

smart design and gorgeous granite once again rescue four kitchens from their dated looks

by linda barth

photography by
miro dvorscak

Editor's Note: *The March 2003 issue of Houston House & Home featured four kitchens—one each from the '60s, '70s, '80s and '90s—that had the distinctive look of the decade when they were built. The story of how kitchen remodelers Carolyn and Mike Waidhofer of All N' Counters rescued those kitchens from their look of "decadism" struck a chord with our readers: the Waidhofers' phones haven't stopped ringing since. Back by popular demand, here are their latest kitchen transformations—one each from the decades they know oh, so well, in the kitchens they often get called to rescue from the '60s, '70s, '80s and '90s.*



Viana Gold granite makes this Memorial-area kitchen swing into spring beautifully as it reflects the garden beyond the breakfast room.

design beyond the decades

IS YOUR KITCHEN STUCK IN A DECADE?

The '60s: Has Flower Power left its bloom in your kitchen in the form of bright pink or orange laminate countertops? Or maybe your stark white laminate cabinets were inspired by Procol Harum's "Whiter Shade of Pale." While your kitchen may have been groovy in the '60s, is it working for you now?

The '70s: There's dark wood-grained paneling and prepasted vinyl wallpaper in an orange and brown floral print in your '70s kitchen, isn't there? "That '70s Show" is not some nostalgia act, it's happening now in your kitchen. Are you humming K.C. and the Sunshine Band's "That's the Way (Uh-Huh, Uh-Huh) I Like It" in your kitchen? Or do you need a change?

The '80s: All that gray and teal looked so hip back when, but now it seems as time-warped as Sue Ellen Ewing's puffy 3-inch shoulder pads. Bonus points for wallpaper with Southwestern chevrons in teal and peach.

The '90s: Cabinets in light-colored or pickled woods and bright brass hardware stand out against your mauve walls. Could that be the O.J. trial or "Seinfeld" airing on the TV atop your white Corian countertop?

The decades' greatest hits (and misses) in kitchen design keep Carolyn and Mike Waidhofer of All N' Counters in business. With more than 24 years of experience in the design and remodeling business, this husband and wife duo have a keen sense for what can be restored and what should be ignored (or removed) in older kitchens.

Not only can they walk into an unretouched kitchen and "name that decade," they're good at seeing trouble spots that homeowners may not have considered, such as cabinets that are too low, awkwardly sized or placed kitchen islands, or an inefficient work triangle between stove/refrigerator/sink.

The Waidhofers, who redo some 40 kitchens a year, are experts at refreshing serviceable kitchens that have seen better days. The improvements they make can be as large or as small as the homeowners want. "Sometimes, all a homeowner wants is new countertops," says Carolyn. "And sometimes we strip a kitchen down to the studs, totally redesign the cabinetry and change the whole footprint of the kitchen. We work with people on their budgets. If you have perfectly good appliances, we need to work with them."

Because countertops tend to take the most use—and abuse—in the kitchen, updating a kitchen usually means choosing new countertops.

Granite offers the best quality, Carolyn advises her clients.

"Granite lasts forever," she says, "and resists heat, stains and scratches. And it's beautiful. Adding granite, which is a natural stone, to your kitchen is like placing a beautiful gem stone in your home. It has depth and clarity. My clients are always telling me they see new things in their granite countertops every time they look at them."

When clients want new countertops, the Waidhofers recommend Ivan and Dollie Martinez of ICM Marble and Granite, fabricators and installers of quality granite. "I tell my clients who're remodeling their kitchens, 'You do it right, and you do it once,'" Carolyn says. "That means you need to hire the best person out there. Ivan is not the least expensive granite installer out there, and he's not the most expensive, but with him, you'll get the granite you want, and you'll have it done by someone whom I truly believe is the best person out there. He's been in the business for years and is at the top of his form."

Granite with movement—big patterns—is becoming more popular, Carolyn says. But the veining and the patterns have to be matched carefully, especially on the edge of the granite.

For example, the edge of the granite on the cover of this magazine is

actually a separate piece of granite, like molding, but it is so carefully joined to the main slab on the countertop it appears to be one piece. "Ivan matches up the veining beautifully," Carolyn says.

Carolyn and Mike have worked on so many kitchens together with Ivan and Dollie that their team functions very efficiently. Carolyn, a licensed interior designer, works with homeowners to assess how their kitchen could function better, then helps them choose new colors, textures and materials. Mike does most of the work and oversees the rest of the construction required to complete the job.

"Ivan and Carolyn are the creative ones," Dollie says. "They talk with the clients and plan all the details for how the countertops need to fit and function within the overall design scheme for the kitchen. Carolyn and Mike are very practical people, very cost conscious. Mike is good at the hands-on work, removing the old counters and cabinetry and building the new, while I move ICM's projects along and keep us on schedule."

