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EAST MEETS NORTHWEST

A serene Seattle kitchen reflects an affinity for Asian design and a lifelong love of nature.

The dining area in Leah Hair's Seattle kitchen, once a separate room, features a red-elm table, a window that backlights bear grass, and Japanese-style pottery by Leah's son.



STANDING AT ONE END OF LEAH HAIR'S KITCHEN is like standing at the base of a tree. The island and dining table, both fashioned from recycled red-elm planks, stand end to end. The island's "living edge" follows the original contours of the tree, reflecting Leah's desire to connect her kitchen to the earth. "I wanted a lot of natural material," she says.

Leah has loved the outdoors all her life. It's no surprise, then, that in addition to red elm, her kitchen includes Alaskan cedar cabinets with bamboo panels, backsplash tile in a bamboo pattern, a window that employs bear grass, and counters of earthy limestone. As the mix suggests, Leah also favors a Japanese aesthetic, which architect Nils Finne worked into the design by contrasting light and dark elements.

There's also quite a contrast between the kitchen's old layout and its new configuration. The kitchen and dining room were once divided by a wall. At first, Leah wanted to simply replace failing appliances, including a switch from an electric range to a gas model. But that required moving the

ABOVE: The island top, made of recycled red elm, replicates natural tree contours and contrasts with light Alaskan cedar cabinetry. LEFT: With the island's trough sink used mainly for prep work, the perimeter sink is for cleanup. It's part of a wall that incorporates a well-disguised dishwasher and more of the room's Asian influence.





The island's natural beauty doesn't come at the expense of function. The 4-foot-long trough sink, as well as the easy-access gear, can be shared by multiple cooks. The push button by the faucet activates the sink's disposal.



Nature's colors, patterns, and patinas warm the sleek kitchen appliances and apparatus.



PARALLEL PERKING

Removing a wall between the old kitchen and dining room created a larger space with outdoor access at both ends. With the island and table parallel to perimeter cabinetry, there are stations for multiple cooks. Placement of appliances and sinks sets up clear zones for prep, cooking, and cleanup.

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range. "Pretty soon, everything was having to be moved around," Leah recalls. "Nils said, 'I think we should just gut the kitchen and dining room and start fresh.'"

Now, rather than separate kitchen and dining areas, there is a unified space with clear sight lines and views. One end looks out at Puget Sound, while the other boasts French doors to an herb garden. Leah keeps them open much of the year.

Should Seattle's weather live up to its inclement reputation, there are spaces for inward reflection, too, including a window seat and open shelves that display pottery by Leah's son, Ben Patton, who studied ceramics in Japan.

Even when the kitchen is full of people, Leah says, it has a natural serenity that everyone responds to. "The kitchen works so well," she says. "I cook better for myself now because it's so easy and fun, and it's a really relaxing place to be." ❧

ABOVE LEFT: Leah's desire to switch from an electric range to a gas model ignited a complete overhaul of her kitchen. She now enjoys a professional-grade unit with two ovens. The surrounding cabinets are inset with real bamboo, while the backsplash tile is a bamboo pattern. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A cozy window seat shares a wall with the refrigerator and a third oven, giving Leah an inviting spot to curl up with a book.