

The Greening of the Kitchen

A glimpse into three dream kitchens and the little things that make some greener than others.

A HARROWSMITH COUNTRY LIFE STAFF REPORT

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL WALLACE

For at least a couple of generations now, the kitchen has been much more than a workaday space in which meals are prepared. It has graduated to be the most lavishly appointed room in the house, replete with stylish and expensive indulgences and a host of gadgets and gizmos designed not only to make short work of cooking chores, but also to impress guests. Admittedly, modern kitchens often border on decadence. So is a green kitchen an oxymoron?

Yes and no.

A green kitchen is hard to define. In fact, it's best described as a matter of degree. Think about it: The greenest kitchen is the one you already have now. By eschewing improvements of any kind, you aren't putting any undue demands on the Earth's resources. However, older examples are rarely suited to the kitchen's current exalted status as the heart of the home, nor are they particularly energy-efficient, so who can blame the enthusiast for dreaming of something new? Surely there's a middle ground, one that satisfies the wishful renovator without overlooking the eco-ethic.

The truth is that there is no such thing as a green kitchen. It's just that some are greener than others.

Everything Old Is New Again

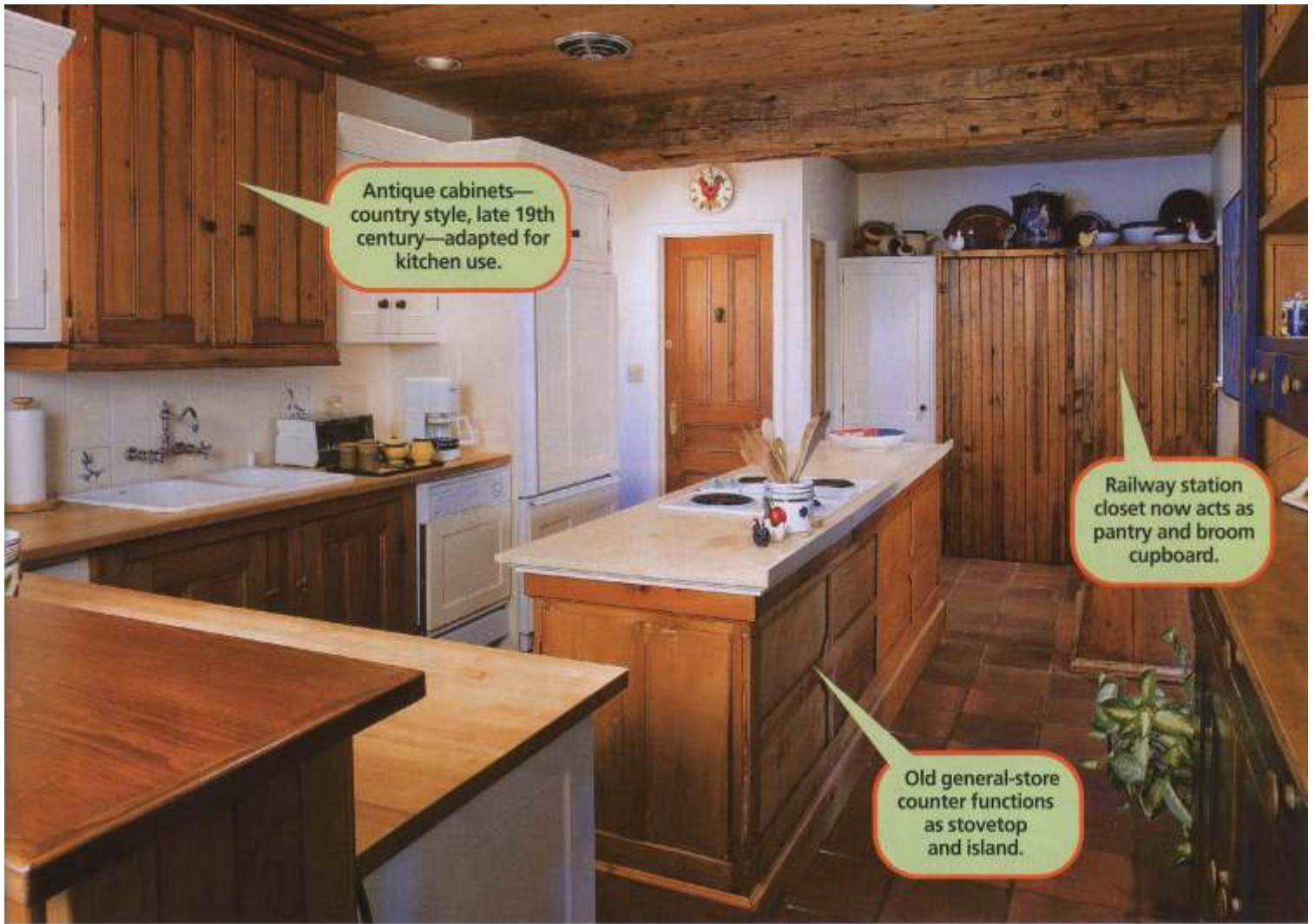
Antique collectors don't necessarily think of themselves as recyclers, but that's exactly what they are when they put vintage things to new use. When Pat and Verne McKay were toying with ideas for their new kitchen, they didn't exactly have the green ethic in mind, but by incorporating antique furnishings into their plans, their efforts certainly qualify.

The McKays live in a rambling timber-frame home whose structural components were salvaged from several century-old barns in 1986. The organization of various rooms was largely determined by the footprints of these massive 12-by-12-inch posts and beams, but even so, Pat was bewildered by the small size of the kitchen when she and Verne bought the place in 1996. In short order, the couple decided it was time to remove a partition wall and make it bigger and better suited to entertaining. An avid Canadiana collector, Pat thought to enliven and personalize the new design with extensive use of antiques.

Central to the composition is a nine-foot-long island lifted straight from an old general store. Set on a higher base to bring it up to practical height for chopping and other kitchen chores, the old antique was capped with a limestone counter and fitted with a cooktop. Below, the ample old drawers are filled with odds and ends and there is even room to accommodate the workings of the downdraft fan.

Meanwhile, the sink fits into the base of a vintage pine cupboard while above it, a complementary top takes centre stage amid upper cabinetry. New cabinetry borrows its cornice profile from the old cupboard. But that's not all: At the opposite end of the kitchen, the pantry and broom cupboard were borrowed from an old railway station. Add it all up and Pat reduced the need for new cabinetry by about one-half.





Antique cabinets—country style, late 19th century—adapted for kitchen use.

Railway station closet now acts as pantry and broom cupboard.

Old general-store counter functions as stovetop and island.



Expanded floor area finished with extra ceramic tile found in basement.



KITCHEN DESIGN: MOYA MCPHAIL, PORT HOPE, ON
 INSTALLATION AND CONSTRUCTION: JOHN GARDINER, DUFFIN CONTRACTING, AJAX, ON