

Renovation, Week 9: The Finale

I am pleased to present the new Dinner Is A Crock kitchen! It's been months of hard work, intense labor, and intricate planning, but I am thrilled to welcome you to my home and get back to creating new and exciting recipes to share.

Week NINE— let's break it down and see how the transition unfolded...

Tuesday: [Carolina Custom Surfaces](#) did a beautiful job installing my new countertops on a very cold day. The guys were courteous and skilled. I love it when people show up to work but take a minute to just step back and admire the progress before they begin. This isn't just an office, this is my home, too. I appreciated that the guys asked me my opinion, like on faucet preferences, and even had great recommendations for counter cleaners (they totally recommended [THIS](#) and [THIS](#) to keep my quartz clean and pretty.)



Even the sun wanted to catch a glimpse of

my new countertops
from Carolina Custom
Surfaces!

My counters were installed perfectly, my house was kept clean, and my kitchen is one step closer to complete. They did such a good job that I'm starting to think about using [Carolina Custom Surfaces](#) to update the bathrooms and get a few custom cutting boards! (*TACOS FOR DINNER USING MY LAST BATCH OF FROZEN COOKED TACO MEAT*)

Wednesday: My cabinet installer came by this morning to finish up some last little details. Any man that wants to bring me a crown is fine by me... even if it's just the molding to go up against the ceiling. ☐

This afternoon, the tile backsplash was installed under cabinets behind where the hood will go. The subway has never looked this good.

What a difference in the dimensions of the room with the refraction of sunlight from the tile and countertop! I feel shiny and pretty. (*BOLOGNA SANDWICHES AND [CROCK POT TOMATO SOUP](#) FOR DINNER.*)



Such a dreamy sight!

Thursday: Today was all about regaining functionality. After nine weeks, I think I am most excited to have running water in the kitchen again! Yes, I realize that I had it in other places in the house, but I am so done with washing dishes in the basement bathroom! (SHOUT OUT TO MY HUBBY SINCE HE DID MOST OF THE DISHWASHING!!) My sink and dishwasher are up and running. And— so are my electrical outlets! I can plug it to a gazillion different places now, so you can anticipate seeing crockpots lining the kitchen at some point in the near future. Haha! (*GRILLED CHICKEN AND KALE BURGERS AND FRESH ZUCCHINI TONIGHT...AND A FEW OTHER THINGS IN PREPARATION FOR THE SNOW TOMORROW!*)

Friday: Oh snow, you ruined my perfect finale. But we made it so close! Kudos to Piedmont Natural Gas for braving the roads and still coming to install my range today. I'm super impressed with your commitment to deliver and follow-through for your patient (and slightly crazy) customers. It's in! I'm good! Just one more thing to go. ([CROCK POT POTATO SOUP](#) FOR DINNER AND A GARDEN SALAD. NOTHING TOO EXCITING.)



Shout out to Primo Water— love that my family drinks and cooks with this clean and refreshing bottled water.

I also want to give a shout out to [Primo Water](#)— I actually designed the cabinets around my refrigerator to house the [bottom-loading water cooler](#). I love it for easy access to clean water! I use it for hot tea at least once a day. My boys go to it all day for cold water (or room temperature, depending what your teeth prefer!). I also feel good cooking with it. With all the crazy stories on the news right now about tainted water, I feel really good about getting big jugs of Primo for my family instead of tap water. (The bottles are easy to exchange at places like Harris Teeter, Kroger, Lowe's Home Improvements, etc.)

Monday: (I'm playing *Pomp and Circumstance* music as I type this...) The hood has been installed and it's like fireworks going off in here. Not like electric short-circuiting or anything like that, but like we've reached the culmination of this project and the applause is going wild. Unicorns are seen jumping in the backyard and leprechauns are scurrying around

stocking my fridge. Ok... maybe not quite. But when my LG oven reaches full temperature, it does actually play a cute little ditty, so that will have to do for now. (*DINNER TONIGHT: ROASTED CHICKEN AND ROASTED BRUSSEL SPROUTS! ROASTED, PEOPLE! LIKE, IN AN OVEN!!*)

There are some small details to still finish (like painting the bay window), but overall, I could not be more thrilled with THIS:



Check out this beautiful panoramic of the new kitchen with all of the upgrades.

Thank you for staying with me on this adventure! I hope it's helped provide some guidance and guilty pleasure of commiserating with me through these 10 weeks. I can't wait to share new recipes with you very soon! #nokitchennoproblem... it's time to save time and cook slower. Welcome to the new and improved Dinner Is A Crock!

