



Fireplace in new kitchen sheds its warmth on author Rose Wilder Lane and the puppies, in breakfast room two steps above.

COME INTO MY KITCHEN

by ROSE WILDER LANE

My little farmhouse, when I bought it, was close to a lazy country road. There was room for only one rosebush beside the path that came up to the porch steps. The porch, no more than a stoop in an angle of the walls, thriftily sheltered two doors, but the living-room door was never opened; everyone came straight past it into the kitchen.

The house measured 23' x 24'. The genius of those unnoticed New England farmers, who invented modern functional architecture, had put into that small space a living room, dining room, kitchen, three upstairs bedrooms and a storeroom that had become a bathroom, and had made them all seem spacious. A bay window brought outdoors into the dining room, and the narrow porch roof continued over a lean-to, widening the kitchen.

A coal shed was behind the kitchen, a longer tool shed beyond that. A pass-through and one kitchen door opened into a walled-off corner of the coal shed which served as a pantry, and another kitchen door opened directly into the coal shed.

That winter the snowbanks buried my house to the upstairs window, and stayed seven weeks. The house was its coziest, the pantry and cellar supplied food bountifully and the coal lasted, but getting rid of the ashes nearly drove me crazy. Finally I followed a neighbor's advice and threw them out of an upstairs window, and before the frozen pile was hacked and hauled away next spring I was buying an oil space-heater and a bottled-gas range. Then with my own startled muscles I mixed and poured a concrete floor in the emptied coal shed (got it level, too, well, *almost* level) and named that room "the back kitchen." I put a refrigerator and cupboards into it.

Because the house backs into a hillside, the back-kitchen floor was dug in lower than the ground outside. Two stones formed steps up to the back door, opening into a roofed space flatteringly called the back porch. It had no floor and somehow was always muddy. From it, another stone step went up to the tool shed; its earthen floor was usually muddy, too.

Well, I had read Thoreau and I was living a simple life, but you know how it is. Every woman in every house is always dreaming [continued on page 98]



WOMAN'S DAY STUDIO



In the work area, also brick-floored, woodwork is knotty pine; range is built into the tile counter top, the oven into a wall.



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Dr. Scholl's
FOOT POWDER

Come into My Kitchen

Continued from page 61

of making it over. So, looking from my little kitchen at the back kitchen's almost level floor, and the refrigerator, and the honeysuckle vine that had got in somehow and was wandering palely over the cupboards, I often thought: If the pantry were gone, I wonder how big? I do like a big kitchen. That west wall all windows; afternoon sunshine flooding in. A sunny big kitchen, with a fireplace. Knotty pine, red-checked gingham. Oh, well. But just to take down a wall and put in some windows; that wouldn't be much, would it?

Let me say emphatically: never undertake any building without first engaging a good architect. He will save you money. He will get you a reliable contractor. They will prepare blueprints, specifications, estimates, contracts to be approved by your attorney. Then arrange financing with your banker. Then build. All sensible persons do this because it is the only sensible thing to do.

What I did was to say to a good friend, an expert carpenter, "Al, I've got an idea. Come look at the back kitchen. Couldn't we...?"

Of course we could. So we moved the refrigerator to an idle wall plug in the living room, where it remained for months and months, with boxes and baskets of dishes and glasses and pots and pans and stacks of bowls, the electric mixer and porcelain door knobs and window frames and new doors and planks and finally cans of paint and brushes and George Wetmore's plasterer's tools and bags of plaster and I don't know what all. Some Pyrex casseroles haven't found their lids yet.

Elsie Jackson, my friend the English journalist, then my hapless house guest, was surprised when Al came with his tools. In England, she said, you send for the masons first. Carpenters come last to do any interior woodwork. All of us were more than surprised when the pantry wall proved to be brick. It supported a log beam that kept the upstairs from crashing on our heads. A pillar to hold that weight would be six feet from any wall of my dream kitchen.

"Okay," I said. "Put a pillar there, and we'll think of something to explain it. Crossbeams, maybe?" Thus Al's suffering began, and I must say it became more than any sane man, justly proud of good workmanship, should be asked to bear. He stood it nobly.

While he fought the problem of putting sliding windows into that west wall, no inch of which was square or plumb, Frank Lattin and his helper came. Frank had put the fireplaces into the living and dining room. The house walls slant so that the chimneys are nearly a foot wider at top than at bottom. Frank tackles anything, and does it well: detective work and driving transcontinental trucks, stonework and brickwork, and special police work at the Danbury Fair. He said, sure, he'd put a fireplace into that rear wall.

"I'll enjoy the change," he said. "I've been laying brick floors, acres of 'em, if you can believe it; the man wanted them laid right through his house and on outdoors."

