



FAITHFUL

A Clinton kitchen addition remains true
to the home's 1837 origin

THE HOUSE THAT PATTIE AND CHUCK BIERWIRTH BOUGHT IN 1986 HAD come a long way from its farmhouse roots. Built in 1837 as a two-room abode for the farmhands who once worked the original 100-plus-acre property, it had suffered through numerous additions that resulted in what Pattie Bierwirth

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OAK CEILING BEAMS salvaged from a Pennsylvania farmhouse give this country kitchen its authentic look. **SOURCES:** cherry farm table, Rotondo Cabinetry in Pittstown; oak chairs, Valley Furniture Shop in Watchung.

■ The homeowners preserved the historic feel of their kitchen as well as the view into their backyard by opting for a downdraft ventilation system with the island's cooktop (above) instead of a range hood. **SOURCES:** center island, Rotondo Cabinetry in Pittstown; cooktop, Miele.

■ Homeowner Pattie Bierwirth wasn't sure what she wanted to do with the backsplash, so she used her artistic skills to paint faux tiles (left) above the countertops. They look real until examined up close.



CHERRY FLOORS repeat the wood used in earlier portions of the house. **SOURCE:** ovens, Miele.

called "a mishmash of styles."

When the couple decided in 1998 to expand the Clinton Township residence once again, they felt it was important that the renovations reflected the home's history. "I wanted a very simple country feel to it because I didn't want to deviate from the original feel of the house," Pattie Bierwirth said. And nowhere in the dwelling did they capture that farmhouse ambiance better than in their country-style kitchen.

The Bierwirths had considered renovating the kitchen within its existing footprint, but their architect, Susan Rochelle, convinced the couple to put the new kitchen and family room on the slab where the garage once stood. That garage, which was part of an addition, "really changed the character of the house," said the architect, whose firm is Susan Rochelle, AIA (American Institute of Architects) in Alexandria Township. "It made it look 1960s

split-levelish." So the Bierwirths built a new garage, tore down the old one, and reused its foundation for the 1998 addition. (The old kitchen, much smaller, was dismantled and became part of the foyer.)

To give the new living space its authentic air, the Bierwirths chose their materials with care, especially the 200-year-old oak beams that span the ceilings of the kitchen and adjacent family room. The seven beams — the longest of which is 22 feet and weighs close to 600 pounds — were salvaged from an old Pennsylvania farmhouse. "Those beams keep the scale of the room down and more in keeping with what would have been original," said Rochelle, who worked on the interior and exterior renovations. "It's the placement of the beams, though, that make it read as though it had been the original structure." In addition, the kitchen floors and cabinets are cherry, the same wood used for

some of the home's vintage floors.

Of course, the kitchen is filled with cutting-edge conveniences such as the Miele cooktop and combination conventional-convection ovens. A little more modern technology allowed the Bierwirths to maintain the historic look of the room. Instead of installing a range hood over the center island stovetop, the Bierwirths opted for a downdraft ventilation system that rises from behind the burners at the touch of a button; it leaves their view of the back yard unobstructed. Just beyond the large casement window over the sink are fruit trees, colorful perennials, and a large sculpture made from found objects.

Pattie Bierwirth, an artist and floral designer, used her talents to complete the room's look. She sewed the plaid swags for the windows and stenciled murals that depict birds lingering among raspberry branches. The backsplash is another example of her handiwork: faux-painted stone tiles that closely mimic the genuine articles. "It was one of those things where I wasn't sure what I wanted, so I put up something that would replicate what I wanted," she said. "I stayed with it because I'm busy and really haven't had time to pick out tiles."

Bierwirth said the kitchen is exactly what she and her husband had hoped for, but she still considers it a work in progress. "When you're trying to put together your kitchen after a major renovation, you just want to do something to get it livable. Then you go through the next couple of years really figuring out what you want." ■

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AS SEEN IN

NEW JERSEY'S HOME & DESIGN MAGAZINE
designNJ

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2004