



(Left) This long, narrow corridor was once a butler's pantry but is now a convenient work area for the Sigillos. It houses a double oven and an extra sink. (Right) A black soapstone sink is the signature Victorian feature of this elegant kitchen, and is beautifully offset by curvaceous reproduction fixtures.

feature wainscoting, mahogany woodwork, elegant brass fixtures and wallpaper borders—all original to parlors, but not to kitchens. Bringing these features into the kitchen is a way to integrate its design with other rooms in the house, as you will see in the following three restoration projects.

#### DAVID AND JANE SIGILLO

Creating a kitchen style that would harmoniously blend with other rooms in a Victorian home was the challenge faced by Amee McNamara, a kitchen designer with Black Dog Builders, Inc. in Salem, New Hampshire. "Victorian homeowners are searching for a lost aesthetic, since contemporary kitchen appliances have lost their beauty," says McNamara, who designed a kitchen for David and Jane Sigillo of Methuen, Massachusetts. "Victorian style brings beauty back to product design." But McNamara is practical about the limitations of Victorian style. "You must pay homage to Victorian design, but not to the extent that you end up with a kitchen that does not function."

The 1998 remodeling of the Sigillo kitchen presented McNamara with

some formidable design challenges. "It was the worst of 1950s kitsch—the prototypical 'Craftsman' kitchen, with knotty pine cupboards and gingerbread trim. The previous owners had gotten rid of every vestige of Victorian style."

"The kitchen had been badly chopped up," she continues. "A lot of the original molding had been torn down and the butler's pantry had been gutted." What remained was an awkward work area, where the kitchen had been pushed into the narrow corridor of the butler's pantry, leaving the Sigillos with a non-functional workspace.

The original tin ceiling had been covered up with a suspended acoustic tile ceiling that dropped its height from 9 feet to 7 feet. The Sigillos wanted a classic Victorian tin ceiling in their kitchen, but since the old tin was water damaged, they had to have a new tin ceiling installed.

Likewise, the original oak floors had been covered with linoleum. The century-old wood was badly stained and gashed. In this case, however, they were able to restore the old floor by refinishing it, but leaving much of the

wear and tear intact. "It definitely has a charm about it," says McNamara. "By keeping the stains and nail holes, we gave it the patina of age."

Although the kitchen has modern appliances that make no apology for their 1998 vintage, the Sigillos made a few design choices that emphasized Victorian aesthetics over practicality. That's seen in their choice of a kitchen sink made of soapstone, a dull black material not commonly used in modern sinks. "The soapstone sink is a beautiful feature and many Victorian kitchens had it," says McNamara. "I studied the design of this sink, copied it and had it built for the Sigillos."

Although fully functional, a soapstone sink requires a lot of upkeep to retain its appearance. For that reason, most people don't choose it. "People of this era want kitchen appliances to look bright and shiny," says Amee. "Soapstone can be dull and gray, and doesn't usually appeal to modern sensibilities." But it appealed to the Sigillos, who view the soapstone sink as their kitchen's showcase Victorian feature.

## Great Victorian Kitchens

Three homeowners bring yesteryear's style to thoroughly modern kitchens.

BY SUZANNE NORTHINGTON

Owners of Victorian homes often want an authentic Victorian kitchen, but they probably would be unhappy if they got it. Far from being the warm family-gathering place of folklore, middle-class Victorian kitchens were stark, utilitarian places used only by servants. They were considered "dirty" places, filled with wood smoke and cooking odors, and were rarely used by the family. Devoid of aesthetic inspiration, the handworking rooms were where the rough household tasks were carried out.

Even in the late-19th century, the

Victorian kitchen was isolated from the rest of the house, not unlike the way in which sofas were detached from the home. A long butler's pantry would divide the kitchen from the dining room, as a way of further separating this functional space from the home's formal rooms.

The typical Victorian kitchen contained only two appliances—a wood-burning stove, usually made of black cast iron, and a sink, with water supplied by a hand pump. Other common features included a fireplace, the butler's pantry and the back servant's stairway, pantries and open shelving

were common features, but cabinetry was sparse.

"If the truth be known, no one would want a Victorian kitchen," laughs Dyle Fortino, citing their obvious impracticality. Fortino, the owner of a mid-19th century home in Lincoln Park, Illinois, faced the challenge of restoring her old Victorian kitchen into a functional space. "The dining kitchen we think of as Victorian in style didn't come into being until the 1920s. It is these kitchens that homeowners want to recreate."

Indeed, it is the early 20th-century "old country kitchen" that we typically think of as Victorian—what warm, homely place where the daily drama of family life is played out. "When I remodelled my kitchen," says Fortino, "I was thinking of a family kitchen, with children running down the stairs, the smell of cookies baking, a big table for the family to gather around and Christmas stockings hanging on the kitchen stairway."

Likewise, when Jon and Janice Garthoff renovated the kitchen in their Santa Ana, California, home, they wanted to create a social hearth for family and friends. "Our old kitchen table is the centerpiece for great kitchen parties," says Jon. "Our lives revolve around this table—it's where we have all our meals and social gatherings."

Modern homeowners also view kitchen renovation as a way to share off Victorian style, even if it means incorporating Victorian embellishments from other rooms of the house. For example, modern Victorian kitchens often



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(Left) Cream-colored pine woodwork surrounds the windows and emulates the color of woodwork in the rest of David and Jane Sigillo's home. The wood floor is original to the house, and was salvaged through meticulous removal of overlaid linoleum.