



Ask the EXPERT

I HAVE JUST BOUGHT A VICTORIAN HOUSE IN THE CITY. IT HAS MANY OF ITS ORIGINAL MOLDINGS AND OTHER LOVELY DETAILS, BUT IT NEEDS LOTS OF WORK. I WANT TO HAVE A WHOLE NEW KITCHEN. I'D LIKE A HERITAGE LOOK IN KEEPING WITH THE HOUSE, BUT I CERTAINLY DON'T WANT TO LIVE IN THE OLDEN DAYS. DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS ABOUT HOW I CAN KEEP THE HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF THE HOUSE, BUT ALSO INCLUDE A CONTEMPORARY KITCHEN?

Paul Denys, Denys Builds Designs, answers:

I understand how you feel. In the olden days, kitchens were small, ugly, and hidden at the back of the house. And of course, modern appliances were unheard of. Now families actually celebrate the kitchen and show off its jewel-like appliances and furniture-like cabinetry. Instead of one person labouring for two hours to prepare a meal, now it takes about 20 minutes, and there are often many cooks.

Modern kitchens can have several “stations” where the food is prepped and prepared (that old “work triangle” is dead). Families gather to cook, do schoolwork, relax, do laundry, talk, and entertain – all in that one dynamic work hub. That’s why we often remove those olden-days walls. An open concept allows a good flow of communication from kitchen to other rooms (as well as among family members).

But you can still have the look you want. You can choose moldings, doors, wall treatments and floors that are reminiscent of Victorian times. How far do you want to go with this? If your budget allows, you can make a modern fridge and dishwasher, for

instance, seem to disappear. They slide right into the cabinetry with panels over them that look like part of the cabinetry. (See Universal Appliances in Ottawa.) You can buy beautiful old-fashioned-looking stoves that appear to be pot-bellied or wood cook stoves; but they actually have electric elements. You can even mix your eras, if you want. You can combine that “Victorian” feel with a “50s-update” look by using some of the funky late-50s reproduction appliances on the market. (See Elmira Stove Works and Big Chill).

Actually, in any kitchen I design, I usually ask clients to start with the appliances they want, and then we work the room around them. So this might be the first decision you should make. Will you have



reproduction appliances of another era, or will you go totally modern and let your decorating keep that heritage look? What size will they be? If you want to buy the latest-and-greatest in green, energy-efficient appliances, take a look at induction cooktops that heat the pot but not the stove and cook four times faster than gas (they’ll boil water in less than 60 seconds) with a quarter of the energy.

If you have trouble getting an idea how everything will look, I can make full-size cardboard “models” for you. I do this all the time with my clients. The minute they see a life-sized model of something – for instance, a counter or vanity – that needs to be placed, they can tell right away if it will be “right”. Or if they think they want crown molding and can’t be sure, I’ll actually nail up a section in the room they want to renovate. Seeing and feeling is believing.

Some people think in black and white. They think you have to put traditional with traditional, modern with modern, and so on. I think things are much more interesting when you blur the line between the two and mix things up a bit. I think sometimes you can capture something unique and original this way.



It’s all out there for you, and with a bit of imagination, it can work.

Happy renovating!

For more ideas,
see Paul’s website: www.denys.ca

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