"Brick floors, that's what I want!" I cried. "Bricks, level, all over this concrete. Can you do it?"

"Didn't you tell me you wanted a wide plank floor?" Al asked. Frank said, yes, level; but not level with the other house floors, not unless they took up the con-

crete. Bricks on the concrete would make this floor inches higher. But break up that six inches of strong concrete, my own proud achievement? Firmly, I said, "This will be a split-level house. Lay the bricks on the concrete."

A faint misgiving came to me when the first thousands of bricks arrived. "Should they be common bricks?" I asked. "Shouldn't they be glazed or something?"

"Look," Frank said, "You want this room to be Colonial, right?"

"I don't care whether it's Colonial," I said. "I just want a brick floor."

"Brick floors are Colonial," he told me, "and Colonial is common brick, so common bricks are what you want." At the time this seemed to me logical, perhaps because Frank, big, brawny, sun-browned, towers over me.

Accepting common bricks, I asked, "What do we do to them, wax them?"

Frank didn't know but the man for whom he had laid those acres of bricks knew, of course, how to finish them. Frank would ask him when he returned from Maine, where he had gone hunting.

So the bricks went down, and as their rosy-brown-mauve colors spread over the gray concrete, we all went mad about bricks. They inspired me. I thought of opening the tool-shed wall and making that shed a pantry and a little hall, brick-floored, with brick steps beside the fireplace going up to the pantry. And why not take out the whole east wall; hold up the ceiling there with a brick pillar; floor that muddy back porch with bricks and make it a breakfast room, with dish cupboards and a door into the little new hall? And from that hall, yes and from the living room, too, brick walks should go to the driveway, rosy bricks on either side of (let's hope) a green lawn under the old apple tree.

The brick floors spread. Al got those west windows in, walls came crashing down; the fireplace and the brick pillar and a brick divider rose. Stanley and Henry Parzuchowski, whose families are my old friends, brought a friend of theirs to help put lath on the ceiling. The refrigerator stayed in the living room; the gas range stood aghast in the chaos; everything you wanted was somewhere else; but morning and afternoon Elsie and I produced cups and cookies for coffee breaks and they were jolly. The knotty pine came and was going onto the walls; the stainless-steel sink came (I always wanted a stainless-steel sink) and lay in its crate in the living room; the electrician didn't come but the wall oven did; more and more thousands of bricks came; Fridays came, and the bills.

I began this enterprise sternly, keeping precise record of every penny spent, but don't ask me what it all cost. Somewhere near the middle the figures scared me so that I couldn't bear thinking of them, and stopped. Blindly and breathlessly I wrote checks as long as I could, and then I said to Joe Cimbora, the magical plumber who made every hot-water faucet in the house gush hot water almost instantly, "Joe," I said, "could you wait till I can get more money?"

"Sure," he said, "I know you're good pay," and he sold me a dishwasher and a water softener. Then suddenly my faithful old artesian well went dry. I had to have another well drilled, 250 feet deep. Joe put a submersible pump in it and the well-driller said, "Pay me any time."

The rest was a sort of—well, yes, on the whole—happy delirium. Bits of it I remember:

Once, coming into the turmoil, staring up at a maze of BX cables and Emil

Halas's hands busy among them, and saying, "Gracious, Emil, do you put those in by the mile?"

Glancing down from the stepladder he said, "No, by the foot."

"How many feet?"

"I can tell you exactly." He took a slip of paper from a pocket. "To now, 3,286."

My helpless rage growing hotter while, day after day, I was taught that all manufacturers make all kitchen counters and appliances one "standard" 36" high, though any idiot knows that all women are not the same height.

The rapture of finding one, only one, count it, one good dishwasher that will go under a 33" high counter.

My moment of horrid smugness at the telephone. "If you're still insisting on a 33" dishwasher," said the salesman, "you can't have it. There isn't one made." "Oh, thank you for telephoning," I said so sweetly. "But please don't bother any more. I have one."

The long-awaited day when that man came home from Maine and Frank asked him what he had done to those acres of bricks. "I didn't do anything to them," he said. "I sold the house."

Then the weeks of writing letters, telephoning, driving around New England, asking, "What should I put on common brick floors?" I saw brick floors 200 years old, waxed, and black as coal. On sample bricks Stanley and I tried everything we heard of, liquids and waxes and polishes and waterproofer, and every brick turned a hideous color. Elsie sent flocks of letters to friends in England, where brick floors are commonplace, and the eagerly opened replies forgot to mention them, until at last one said, "You don't do anything to brick floors but scrub them when they need it." Surprisingly, they seldom need it, but when they do, my rosy-mauve floors are scrubbed with the electric scrubber, rinsed with the soft water, dried with the Rex-Air. And they do come out beautiful.

