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This Old House - Summer 2023 - May/June/July 2023

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IDEA/FILE

### Kitchen-Plus Renovation

# Warm and inviting

A thoughtful remodel delivers a new kitchen hub, a mudroom entry, and more—while honoring the 1929 house's classic bones

BY JILL CONNORS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURA MOSS

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Lots of space. Lots of wood. Lots of light. Sometimes too much of a good thing can be, well, too much. Especially when there's also too little openness, too little function, and too little flow. That was the case at Heather and Andrew Altobelli's gracious vintage house in Westfield, NJ, which came with a sprawling kitchen wing that lacked another essential ingredient: warmth. "I'm a foodie, and I need a kitchen that's a hub where we can all be together," says Heather, who loves to cook and entertain.

Enter builder Mike Mroz and his wife, interior designer Ellie Mroz, who were hired to rethink the existing space and exchanged walls of 1990s glazed-maple cabinetry for an eclectic mix of finishes that echo the home's original wood-paneled walls, handsome moldings, and weathered-brick exterior accents. The revamped kitchen is now open to an inviting breakfast room, and connects to a charming entry that leads to a large mudroom and an upgraded bath—convenient with a swimming pool just outside. An outdoor dining area and snack bar create a seamless connection between indoors and out. The result: renovated spaces that feel both modern and timeless. Best of all, says Heather, "we kept the integrity of the house."



### REMAKING AN ENTRANCE

"We paid attention to traditional details and materials," says Mike Mroz, who added a new Dutch door at a secondary entrance that now leads to a mudroom lined with brick pavers. The space's casual shiplap walls are in keeping with the home's stone-and-shingle Colonial Revival architecture.

1. A fieldstone path off the driveway leads to a portico that is Heather Altobelli's favorite way to enter the house, whether laden with groceries or accompanied by the couple's children—ages 12, 14, and 17—since it's close to both the kitchen and mudroom. Mike repaired the original slate roof; siding shingles were replaced or repaired and repainted.
2. Coming through the Dutch door, a turn to the right leads to the kitchen; to the left lies the mudroom. A series of new arched openings emphasizes the sight lines through the spaces.
3. The mandate for the 10-by-13-foot mudroom was to make it all about the kids' stuff—and to keep it out of sight. "With basketball players and a dancer, we have tons of sneakers and shoes," says Heather. The tall cabinets' doors are finished with leather handles that echo a leather bench in the center of the room. There's also storage for art and gift-wrapping supplies, and a fridge filled with grab-and-go snacks.
4. The mudroom's apron-front sink doubles as a convenient cleanup station for muddy sports shoes. Crisp white shiplap walls and marble counters offer a pleasing counterpoint to the dark-blue cabinets and the floor's veneer bricks, which are laid in a classic herringbone pattern.





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**COOKING UP TOGETHERNESS**

Heather needed an upgraded kitchen with equipment for a serious cook and space for the three kids to gather. She also wanted an open layout that took advantage of the treescape outside. "The old kitchen was stuffy, with lots of cabinets that made it feel closed in," she says. Carpenter Azzam Ezmat varied the cabinet finishes to keep them from overwhelming the space, while a double pendant, simple sconces, and undercabinet LEDs were added to create more layered lighting.

5. The 15-by-19-foot kitchen features a wall devoted to cooking, with a 60-inch pro-style range under a zinc vent hood trimmed with brass. Granite-topped cabinets store pots and pans, with appliance-lift shelves for an air fryer and a toaster. The island holds the main sink plus a 5-foot-square table section that seats six and is used for homework, snacks, and some meals. A brick niche with open shelves echoes the mudroom floor and sits between separate 36-inch built-in freezer and refrigerator columns. New red oak floors match those in the rest of the house.

6. A play of colors and textures adds visual interest. Tall blue-green cabinets that echo the arched doorways offer a contrast to the white-marble backsplash and base cabinets; honed-granite countertops and wood floors add deeper tones. A new 12-over-12 double-hung window set into the marble-clad wall provides a view of the trees along the front of the property.



