

homegirls H4

Hostess gifts: Tips on what to bring during the holiday season.

home plan H8

Compact cottage is as cozy as a vacation getaway.

nesting H3

Thanksgiving decorating with found items in your home.



homesunday

STARTRIBUNE.COM/HOMES • SECTION H • SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2011



Photo provided by Orfield Design

Dianne Brown's new kitchen is still small. But now it's bright and user-friendly — not dark and dysfunctional — thanks to a small addition and careful makeover.

IMPROVING on HISTORY

A tiny addition makes a big impact — updating a 19th-century home for the 21st century, without compromising the character of its historic neighborhood.

By KIM PALMER • kpalmer@startribune.com



JOEL KOYAMA • koyama@startribune.com

Laura L. Orfield-Skrivseth, left, of Orfield Design & Construction, helped homeowner Dianne Brown improve her kitchen.

How small was Dianne Brown's former kitchen?

So small that her refrigerator couldn't open wide enough to get the drawers out.

So lacking in cupboards that she had to store groceries in her living room.

So cramped that an appliance repairman once had to call for a smaller repairman.

"It was very dysfunctional," Brown said. She lived with her tiny dark kitchen for

more than 25 years. But last year, she decided it was time to add some elbow room. It wouldn't take much more space to make the kitchen a lot more workable; just a 5-by-2-foot bump-out.

But because of Brown's location, in the Milwaukee Avenue Historic District, even a small addition is a big deal — requiring a lengthy process of review, public notices, a hearing and approval by committees for both the neighborhood and the city.

Kitchen continues on H6 ▶



VIEW PHOTOS of the renovation at startribune.com/homes.

'The Not So Big House' takes center stage near Chicago

By LYNN UNDERWOOD
lunderwood@startribune.com

Sarah Susanka wanted to show people how they can live comfortably with less space.

So the celebrated architect and author of "The Not So Big House" series of books designed a showhouse in SchoolStreet, a new housing development in Libertyville, Ill., which opened for tours this week. We chatted with Susanka about "better-not-bigger" design, strategic wall color and the house of the future.

Q You've designed demonstration houses for builders' shows — why did you decide to do a model home?

A I spent the last 12 years writing books about the "Not So Big House," and I realized the best way for peo-

ple to learn about house design is by walking through and kicking the tires. It's open for six months and then it'll be sold.

Q How would you describe the home?

A SchoolStreet is a Front Porch Revival community. I would say it has bungalow character with a lot of Craftsman details — but with all the ideas of the not-so-big house, which is eliminating formal spaces that are rarely used and building so every square foot gets used every day.

Q Why are you a proponent of front porches?

A People are craving a reconnection with their community. But the way we design houses, the living space is far from the front of the house. This

floor plan has the kitchen adjacent to the front porch, creating a strong connection to the street.

Q Some people might consider the 2,450-square-foot showhouse quite large.

A When people hear "not so big," they assume that means small. What it means is that we take square footage out, such as in wasted formal spaces, and use those dollars to add in character and details — lots of built-ins and trim work. Things we love in older homes.

This is intended to be a new model of a house for an average family. We could use the same set of ideas in a 1,200-square-foot home as well as a 4,000-square-foot home.

Susanka continues on H2 ▶



Photos by BARRY RUSTIN

Sarah Susanka's three-bedroom showhouse is on a 29-foot lot in Libertyville, Ill.



JOEL KOYAMA • joel.koyama@startribune.com

The view from the living room into the dining room: The plum walls that define the eating area take their cue from a color in the sofa pattern.

The townhouse is one of three adjoining units in an 1892-built building on historic Milwaukee Avenue in Minneapolis' Seward neighborhood. The houses overlook a two-block pedestrian mall.



IMPROVING on HISTORY

◀ KITCHEN FROM HI

That careful oversight is the reason the district has retained its 19th-century charm into the 21st century. Tucked into Minneapolis' Seward neighborhood, Milwaukee Avenue remains a stroll back in time, an enclave of Victorian houses with open front porches facing a two-block pedestrian mall. These aren't grand mansions, but modest houses on small, narrow lots, built in the late 1880s to house immigrant Scandinavian laborers and their families.