Renovation, Weeks 6-8: Update and Wait

When I walk into the kitchen, I hear crickets. Ok, not real crickets, just the metaphorical ones. Which is good, considering that in [Week Five](#) we had issues with really undesirable creatures in the house. But I hear the crickets like the humor in movies when it's so quiet and nothing is moving that the moon is staring at you so brightly that you have to look away.

Freaking crickets.



The cabinets are in- but
TOPLESS!

I should back up and cheer before I complain. In Week Six, the cabinets were installed. Can I get a “hell yeah” from the crowd?! (hell. yeah.) Thanks. Finally, real progress. They are beautiful and clean and I am amazed how easy it looks but how many excruciating, intricate details are necessary to make it all look just right. **(LUCAS- IF YOU READ THIS, YOU ARE AMAZING.)**

Cabinetry is like wizardry, but without the cool hat.

Shortly after the cabinets were hung by the sink with care (yes, *St. Nicholas* had recently been there), [Carolina Custom Surfaces](#) came to take the measurements for my countertops. They used some of the coolest technology and gadgets that I've ever seen— again, wizardry! Freaking laser beams to measure the space, the angles, the cuts. I don't mean to overestimate here, but I am anticipating sheer perfection from this process.



We expanded the small pantry space and added drawers and doors. I love the easy access now!

And then the crickets. Oh, the pain in waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting. And waiting. I know that the countertop template process has me believing in perfection, so I should wait patiently. This is not an unusual or even unanticipated wait time (especially considering these three weeks include the New Year holiday), but patience is not a virtue I possess.

What do I possess— a cell phone. And yes, I've called to check on the progress, my scheduled appointment time, called back to see if materials arrived, and reconfirmed the appointment time. (Thank you, calm, caring staff at [Carolina Custom Surfaces](#), for handling my crazy. Because it's out in

rare form right now and you are on the receiving end of the line.)

So I quiet the crickets by playing really loud music in the kitchen and share my cooking adventures with you instead. (Are you following me on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)?) I've made two batches of [Crock Pot French Onion Soup](#). I've shared my passion for Korean cooking by making kim bap rolls (very much like sushi but so much better!). We've had sandwiches and cereal and easy-peasy mac and cheesy and all those other go to foods that don't require any prep.

Three weeks of updates, all wrapped into one post. I hope you are enjoying my adventure and my crazy. Be sure to check back next week and see what the final week of install brings!

#nokitchennoproblem Right?!

[Renovation, Week Five: Dinners and Creatures](#)

Let's break this week's renovation update down day by day. I updated my four-week menu plan to carry us through the rest of the project, the installations are still on schedule, and it's remarkably nice weather still outside. **I want you to understand that while my posts may make this whole process appear to be coated in sugary fairy dust, let me be clear... I'm stressed. I'm hungry. I ran out of coffee filters. And I really hate snakes.**



Crock Pot French Onion Soup is ridiculously easy. And ridiculously delicious!

MONDAY: Dinner– french onion soup in the crock pot. [Crock Pot Caramelized Onions](#) are the best and easiest thing you should be making once a month, at least. I had two great electricians and a city inspector in the house today. We've got a gazillion new outlets installed in order to pass county code and now I can plug my crock pots in anywhere and everywhere. Very cool. What is uncool?? The crazy freaking snake that the electrician met in my crawl space and killed with a crow bar. I'm pretty sure that wasn't in the contract, but I could not be more grateful to him for taking care of it!

TUESDAY: Dinner– Microwaveable tacos that my kids can heat up themselves. Why? Because I spent the afternoon with the pest control company checking my house for undesirable creatures. Want to know something terrifying?? If you have snake(s) in your crawl space, the first place they check for snakes is the ATTIC. If you have a rodent problem in the attic, there is a potential likelihood that the snakes enter through the crawl space and then wiggle through your walls to get to the attic for the mouse buffet. (I may never sleep again if they ever find something up there!) Luckily, no mice were found. No snakes either. After a full house inspection, the only culprit was the one in the crawl space. After all the anxiety over slithery slimy snakes, this mama had a crazy migraine and went straight to bed before dinner. Hence the reason that the kids

made their own dinners!

WEDNESDAY: Dinner– Macaroni and cheese, fresh blueberries, grape tomatoes. Ramen noodles and steamed sticky buns for the grown ups. No workers today in the house so I used my time to get out and run errands, get groceries, etc. I feel a little guilty for feeding my kids so much processed stuff during the renovation, so I combat that concern by trying to include fresh produce as much as possible.

By the way, about the sticky buns... I buy them at the asian market's freezer section. Then, they go in my rice cooker on "STEAM" for about 10 minutes. Makes a great quick lunch or dinner. I highly recommend using your small appliances for more than just their primary purpose, I love using [my rice cooker](#) as a steamer as well!



