

# nesting

## BEFORE & AFTER



Photos by SUSAN GILMORE

Marge Brchan wanted an accessible kitchen that didn't look institutional. "I wanted [it] to be warm and welcoming," she said.



The kitchen includes a two-tier countertop for working while standing or seated.



The wall oven is set at countertop level, with locking shelves, for added safety.



"There's no space in my kitchen I can't reach," Brchan said.

Accessibility is the key ingredient in a townhouse kitchen makeover.

By KIM PALMER  
kim.palmer@startribune.com

**The challenge:** Marge Brchan is a gourmet cook, but it was becoming increasingly difficult for her to navigate the kitchen of her Blaine townhouse. Brchan has facioscapulohumeral disease, a type of muscular dystrophy, which affects her balance and



**Brown**

her ability to lift things or walk without assistance. The disease is progressive, and she'd reached the point she could no longer cook

without the help of her husband, Dale.

**The designer:** Susan E. Brown, Susan E. Brown Interior Design, St. Paul, 651-330-8707, www.susanebrown.com.

**The goal:** Brchan needed a kitchen that accommodated her physical limitations — without announcing them. "Cooking is something I love to do," she said. "But I detest institutional-looking kitchens. I wanted my kitchen to be warm and inviting."

**An investment in healthy aging:** Initially, the Brchans intended to make a few modest changes. But as they explored their options, they ultimately decided to gut the kitchen and start from scratch. Marge, who retired three years ago from a career in nursing and health care policy, realized that a workable kitchen was an important investment in her long-term health. "The key components of healthy aging are nutrition, social interaction and exercise," she said. "When you can do home cooking, you're eating less packaged food. You're socializing, entertaining family and friends, and you're getting exercise. It combined all these components of positive living and quality of life. I was preaching but not following. It took me a while."

**Safety first:** Safety and functionality were high on the list of priorities for the Brchans' new kitchen. "She has a lot of unique needs," Brown said of Marge. Sometimes she loses muscle strength without warning, which can pose a safety hazard when lifting hot, heavy pans out of the oven. Brown designed the kitchen with a wall oven at countertop height, with locking oven shelves, as a precaution should Marge lose control of a hot casserole.

**Accessible storage:** Rollout and pull-down inserts in drawers and cabinets gave Marge easier access to their contents. Brown also increased storage in Marge's "prime real estate" areas — the lower shelf in upper cabinets and the top drawers in lower cabinets. She now has more accessible storage space in those key areas than she had in her entire kitchen before the makeover, she said.



**BEFORE:** The kitchen had become increasingly difficult for Brchan to use.

**Functional plan:** The Brchans needed efficient work spaces with countertop areas that could be used for different tasks, such as baking or salad prep. "Work areas flow from one to the other," Marge said, and there's room for guests to gather in the kitchen while she's cooking. A two-tiered counter surface offers additional versatility, allowing her to work on her laptop or do food prep while standing or seated. "She's so active, despite her disabilities," Brown said. "She has a lot of hobbies."

**Eliminating barriers:** All areas needed to accommodate Marge's walker, should she need to use it, or a wheelchair if one becomes necessary. The flooring also needed to be walker-friendly. Tile was out, because of its hard uneven surface. "She needed something with a bit of cush," Brown said, but not tacky or slippery. They settled on wood-look laminate.

**Color compromise:** In choosing colors, the couple had very different preferences. "His favorite color is green. Mine is blue," Marge said. "I like primary colors. He goes to more muted colors." But Brown came up with a palette that pleased both of them. "They thought it would be difficult to integrate their ideas on color, but I thought it was an opportunity," she said. The center island is painted deep blue, while the walls are sage green. Both hues harmonize with the maple cabinets, the Brazilian granite countertop with its gold and charcoal tones, and the burgundy backsplash, done in glass tile to reflect light.