Milwaukee Avenue, named for the railroad where many of its earliest residents worked, was almost lost to the wrecking ball. By 1970, many of the houses had deteriorated to the point that the whole area was targeted for demolition. But neighbors fought back, winning a reprieve for the remaining 78 houses and ultimately their inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

Brown bought her townhouse in 1984, after Milwaukee Avenue was rehabilitated. As a longtime owner in the district, she was familiar with the restrictions that come with historic designation. When she changed her exterior color scheme, from yellow with black and cream trim to green with plum trim, for example, she'd had to choose from a book of approved, period-appropriate shades.

To rework her kitchen and help her navigate the approval process, Brown turned to Orfield Design & Construction Inc., the Minneapolis design-build firm that had helped her with an earlier lower-level remodel.

The challenge for the Orfield team was to make the kitchen roomier and more functional without detracting from the home's and the neighborhood's vintage aesthetic.

Exact match

"The historic committee was very strict about what you could do," said Laura L. Orfield-Skrivseth, the firm's co-owner and designer. The foundation for the addition and all architectural details had to match the home's original ones.

Owner/architect Ron Orfield (Laura's father), salvaged and re-used the original trim, woodwork and other materials, and hand-milled a new window apron and storm window to exactly match the other windows.

Inside, Orfield-Skrivseth and designer Amy Hinck reconfigured the kitchen to create a more user-friendly layout. The stove stayed in the same place, but everything else was moved, including the poorly placed refrigerator, to create better focal points and more work space around each appliance.



JOEL KOYAMA • joel.koyama@startribune.com

Lighting was crucial to improving the kitchen, said Orfield-Skrivseth. "Before, there was one ceiling light." Now there are surface-mounted ceiling fixtures that complement the home's historic character, as well as under-cabinet lighting. "It made a huge improvement."

She created an off-white color palette to brighten the space and blend with Brown's existing appliances. The old orange countertops were replaced with granite-patterned laminate, and the linoleum floor was removed and replaced with a new hardwood floor, stained to match that of the adjacent dining room.

Finishing touches included a tile backsplash with a stone mosaic border, textured glass doors in some cabinets and brushed stainless-steel fixtures and hardware.

While the kitchen was the focus of Brown's project, a few other improvements were made, including installation of a slate-tile entry floor near the front door and painting the dining room, formerly white, a rich plum color to define the eating area.

Familiar habit

There was one modern improvement Brown chose not to make: add-

ing a dishwasher. "I like to wash dishes by hand and listen to the radio," she said. So one lower cabinet was designed with a future dishwasher in mind.

"The plumbing and electricity are roughed in," Orfield-Skrivseth said. "So if she gets tired of washing by hand or wants to sell, she can easily put in a dishwasher."

The 5-by-25 foot addition ultimately got the seal of approval from all necessary departments and committees. "The fact that it was on the back of the house, not the mall, was a plus," Brown said.

And while it might be the smallest addition Orfield-Skrivseth has ever worked on ("It's right up there," she said), it's had a big effect on Brown's enjoyment of her home.

"It's more conducive to cooking," she said. "Now you can have two or even three people working together in there. My daughter loves it!"

And Brown, who used to sit with her back to the kitchen when she was at the dining-room table, now faces the other way. "Before it was just ugly. Now I like to look at my kitchen."

Kim Palmer • 612-673-4784



JOEL KOYAMA • joel.koyama@startribune.com

Above: Textured glass cabinets, brushed stainless hardware, a mosaic backsplash and granite-look counter add to the kitchen's new look.

Left: The new kitchen, as viewed from the dining room.

Right: The kitchen before it was remodeled.



Provided by Orfield Design



Provided by Orfield Design

The exterior of the 5-by-2-foot bump-out had to exactly match the original because of the home's location in an historic district.