It's a mess, but it's progress!

THURSDAY: Dinner– Stuffed zucchini in the crock pot. This dish takes my favorite pork meatball recipe and puts it inside a vegetable... clearly meaning that this is good for me, right?! Probably need to include a little more of that fresh fruit into dinner tonight, just to be sure it all cancels out. Ha! Electricians are here today finishing up the wiring so that

hopefully the inspector comes tomorrow to sign off on everything so far.

Here's the recipe for tonight's dinner.

It's so quick, I'm not even going to write it up in a separate post:

1 lb ground pork or pork sausage for more flavor. 1 c. pancake mix. 1 c. shredded cheddar cheese. Mix all three ingredients. Take two zucchini, cut lengthwise and scoop out the insides. Fill the "boats" with the sausage mixture. Cook on low in the crock pot for 4 hours.

(To do these as just meatballs, roll into golf balls and then bake in the oven- they get a really nice crispiness to the outside.)



Once you learn to make the rolls, the possibilities are endless. So many different filling combinations to try!

FRIDAY: Dinner- sushi rolls. Back to the rice cooker I go.

I'm keeping it simple and just doing spicy tuna rolls tonight (drained canned tuna, a little mayo, and enough sriracha to

make the mixture orange). The kids will eat the rice, some steamed edamame, and cut-up mango. Sometimes simple is just so good. Have you tried making sushi before? Once you learn to roll, it's really easy, and you can use a crazy variety of fillings! First you need [these mats](#). I keep mine clean by putting them in a gallon-sized ziplock baggie before rolling. Then just spread the rice thin, lay the toppings in the first 1/3 of the [seaweed sheet](#) and then roll it tight! Once my kitchen is back together, I'll make a video for you on making sushi rolls.

Oh, and the kitchen work?? The electric inspection was passed! And cabinets started going in! (insert happy dance here!)

Renovation, Week THREE and FOUR: Hurry Up to Wait



The cabinets arrived three weeks early, can you believe

it?!

Welcome to the Renovation Dance. Please, find a partner and a tool. Take two steps forward and then slide to the left. Take another step forward and then jump back. The Renovation Dance is a new way of jiggling about in your kitchen— there's no sink, no appliances, not even a cabinet to be seen. Time for a party... just hurry up and wait for the music to begin.

I was super excited to report that our cabinets arrived last week— three weeks ahead of schedule! What?! That never happens with a renovation! *Jump up and down two times.* The boxes filled my family room from wall to wall to ceiling. My poor dogs had to travel a labyrinth in order to get outside (which was pretty entertaining to watch!).

Count three days and then the install team joined in the dance. By now, the cabinets are all unboxed and counted. Ooooh... look at those pretty doors. *Take one step right as the electrician shows up.* Check out the old layout and realize that the current wiring set up will no longer pass code. *Grab your partner and take a full turn backwards.*

I bowed out and decided to focus on food instead- clearly a better project for me to manage. I was thankful for friends that hosted us for dinners this past weekend. I loved the company and the delicious meals. My kids even complained that we haven't had friends over for dinners in the last few weeks. Ummm yeah?! We don't have a kitchen! But it's reassuring to know that they like entertaining just as much I do. *(Remind me to add my boys to my dance card.)*



Fresh foods make all the difference in keeping us eating healthy during the renovation.

Meals have been pretty basic recently. I used the side burner on the grill to boil up a pound of pasta one night. We had home-rolled sushi the next with edamame and pomegranate seeds. I'm so glad my kids like fresh produce. I've been trying to have something fresh at each meal... sometimes something like pomegranate seeds or sometimes as simple as baby carrots and ranch dip.

Hard boiled eggs, tuna salad, and lunchmeat have become great go-to snacks at all hours of the day.

I have a newfound appreciation for all of those frozen veggies that you cook in the bag. At first, I was skeptical about cooking IN a plastic bag, but it saves me so much effort if I don't have to wash a separate container out in the basement sink.

I've worked through my first four week meal plan pretty well, so starting next week, I will write a new plan that will carry us through the beginning of January. I'm **very hopeful** that the kitchen will come together by then and I can get back to real cooking. I miss it, but this plan has saved me time and

money, so I don't mind a little legwork.

Renovation, Week Two: THX and Floors



Here's an easy way to free up space in your oven when you are making Thanksgiving dinner.

While most of you are probably brining your turkeys, whipping your cream, or stuffing that bird, we're being a little non-traditional with our family time this holiday season. Yes— we will still eat a full Thanksgiving dinner, but no... the renovation is not complete. No kitchen? No problem!

