

TRANSITIONS DESIGNS



PHOTO: J. BRENT REEVES

Transitions Designs' owner Valarie Mina says the main problem with the "before" kitchen pictured here was not its size, but its color and cabinetry. Dark enough to suggest perpetual shadow, the cabinets stopped short of the ceiling, leaving wasted space above. Open shelves on the island were so impractical that cookbooks placed there were always knocked to the floor; the clients were reduced to using the shelves for their kids' toys.

The remodel had to keep the existing flooring, footprint and plumbing. Mina, an Industry Member of the National Kitchen and Bath Association and a Senior Designer at the famed Expo Design Center in Laguna Niguel for six years before opening Transitions Designs in 2009, began by collaborating with the clients – she'd done their master bathroom a year before – to help them determine a budget.

"Most homeowners have never redesigned a kitchen, so it's hard for them to know what's appropriate cost-wise for the desired level of quality," she says. "For most clients, spending appropriately is important to them. You make your choices thoughtfully because the money only spends one time."

Mina began by selecting glazed eggshell-white cabinets, including the pantry cabinets in the adjacent dining nook, to extend completely to the room's tall ceiling. It increased storage space and brightened the room, an effect augmented by back-lit opaque glass inserts in the top transom

cabinets. The new furniture-style island was longer and much more functional than its predecessor, with one end elevated to create a conversation area as well as provide easy access to a wine refrigerator below.

As good as those improvements were, Mina knew it needed something very special to reach the next level. One of her favorite pastimes is walking through a particular granite yard in Anaheim. With cabinet samples and photos from adjacent rooms in hand (Mina strives to make designs cohesive with the whole home), she wandered the yard until she found a piece of "drop-dead gorgeous" Fusion-colored granite that she instantly knew would be perfect for the countertops.

"While many man-made countertop materials are lovely and improving to the point that they're giving granite a run for its money, when I saw this piece of stone, it reminded me that the 'artwork' nature provides is difficult to compete with," she says.

Once the countertop was chosen, selection of colors for the rest of the kitchen came easily: slate blue for the island, walls, and dining nook, and buttery yellow tile backsplashes punctuated with the occasional slate blue tile. Final touches of under-cabinet lighting, pendant lights over the island, plus the transformation of the open area between the dining nook's pantry cabinets into a window seat with storage, made this formerly dark, dysfunctional kitchen into a bright, beautiful,



practical workspace.

Although Mina is a full-service designer, she has a special liking for both kitchen and bath remodels. Her bath specialty is custom showers with multiple water features such as body sprays and rain showers: "I learned early how to figure valve requirements and other mechanical aspects unique to bathrooms," she says. "It requires a level of understanding that doesn't really appeal to many designers, but I always found it interesting. I think that's why I'm one of the few designers who really enjoys doing bath remodels."

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