Oh, the off-the-floor toilet! I saw its picture in a little magazine. Patiently Joe hunted down its obscure maker and ordered one from Chicago for the tiny powder room that, impossibly, we got into the transformed tool shed. It left Chicago by truck and vanished. Weeks of effort found it in Ohio, and it arrived later than Joe's supplier's new catalogue which offered a better one, cheaper. Anyway, it's a pleasure to sweep a dust mop under it.

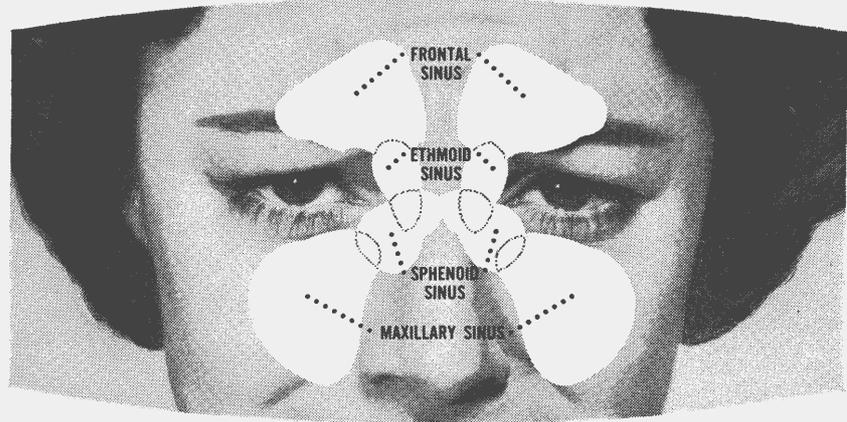
And my happiness with the wall oven's French doors. Opened, they let me wash the whole inside of the oven easily. Why do manufacturers make tall, down-opening oven doors that keep short arms like mine from reaching the oven's back wall? On the glorious day when Emil installed my oven, I opened a magazine and saw advertisements of the new ovens: their linings come out to be washed at the sink.

Elsie was awed. "What a country," she said. "Before you can get the very latest thing put in, it's obsolete." She has since returned to England and bought a 15th-century house.

My cabinets had to be handmade. Richard Marinaro made them, singing while he did so. He made them on incredibly clever power machines. He mixed, and put on the walls and the ceiling crossbeams, exactly the right stain for the pine. He made the picket fence around the lawn and painted it white. And when I asked, "Dick, can you make an antique?" he simply asked, "What antique do you want?" And he made the Lazy Susan pine table that stands by the fireplace. It will be an antique; give it time.

The (almost) discord about the counter top. I wanted hard wood; Dick and Emil

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stood firm for a plastic; Joe preferred stainless steel. We compromised on ceramic tiles and that brought Mr. Scalzo into the controversy about colors. But when that counter top was glowing as softly white as leather under the white plaster ceiling, we all beamed. "That's it!" we said to each other. "That's *exactly* it!"

And the cheap, cheap chest, actually with beautifully made mahogany drawers, that I found in a secondhand shop. The breakfast room needed a sideboard; there was no space for one; it must be set into the wall. This chest of drawers was exactly the thing. It was painted gray; imagine painting mahogany! With paint remover and scraper and hours of careful work, Stanley removed layers under layers of paint and revealed—cheapest pine, with wallboard back. Never mind, in white paint the chest serves well enough.

Sometimes my kitchen does look as if it were sitting for its portrait, but oftener it looks like any happy kitchen. You know: clean, except that *already* the windows need washing *again*; and neat, except of course for our teacups and napkins and the cake plate, and the ironing still

airing, and the puppies' basket and playthings on the floor; yes, that old shoe is theirs, they like to gnaw it, and the little imps will sneak paper handkerchiefs from my pocket and tear them to bits all over everything. But they're puppies only once, bless 'em.

Every day the big picture window in the breakfast room (looking out at the white-fenced green lawn and the rosy brick walks) reminds me of my coming home from a sad journey and finding that Stanley and Dick had put that window in while I was gone to give me a glad surprise.

And everyone still ignores the way to the living-room door and comes directly into my kitchen, though everything is so changed now. For, while we were transforming the kitchen, we moved the whole house without moving it; truly we did. We moved it back from the road and turned it halfway around without budging the old house from its firm foundation: the stone-walled cellar lined with sparkling cans of foods from garden and orchard. I wanted to move it because, but, as Mr. Kipling said, that is another story.

THE END