Here are four of the team's recent remodeling projects of kitchens from the '60s, '70s, '80s and '90s. In all of the projects, granite countertops dramatically improved each kitchen's dated look.



after

After: Viara Gold, a new granite from Brazil, warms the look of this Memorial-area kitchen. Larger upper cabinets updated the kitchen and made the counter's work space more accessible.



after

After: Nautical themed tiles accent the backsplash in this Clear Lake kitchen. Pendant lights from Lighting, Inc., make the Giallo Veneziano granite glow.



before

The furdown above the cabinets and vent hood made them too low.



before

Before: The homeowners kept the same cabinet configuration, but tore out the upper cabinets so new ones, along with a vent hood, could be installed.

The '60s kitchen:

A Houston couple with grown children searched for three years before they finally found their dream home in the Memorial area—a classic single-story contemporary built in 1966 with large windows that overlook a pretty yard with oak trees and azaleas. The house, with its classic, clean lines, once belonged to the Japanese consul.

The kitchen has one special architectural feature that makes it spectacular: huge picture windows in the breakfast area meet in a corner without any support or framing so there's an uninterrupted view of the garden. The workhorse area of the kitchen, with sink and stoves, was not as well designed. A large furdown (dropped ceiling covered in Sheetrock above the cabinets) made the cabinets too low, so it was hard to see the work surface of the countertops when preparing food. "To see the back burner of my stove, I had to duck my head," says the wife.

The color of the kitchen was chilly, at best. "Everything was about four different shades of white," the wife says of the house when they moved in. She and her husband had new porcelain tile floors in a warm, earthy tone installed, but that

failed to warm the kitchen up visually. Their countertops were plain white Formica, and they wanted granite. "Our plan was just to do granite countertops," the wife says. So they called Carolyn Waidhofer.

Carolyn pointed out that the furdowns could be removed and the cabinets raised a bit for better access to the counter and cooktop. A fluorescent light box over the counter's main peninsula was blocking the view through the picture windows into the back yard. The light could be removed to open up the kitchen. "Granite is an investment," says the wife, "and with Carolyn's ideas for the cabinets, we decided it didn't make much sense to put granite on 40-year-old cabinets that weren't working very well for us."

The wife's mission was to choose the granite. "I went on the hunt with my sister-in-law," she says. "She told me because of this floor, I should stay with earth tones. We narrowed our choices to three granite samples and took them home. We had a favorite, but we gave the samples to Carolyn for her advice. She called and said the Viara Gold, a new granite from Brazil, was perfect. It was our number one choice, too."

They kept the porcelain floor tiles, which they liked, but did not change the basic configuration of the cabinets. Before the granite went in, Mike removed the furdowns and installed custom cabinets, adding extra molding and other details to the cabinetry. He oversaw the installation of the new backsplash made of slate with satin nickel inserts. He also installed a new sink and convection ovens. Carolyn worked with the homeowners on colors for the cabinetry and walls.

The couple now entertain family, friends and their church group frequently at their home. "The first thing everyone does is come in here [to the kitchen] and rub their hands over the granite and go, 'Ooooh,'" says the wife.

The '70s kitchen:

Linda and Kirk Koepsel live in Clear Lake and love boating, so they knew their kitchen would have a nautical theme. But that was about all they could decide. For three years, Linda carried around samples of granite. "I took them out Christmas-before-last and showed them to my mother, and she said, 'I've seen those,'" Linda says. She called Carolyn Waidhofer and said, "I'm tired of looking, just tell me what to do." Carolyn

suggested the Giallo Veneziano granite for their countertops, and that's what they chose.

Kirk wanted to do the kitchen floor himself. He broke the old tile floor and removed it and installed new sand-colored porcelain tile.

They kept the same configuration of cabinets, but Mike refaced the lower cabinets and installed new upper cabinets and wrought-iron pulls. He also made a custom vent hood using a strip of granite that matches the countertops as an accent piece. Carolyn helped Linda find satin nickel accent tiles with shell motifs for the slate backsplash.

The old kitchen counter was two levels. Carolyn recommended it be one level for a cleaner look and better interaction with the breakfast area. Kitchens are full of sharp, straight lines, so to break up the angularity of the kitchen, she made sure the Koepsels' granite countertop bar curved gently where people sit at the bar. Copper pendant lights from Lighting, Inc. make the granite glow.

Now, when it's suppertime, bowls of gumbo and platters of shrimp glide effortlessly across the granite counter. "What I like about it," says Linda, "is it really hides dirt. There is no maintenance required."



after



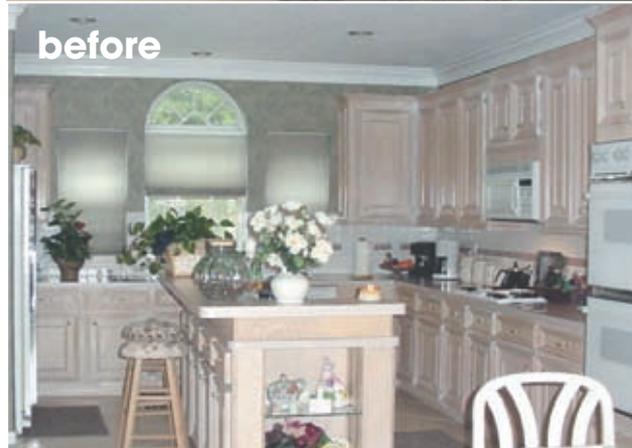
before

After: Moving the refrigerator across the hall (its edge can be seen opposite the island) greatly expanded the work triangle. The Vitoria Reggia granite is an elegant addition to the kitchen. At left is the message center, which replaces a curved stair rail.