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**BEAUTY AND THE BATH**

The existing full bath across from the mudroom was gutted and fitted with a walk-in shower for après-swim cleanup. Mike rebuilt the room with a slightly reduced footprint to accommodate a separate laundry closet he located across from it.

7. The pale-celadon vanity has a marble top and a washstand-style backsplash with curved sides. The three birds crowning the mirror frame are an homage to the three children in residence.



**EXPERT ADVICE**

"Using touches of marble—here it's the vanity top, the floor, and the shower tile—can make even a small bath feel luxurious."

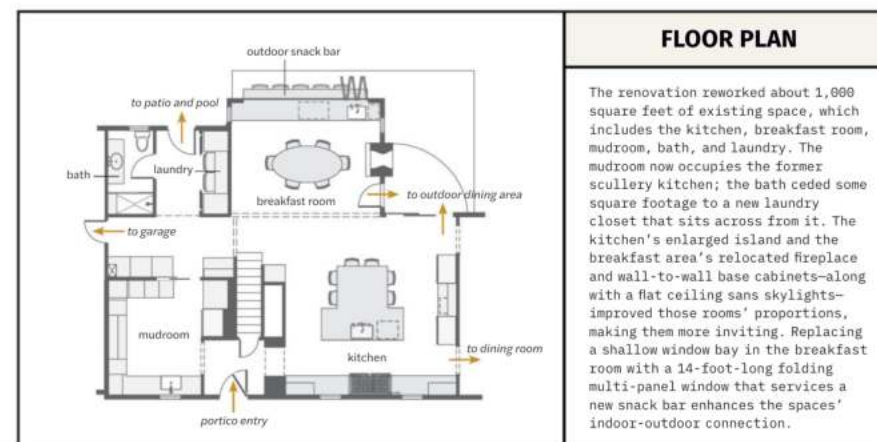
**ELLIE MROZ**, interior designer



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MROZ; ILYSEKA MAHLAND. FLOOR PLAN: IAN MORFPOLE

**FLOOR PLAN**

The renovation reworked about 1,000 square feet of existing space, which includes the kitchen, breakfast room, mudroom, bath, and laundry. The mudroom now occupies the former scullery kitchen; the bath ceded some square footage to a new laundry closet that sits across from it. The kitchen's enlarged island and the breakfast area's relocated fireplace and wall-to-wall base cabinets—along with a flat ceiling sans skylights—improved those rooms' proportions, making them more inviting. Replacing a shallow window bay in the breakfast room with a 14-foot-long folding multi-panel window that services a new snack bar enhances the spaces' indoor-outdoor connection.





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**INDOOR-OUTDOOR DINING**

The old breakfast room had a shed roof, skylights, and wraparound windows that made it feel like a greenhouse. Now a flat, beamed ceiling and a fireplace cozy up the space, while still capitalizing on the park-like setting. "I knew the minute I saw it we had to open up the back of the house and play up views of the property," says Mike.

**8.** The 11-by-17-foot breakfast room includes decorative oak ceiling beams, a two-sided gas fireplace, a wall-hung TV, and a generous oval table. But the real attraction is the foldaway window above a row of base cabinets that hold a refrigerator drawer, tableware, and an ice-maker—all close to the outdoor action.

**9.** When the accordion window is open, food, beverages, and place settings pass easily to the granite snack bar outside. "If the kids and their friends are hanging out at the pool, I tell them to stay there while they are wet and having fun, and I hand food out to them," says Heather.

**10.** The breakfast room's two-sided fireplace is designed to be enjoyed outside on the patio dining area as well; Mike was able to locate fieldstone for the chimney that's a close match to stone elsewhere on the exterior. "Our dog can sit outside near the fireplace and see us inside around the table," adds Heather. It's a nice bonus for a renovation designed to bring everybody together. ■



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