

A Jamaica Plain kitchen gets a modern makeover inspired by nature

A gut rehab turns an awkward space from cramped and awkward to modern and user-friendly.

By **Marni Elyse Katz** October 18, 2017, 8:00 a.m.



Lucas and Camille with their dad, Ian Whittle. JOYELLE WEST

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Nisha Basu and Ian Whittle's Jamaica Plain kitchen was so dysfunctional that even Basu's mom was on the lookout for someone who could help. When she overheard designer Sashya Thind Fernandes talking about a project at a neighborhood cafe three years ago, she introduced herself. Within six months, Fernandes, principal at iD8 Design Studio, had mapped out a plan to transform the couple's tight, nondescript space into a highly efficient showpiece.

Basu and Whittle moved from a condo in a nearby three-decker to the 1940s Colonial in 2008, when Basu was eight months pregnant with Lucas, now 8; Camille came along two years later. The kitchen had been superficially spruced up, but it had zero style, and the layout was less than ideal. "Things were scattered everywhere," Fernandes says. "They tried to implement fixes, but it just didn't work."

The room had poor flow, scant storage, and small windows. A half wall separated the cooking and dining areas, impeding movement from one side of the room to the other, especially when the family entertained. An opening to a hallway leading to the powder room was right next to the range, creating congestion when Basu was cooking. The door to the yard was not only squashed in a corner, it opened right into the fridge.

Fernandes gutted the 275-square-foot space, demolishing the half wall and creating one large rectangular room. The pesky passage to the powder room hall was closed off.

In the new kitchen, the window over the sink is double the size of the previous one, admitting a lot more sunlight. A slider replaced the awkward exterior door, permitting better access to the deck, which leads to a patio and lush gardens.

The outdoors drove the palette, with soapstone and walnut as the jumping-off points. "The homeowners wanted an organic, bright, friendly feel, with natural materials and earth tones," says Fernandes. "It's clean, modern, and unfussy; there's no starkness to it."

Early on, the team decided to cut costs by using IKEA cabinets. Fernandes dressed them up with walnut trim, which encases the cabinetry like an envelope. A walnut ceiling over the range conceals

venting for the hood, an effect Basu loves. “When I’m cooking, I feel like I’m in a little nook,” she says.

Basu had hoped for a marble slab backsplash, but the budget dictated 12-by-24-inch Calacatta marble tiles, which Fernandes stacked to the ceiling. The veined white expanse, a striking backdrop for the solid walnut floating corner shelves, also provides a dramatic contrast to the soapstone countertop.

With the half wall gone, the room had space for a proper island to replace the butcher-block cart the family had been using. Fernandes designed a 9-foot-long island topped with reclaimed live-edge walnut made by Longleaf Lumber in Cambridge. Basu, an enthusiastic cook, chops vegetables on it. She doesn’t mind the knife marks, which can mostly be sanded out, or the maintenance. “Initially it absorbed almost four bottles of wood-block oil,” she says. “Now we oil it once every three months and disinfect it regularly with vinegar.”

At the other end of the room, Fernandes installed a banquette and paired it with the family’s existing dining table. Removable seats (the base doubles as storage) are upholstered in easy-to-clean vinyl. The color matches the Benjamin Moore Blue Jean paint on one side of the island. “We wanted to bring in color with all the white,” Fernandes says, “The dark shade helps hide inevitable scuffs.”

Basu rates her first experience working with a designer as a success. “In addition to all the technical expertise, the benefit was learning how to edit,” she says. “Sashya would say, ‘If you want it to look like the picture, you have to show some restraint!’”

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Homeowner Nisha Basu chose (and her mom assembled) the brass chandelier, a cost-effective DIY option from lighting designer Lindsey Adelman. A landscape of Mount Desert Island anchors one wall; paintings by Basu and daughter Camille hang on the other. JOYELLE WEST



The Schoolhouse Electric pendant lights add interest without impeding the view. “They’re little jewels,” says designer Sashya Thind Fernandes. The family frequently hosts parties. Says Basu, “I love to cook with people around.” JOYELLE WEST

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