Before: The work triangle between refrigerator, sink and cooktop was too small.



after



before

After: The new island looks like a separate piece of furniture. Instead of the microwave over the cooktop, there is now open space and a large decorative medallion on the backsplash. The Verde Labrador granite gleams under a new wrought iron and glass light fixture from Lighting, Inc.

The beige, sand and white tones in this kitchen needed some visual punch. The Formica-covered kitchen island had two levels, which made for an awkward seating arrangement.

The '80s kitchen:

Rick and Gina Halle were at their wits' end when they called All N' Counters for help. They liked the house in Clear Lake where they were living, but the kitchen, which had functioned well when their two children were young, was too small. "The work triangle of refrigerator, sink and stove was too small," Gina says. "I used to be the only one in the kitchen, but now there are four of us in there cooking." They had consulted architects but weren't pleased with any plans. "We were trying to be cost effective, as opposed to having a showy kitchen," Gina says.

Carolyn looked at the kitchen and suggested moving the refrigerator across the hall. In its place now are more counter space and drawers and a microwave mounted above.

Next to the refrigerator is a pantry. Gina found an organizing system with sliding racks and shelves from The Container Store that made her pantry space much more efficient.

Rick and Gina told Carolyn they didn't want granite. "I was going to play it safe and get a knock-off granite look in Formica," Gina says. Carolyn suggested they just take a look at granite. "I asked my husband to join me," Gina says, "and he's

the one who selected the granite." They chose Vitoria Reggia granite. "It just looks so elegant and classic," she says.

The Halles kept most of the same cabinets and were able to match the cabinetry for the counter that replaced the refrigerator. Carolyn found a panel to cover the dishwasher to give the kitchen a cleaner look. Recessed lighting replaced the kitchen's old box lighting.

One small detail that made a difference was changing the end of the stairway, which curved and jutted out into the kitchen. Mike had the stairs straightened so there would be space for a small message center. Now there's a granite-topped cabinet there with a phone and place for keys and notes.

"Carolyn taught me a lot," says Gina. "These changes seem like little stuff, but on a day to day basis my kitchen functions beautifully. We're cooking more at home. The guy at Pizza Hut is wondering what happened to me."

The '90s kitchen:

What started Bob and Brenda Cooper's recent kitchen redo was Bob's desire for a large-screen TV in the family room adjacent to the kitchen. "We took the old TV cabinet out and removed a window to

accommodate the new TV," Brenda says, "so then we had to redo all the wallpaper in the family room and kitchen."

She had been wanting to redo the kitchen of their house built in Pasadena in 1992, anyway. "I think it's important to update your house," she says. "People always update their house at the end before they sell it, but I told my husband, 'I want to live with the updates.'"

They decided it was time for granite countertops, too. They'd known for years that they wanted Verde Labrador granite—they'd seen it at a resort in Mexico and had always wanted it in their kitchen.

They called Cindy Srader of Cynthia's Designs in Shoreacres (281.471.6174) to help with their kitchen décor. Cindy's husband is Ivan's tennis partner, so she called Ivan at ICM to install the countertops. He recommended she also call Carolyn at All N' Counters to help with the design of the cabinetry and countertops.

The first change Carolyn recommended was redoing the old kitchen island, which was covered in a sand-colored Formica. "Its top was two levels," says Carolyn. "You couldn't seat anybody there, and you couldn't see anything."

Cindy redesigned the new island and found the decorative corbels for it on the

Internet. "I wanted it to look like a piece of fine furniture," she says. Mike collaborated with Cindy to implement her designs for the island. A friend of Brenda's from high school, Mary Temple, and Connie Everitt of Friendswood faux-finished the island in shades of green.

A new pendant light from Lighting, Inc. dresses up the kitchen, as do new wrought-iron pulls and hinges. "My early '90s shiny brass hardware looked dated," says Brenda.

She praises the Waidhofers' work. "What I like about Carolyn and Mike is that their prices are very reasonable," Brenda says. "What's nice about their people is that they clean up as they go along." Her kitchen functions much better now, she says, and the granite is beautiful.

"The island is a masterpiece," says Carolyn.

"It's a 'wow' kitchen," says Cindy.

This month's cover story is sponsored by ICM Marble and Granite. Their shop and showroom are open by appointment. Please call 281.242.9009. Carolyn and Mike Waidhofer at All N' Counters may be reached at 281.326.2237.