

WELL-WORN • With blue-painted cabinets and natural materials, this renovated great room fits a family's lifestyle like a favorite pair of jeans



SPACE AND LIGHT TYPICALLY LEAD THE LIST OF ATTRIBUTES most wanted in a kitchen or central gathering area. And while a hybrid house west of Boston offered those qualities in abundance, the volume felt overwhelming rather than comforting to the family of four that lived in the soaring structure.

"They wanted to be able to live life here, to have a room that could take the rough-and-tough activity levels," says W.

ARCHITECTURE/CONSTRUCTION: PLATT BUILDERS

Timothy Hess, principal at DSA|Dewing & Schmid Architects in Concord and South Dartmouth, Massachusetts, who at the time of the renovation was design director at Platt Builders in Groton, Massachusetts. "Above all, the room had to be durable and comfortable."

The family also wanted the great room, which is in a 1980s structure that serves as a bridge between a 1751 house (now used as a home office and guest wing) and a horse barn, to suit the rest of the property. "We wanted an earthy, organic

TALL TWIN blue-painted cabinets house the refrigerator and ovens. Exposed beams terminate in custom steel connectors.



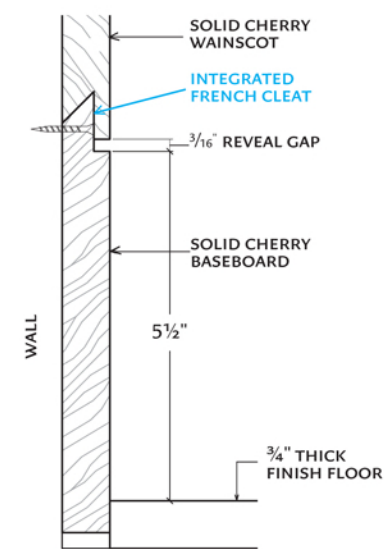
feeling," says one of the owners, an accomplished equestrian who often transits the great room on her way to or from the barn. Her husband, two children, and three dogs round out the family, meaning foot and paw traffic is substantial.

When the renovation began, nearly every surface was painted white, and a semicircular island separated rather than linked the kitchen and gathering areas. To unify the expanse, Hess added an 8-foot-high strip of cherry, which visually organizes the space. The wood continues around the great room, performing different functions as needed — wainscot, art shelf, kitchen cabinet, stair rail, balcony — but always at a consistent height. The use of cherry and other natural materials, from fir flooring and soapstone countertops to leather and corduroy-clad furniture, figured prominently in the laid-back aesthetic.

THE INFORMAL EATING area offers an abundance of natural light; the single-pane windows are framed in cherry wainscot. Fir was chosen for the flooring for its warm appearance as it ages. The kitchen island, topped in soapstone, houses the sink and cooktop.



A HIDDEN HAND



The cherry paneling required special installation, says Halsey Platt of Platt Builders. "All the wainscot was done with no visible fasteners," he says. "Any time there are fasteners in wood, there's putty, and with cherry, which oxidizes over the years, those putty areas would soon start to show." This cut-away illustration shows how carpenters screwed the cherry baseboard, cut at a 45-degree angle at the top, to the wall and then covered the screw head with the wainscot, also notched with a 45-degree angle. The interlocking pieces are known in the trade as a French cleat.

"We chose materials the same way you choose a pair of Levi's," Hess says. "You buy them because of the way they'll feel after they've been worn for a while."

Grappling with the sheer volume — kitchen, eating, and gathering areas occupy 1,200 square feet — Hess reconfigured the island. "We wanted to think of it as an object rather than a container," he says. The new rectangular 12-foot-long 4-foot-wide island with sink and cooktop anchors the new layout and allows anyone working in the kitchen to face the family room.

Two towerlike 10-foot-tall painted blue cabinets hold the refrigerator and wall ovens. Altogether, says Hess, "the towers and island read as the primary elements."

Existing exposed wood beams terminated in clumsy, white-painted wood "knuckles" and square columns were installed directly on the semicircular island. To improve the situation, Hess made aesthetic adjustments by adding more beams, designing custom steel connectors, and wrapping a column that extended to the floor in cherry.

Finally, the decorative fireplace was replaced with a fully functional hearth, for which Hess designed a soapstone surround that ties the space to the kitchen. Now, whether it's dogs, kids, or a boot-clad equestrian treading through the great room, everyone feels right at home. ■