GOODNIGHT KITCHEN

A long overdue kitchen renovation inspires nostalgia.

By Maureen Egan

If the artist Clement Hurd had used my kitchen as inspiration for his illustrations in *Goodnight Moon*, Margaret Wise Brown's calming, classic picture book, no child would ever have drifted off to sleep. When we moved in 20 years ago, there was an orange range hood and not much good — French's yellow mustard-colored cabinets, yellow and green plaid wallpaper and a vomit-colored floor.

I can't blame everything in the kitchen on decades-old design impulses, though. In the years we've lived there, we, too, have laid bold colors (and dirt) on a little thick. We're finally saying goodnight to all that and redoing our kitchen: Goodnight crumbs, goodnight grease, goodnight frightening crud in that crease.

As my husband and I are designing and renovating it mostly ourselves (with assistance from our handy son and the occasional professional), the project has the potential to turn into a nightmare. Working on the kitchen of our dreams has kept us up for nights, worrying about the cabinet order (it was wrong) and the countertop choices (the jury's still out). Now that we're in the thick of demolition and dust, I need a bedtime story to relax me.

It's been a long haul to our new kitchen and we are not there yet. When we moved in, we were tapped out financially, so only paint was possible. A mug from Pier 1 inspired me to paint the cabinets French blue with plum and green accents. All I can say in my defense is that it drew the eye away from the barfy floor. I bought more mugs to tie the whole thing together. It worked — when we drank hot chocolate.

That version lasted a few years until we planned a real renovation with new cabinets, countertop and floor. A tree smashed through our roof at precisely the wrong time and place, putting the new cabinets on hold. So we faked it by refinishing and repainting and staining a cobalt blue and wood combo with deep green accents.

It's been 17 years since our "temporary" renovation. In the ensuing years our children have grown up and wound up with nicer kitchens than we have. After years of not thinking it was worth the hassle to overhaul it, I suddenly sound like a petulant toddler. I need a new kitchen NOW. I'm tired of paint chips in my pots. I want soft-close drawers and rollout shelves. And I want the new cabinets and appliances out of the living room. Getting to that storybook ending is where the dramatic tension is.

Last week, in the middle of demolishing our kitchen, devoid of cabinets, color and cleanliness, I realized that *Goodnight Moon* tells the story of my kitchen, and my family's life, in 130 words and 20 pictures. It's all in there, loaded with foreshadowing. In the great green room — yes the dark green on the walls was a mistake, but the deep green gas stove is the best thing in the house. I recognize those bowls and that mush — and more than one mouse. The red balloons that celebrated birthdays around the table. The feral cats outside the kitchen window will do for the kittens, and the mittens are in that drawer there. Though for now, "Goodnight air/Goodnight noises everywhere" resonates the most. The kitchen air has been especially heinous as we've drilled through brick and sawn through tile, grout and wood with a grinder, circular saw, hammer drill and reciprocating saw. We are hands-on and dust-on. I'm afraid that makes me the old lady not exactly whispering, "HUSH!"

The rhythm of gutting and rejuvenating a kitchen isn't the least bit soothing and I'm tiring. If the plumber doesn't show up soon to reconfigure the pipes so we can get the kitchen sink working, I'm going to make like a bunny and run away.

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Bob Scott illustration