



Vicki James prizes the efficiency and beauty of the newly remodeled kitchen in her Eugene ranch home. The ardent baker (note long wood bread riser from the 1700s on countertop) loves underlighting beneath the quartersawn oak cabinets for bright working surfaces on black honed-granite countertops.

# A simply tasteful kitchen

Baker at heart turns “frustrating” space into one of warmth, beauty and refined elegance.

By Kelly Fenley  
Photos by Kelly Lyon  
THE REGISTER-GUARD

At first look, the remodeled kitchen at Vicki James’ ranch home in Eugene appears ordinary enough: galley style with the usual spots for countertops and cabinets.

Aha, but look closer at this refined little bakery, and it’s a treat for the eyes, too.

Turns out those old-fashioned “library” looking cabinets, as James calls them, are more like works from Arts & Crafts days: quartersawn oak with flush-inset doors and drawers. Glass panes reveal her pottery collections and jars of home-canned tomatoes inside.

Beneath the cabinets, LED string lights brighten black, honed-granite countertops; daylight from deep-well skylights shines upon white subway wall tiles.

A deep, white farmhouse sink makes her “want to bathe a baby,” and the lively red-oak floor has “a living feel to it,” James muses.

Her old kitchen, dark and confined, had left her frustrated. Now her daily cooking and baking is like therapy, James says.

On a gray January day like this one, the recently retired RN may kindle a fire in the adjacent family room’s wood stove and either bake something — cookies, cakes, pastries — or brew veggies from her sprawling organic garden.

“The fire going and me making a pot of soup, that’s where I’m happy,” she says.

The remodel certainly has struck a chord on Rainbow Valley Design & Construction’s website, says Alec Dakers, who orchestrated the project as a designer with the Eugene firm.

Many kitchens may have more bells and whistles, he says, but few surpass James’ for timeless and subtle elegance.

“When you look at this kitchen, it doesn’t



Deep farmhouse sink mounts under honed granite countertops.

scream out at you as something extremely special,” Dakers continues. “It’s not like one of those ‘look at me’ kitchens. But everything about it is done in the highest quality possible.”

### Same footprint

The difference between old and remodeled kitchen is night and day, James says, yet without any “new” space added other than extended countertops from where old ovens and a pocket-door wall had been.

Rainbow Valley also remodeled the home’s family room and a bathroom, with the kitchen’s cost at about \$56,000 of that, Dakers estimates.

Overall the years have been kind to James’ ranch house, which debuted on Eugene’s old Tour of Homes in 1959. But the kitchen had become funky, what with stepping up to a double layer of dark floors, overall disrepair and far too little counter space for a baker who loves to entertain.

“People gather in the kitchen, that’s what they do,” James says while stand-

ing in her dining room. “You have a room full of people, and they’re out here (in the dining room) for like 3 seconds, and then they move into the kitchen. There was no space for that.”

### Classy details

So Dakers and team started over with Old World elements crafted around modern luxuries, namely a chef-grade Wolf gas range and stainless-steel fridge.

Art in their own right, the cabinets bear precision framing by the Cabinet Factory in Eugene. Doors and drawers mount flush against the cabinet boxes rather than overlapping them, so it’s thin air space — not wood — that trims each opening.

The cabinets have a “green” side, too, with the boxes made of formaldehyde-free plywood by a company in Klamath Falls. Red oak for both the cabinet faces and the kitchen’s floor came from a sustainably managed forest in the U.S., Dakers says.



Original kitchen was cramped for countertop space, in part due to stacked ovens, top right, and wall by opening to the dining room.

Rainbow Valley Design & Construction

More quartersawn oak framing conceals the range’s air vent, and, for that matter, one other appliance is missing altogether.

“I didn’t want a dishwasher,” James says. “I’m not a person who uses a dishwasher. I like to get my hands in soapy water.”

She did have a dishwasher space framed in next to the kitchen sink, but for now she has a baking rack — built by boyfriend Ted Campbell — that slides in and out of the recess.

“It’s also an extension of space,” James says in regard to the oak rack.


“And it’s a little lower than the countertops, which for my height makes it easier to work on.”

If her pottery collections and artworks look pretty as a picture on shelves and inside glass cabinets, that’s the point. “We really designed the kitchen around her collections,” Dakers says.

In part, James says, she avoids cabinet clutter — cereal boxes, canned goods, etc. — by harvesting so much directly from her garden. But she’s also a fastidious organizer.

“It’s so functional,” she says. “To take that space, which was so frustrating for a cook, and make it into something that works so well, and that’s pleasant to be in ... it’s my favorite spot.”

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## At the home show

Companies specializing in home improvement will be in the Good HOME pavilion at Good Earth Home, Garden & Living Show at the fairgrounds in Eugene Friday through Sunday. Rainbow Valley Design & Construction, featured in the story above, will be in booth number 218.



Where a dishwasher ordinarily would have gone, James kept the space open for a pull-out rack with marble top for preparing pastries. The cabinets also include shelves for her cookbooks, left.



New view from dining room to kitchen and family room, also recently remodeled, beyond.