

DISTINCTIVE

BY MOLLY FROMKIN  
PHOTOS BY MIKE BOATMAN

# DESIGN



**W**hen Tom and Kim Mitchell bought their East Memphis home two years ago, they knew it would need a lot of work. "We loved everything about the house, but it needed updating to suit our needs," says Tom. The existing structure, circa 1960s,

included a small kitchen, dining room and butler's pantry, all contained and separate from one another—and more importantly for the Mitchells' needs, from the entertaining areas of the house. "We both like to cook and to be in there together, so the original kitchen was just not practical for us," notes Kim. The Mitchells

contacted architect Jeff Bramlett, who gave them some ideas about how to modernize, and worked with contractor Tim DiSalvo to bring the kitchen into the 21st century.

Where the original kitchen was cramped and lacked storage, the new space is open to the family room and





expansive enough to hold, among other things, restaurant-grade appliances, a walnut-topped chopping block island, and, Kim points out with a laugh, “a sink big enough to bathe triplets in.” Tim DiSalvo says that getting from before to after was not without challenges: “We had to tear down a lot of walls,” he notes, and actually what was once the old kitchen is now the laundry room. “We repurposed as much of the existing structure as we could,” says DiSalvo, noting that what used to be kitchen cabinets have been incorporated into the new laundry and pantry space, and brick walls that had comprised part of the old garage now function in that space as well. Tom Mitchell is full of praise for how well Bramlett and DiSalvo preserved the original structure of the house. “From the outside, you can’t tell what’s new and what’s original,” he says. “We were wary of having one of those additions that’s just stuck onto the side of the house, and

they really made it so it looked like the remodel was part of the original design.”

While the Mitchells didn’t have a particular vision for the design of the kitchen, instead falling in love with Bramlett and DiSalvo’s ideas and following their lead, there were a few elements they knew they had to have. “We knew we wanted a big gas range, three ovens—we knew the new space would have to accommodate all these appliances for big gatherings, Thanksgiving dinners, that kind of thing.” One rather unusual feature the Mitchells wanted to include was a commercial reach-in restaurant refrigerator, with no freezer space. “It’s just 35 cubic feet of fridge,” says Tom. Far more common, of course, is a fridge/freezer combo, so DiSalvo found a way to customize the cabinets so that the restaurant fridge looks like a built-in, but the dimensions of the space will still work for any future owners of the house who may be inclined

toward a more conventional setup. (For frozen goods, Kim says, there’s a chest freezer in the pantry that’s “bigger than my first apartment, I’m pretty sure!”)

Though remodeling projects are often accompanied by headaches, delays and blown budgets, the Mitchells note that working with DiSalvo made the experience a breeze. “When you tell people you’re starting a project like this, you hear all the horror stories,” says Tom. “But Tim and his crew made it so easy. Even though we weren’t living in the house, they treated it as if we were—they became family.”

Now that the work is finished, Kim says, “there’s nothing about that room I don’t love.” The couple entertains more now, and cooks most nights—“I miss it when we don’t!” she adds. “If we could fit our bed in there, I think we’d sleep in the kitchen,” says Tom. “Every morning when I get up now, I look forward to going in there.”





Professional credits: Tim DiSalvo and Company, Jeff Bramlett Custom Residential Design, Brough and Stephens, Inc. Engineering, Carla Easter, interior designer