchen from scratch?

It depends on the kitchen. If it's a home that's a showpiece for somebody who entertains, and there's a service staff that deals with the reality of the cooking in a separate area, then it's sometimes "museum design," as I call it. For everybody else, yes, the storage and usability—that the space is comfortable to use—is the biggest issue. We can always make it look good once we've got the traffic flow and storage worked out, but it doesn't matter that it looks good if it doesn't work.

Do you get a lot of requests for tile counters these days?

I still get some requests. I'd say it's unusual but not unheard of. These clients were really specific about the aesthetic of tile as a nod to the history of the house. And they like tile—not all clients do. The price is coming down on some of the solid surface materials; it's no longer twice as much as tile, like

it was at one time. So that's changed things.

The treatment behind the stove, with the little niche, was also the client's idea—from a picture in a magazine. Did you like the idea?

There's a brick chimney back there that's abandoned, and I initially wanted to expose it. But once I got over that, I thought this was a great way to add some space and depth to that area. The stove that they chose is so big that the cabinets alongside it got really narrow and it was feeling a little cramped. Adding that tile and recess—and the molding around the top—made it feel more intentional and ample. It didn't add much in terms of storage but it pulled the space together.

What's your favorite thing about the finished kitchen?

The little pantry closet with the sliding door. When you open it, it's sort of a temple to efficiency. And with the window in there and the frosted glass door, there's a sort of prism effect. It makes the whole kitchen feel bigger and it's just super-functional.