The goal this holiday weekend is to install about 600 square

feet of hardwood floors in the kitchen (and throughout the family room). Last week, in [Week One](#), we stripped everything down to the subfloors. We received great news about our cabinets being ready ahead of schedule, but we need to get the wood down first!

At this point, most people think I'm crazy for doing so much of the work ourselves, but it's been really therapeutic. Haven't you ever wanted to take a crow bar to some part of your own house?! The floors though— this was legit remodeling work. Lucky for me, my husband has a masters degree in pure awesomeness and together, with a little help from friends and family, we were able to get the job done.

But let's focus on what is important— what we are eating! Again— I have NO KITCHEN. I've got a workable sink in the basement, a stack of paper/plastic everything from Costco, and some prepped foods in the freezer.

Here's how Week Two panned out in our bellies. Thanksgiving dinner was the big challenge. I was all set to do [Crock Pot Turkey Legs](#)— it's a family favorite. But after checking three grocery stores for turkey legs with no success, I gave in and just bought cooked turkey meat. I did manage to make [Crock Pot Green Bean Casserole](#) and reheated some mashed potatoes. My boys wouldn't call it Thanksgiving dinner though if I didn't have the "secret" cranberry sauce. You know, the one that has the ridges on the sides from the shape of the can. I did find organic cranberry sauce this year that didn't have high fructose corn syrup in it, so that seemed like a win-win to me.



It's easy to keep all of these ingredients on hand for a delicious dinner anytime!

On Friday and Saturday, we worked on THX dinner leftovers. I also made [Crock Pot Chili](#)— it's the easiest recipe ever. You might have also seen my [Crock Pot Tortellini Soup](#) on social media, that was a huge hit. I used [this recipe](#), but also added a can of white beans to add more protein. It's so easy and there was no prep work and no clean up. The ingredients for both of these meals are easy to keep on hand in the pantry and freezer and I recommend adding them to your next shopping trip.

You might not be remodeling this holiday season, but I'm guessing you too will have crazy days, impromptu gatherings and festive celebrations. You don't need a demolition to save yourself time and energy in the kitchen. Save time, cook slower. Savor the flavors and the moments.

Renovation, Week One: Demolition

I cook. I am not a trained cook, but it's my favorite thing to do for my family, my friends and my fans. I just needed a better place to do it all.



This is the last picture I took of my old kitchen before we started tearing it apart.

But my kitchen— well, it was still circa 1985 with a laminate countertop, too little cabinet space and not enough storage. This is my office, my test kitchen, and it was time for an upgrade. It took six months to plan and will probably take six weeks to do, but I am so excited to share this whole process with you.

DISCLAIMER: I was hoping to get sponsorship on the renovation and tell you all about it and thank the companies blah blah blah, because it was better for ME to get that. But since we're doing a lot of the work ourselves, it made more sense to just be brutality honest with you about the process and give shout outs to those that did great... and let you know what choices I would make differently in retrospect.

I worked primarily with my local [Home Depot](#) to do the designs—the kitchen designer was fantastic. She met with me every week for almost three months. We played with different layouts, discussed my style and what I was picturing in my head and figuring out how to get it on paper. We carefully selected cabinets and worked out some interesting kinks in my space. She was patient and knowledgeable and even kept it on budget. Thank you, Kelly, for helping to bring my project to fruition.

My kitchen style is going to be French Country. It's going to be a careful balance between rustic and elegant. It will be very user-friendly, lots of workable surfaces, and even a desk. It will be sturdy and spacious and inviting. When it's all done, you'll get to see me working in my crock pots while looking out the back windows. You can belly-up to the counter bar and enjoy libations while I fix dinner. If you want to help out, there will be two prep stations on the kitchen island. And at the end of the day—cleanup should be a cinch. I'm giddy with excitement.



And 24 hours later...
the kitchen was gone.

But before this can all come together... it has to all come apart. We've spent the week tearing my old kitchen apart— as a

family. Yes, I gave my kids hammers and crow bars and a lesson is safety. Yes, I prepped meals ahead and cooked in my crockpot while wearing safety glasses. It was hard work—exhausting, in fact, but I love the fact that we did it. I encourage you to push yourselves to be involved as much as possible in projects of the home and of the heart, when possible.

And then I got the call... your cabinets are ready. WHAT?! But that's three weeks ahead of schedule! In what alternate universe does production and delivery go ahead of schedule.

My kitchen— and family room— are torn out down to the subfloors and my cabinets will be delivered in a week?

Happy Thanksgiving, y'all. It's time to get to work!