**The result:** Marge now has the accessible kitchen she needs to keep on cooking. "Everything is workable for me, and very handy," she said. "There's no space in my kitchen I can't reach." She no longer has to recruit Dale every time she pulls out a recipe. "I can cook without him now. He loves it. He was tired of hearing me ask, 'Can you help me with this?' ... And everybody loves the way it looks," she added. "People would not know it's accessible."

Kim Palmer • 612-673-4784

## close to home *Adding fun and utility to your living space*

### Passion for bungalows

Bungalow owners will share their vintage gems at the **Twin Cities Bungalow Club Home Tour** on May 9. The five houses, open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., feature classic bungalow qualities, such as built-in oak bookcases and buffets, Arts and Crafts architectural details and vintage light fixtures. Tour homes will showcase attics converted into master suites, remodeled kitchens and finished basements.

Bungalow enthusiasts can gather ideas on updating or rehabbing their own spaces to complement the Craftsman qualities of this early 1900s architectural style. The tour starts at 5101 44th Av. S., Mpls. Cost is \$5; members free. Go to [www.bungalowclub.org](http://www.bungalowclub.org) or call 612-724-5816.

### T.P. Healy tour

Theron Potter Healy was nicknamed the "King of the Queen Anne," a nod to

some of the recognizable grand homes he designed and built in the 1890s that now face I-35W in south Minneapolis. A **Preserve Minneapolis T.P. Healy Walking Tour** on May 9 will showcase 21 of Healy's architectural beauties — you'll also get an inside look at two of them — that he built between 1886 and 1905 in the Lowry Hill East neighborhood. On the tour is a classic Healy barn, which was converted into a house in 1908. The walking tour is from 10 a.m. to noon May 9 and spans 12 blocks displaying his houses, as well as those of other early 1900s master builders. Meet at Mueller Park, 2509 Colfax Av. S., Mpls. Cost is \$9. To register, go to [www.preserveminneapolis.org/wpfile/tours](http://www.preserveminneapolis.org/wpfile/tours).

### Support fair trade

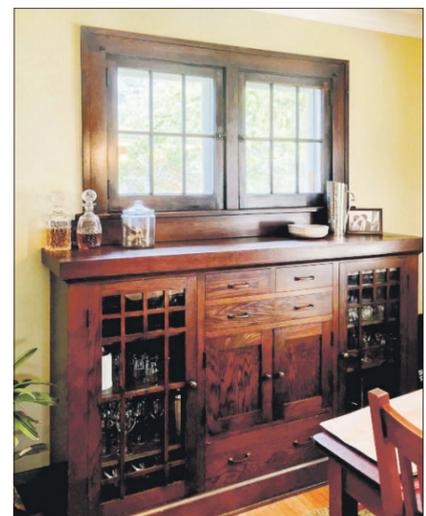
Are you a proponent of fair trade? Ten Thousand Villages, a fair-trade retailer of artisan-crafted home decor and gifts, is par-

ticipating in **World Fair Trade Day** on May 9. It's the largest fair-trade event in North America, with about 100,000 people attending nearly 1,000 events around the U.S. and Canada to promote fair trade and the campaign for trade justice with farmers, workers and artisans. Stop by Ten Thousand Villages for prize giveaways, games for kids, food product samples, jewelry discounts and temporary tattoos, during store hours, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. at 3825 W. 50th St., Mpls. For more details, call 612-920-3659 or go to [www.tenthousandvillages.com](http://www.tenthousandvillages.com).

### Warm up your yard

Gertens is holding free **DIY Outdoor Fireplace workshops** demonstrating how to build a stone fireplace and patio in your back yard, 11 a.m. May 9 and 16, 5500 Blaine Av. Inver Grove Heights. Call 651-450-1501 or go to [www.gertens.com](http://www.gertens.com).

LYNN UNDERWOOD



Get an inside look at five charming bungalows on the Twin Cities Bungalow Club tour May 9.

Provided photo