

SUMMER 10

DesignLINES

An official publication of the American Institute of Building Design



Seamless Additions

- 1920s Kitchen Redux
- Family-Run Design Firms

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This flower-drenched wooden terrace, which sits on top of a garage, was part of an extensive addition that enhanced the original home's Spanish-style architecture. Photo and design by Mark Reichel.

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A Meeting with Lasting Significance

This year AIBD turns 60: a milestone that isn't just a collection of years, but rather a lifetime of accomplishments. And we have no plans to rest on our laurels. In fact, as we enter our seventh decade, two monumental changes—a merger and a new name—may be just on the horizon.



The proposed merger would be with the National Council of Building Designer Certification, an independent entity that AIBD helped establish to administer the certification exam for residential designers. In January, the council and the AIBD House

of Delegates each approved a motion to discuss the merger. If the merger goes through, AIBD will pursue establishing certification policies and procedures recognized by third parties. Plus, with one membership, you'll have access to both AIBD and its certifying body.

Also in January, a task force was established to evaluate if our name best describes the services our members provide to consumers. The task force has been busy identifying the predominant type of work most of our members do: residential design, commercial or both. You may have already received this survey, asking for your perspective on our current name and whether it aptly describes your business's primary activities. The task force plans to report its findings at our national convention in Portland, Ore., this August. In addition, officers from AIBD and the certification council will also present their recommendations about the proposed merger.

These two separate issues deserve the thoughtful deliberation and open discussion that can only come from having all of our members in one place. That is why I urge you to attend the national convention this summer. This is your opportunity to participate in events that will have lasting significance. ■

Steve Mickley
AIBD Executive Director

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When Design Work Is a Family Affair

Running a business with relatives can foster closer family ties even when disagreements arise

By Catherine Siskos

For more than 30 years, David Seymour ran his Alaska-based design firm just the way he liked it—alone. Then four years ago, Seymour took a chance and hired his first employee, his son Zachary. Now 24, Zachary is his dad’s go-to guy for drafting and 3D modeling, freeing up more time for Seymour to design houses and meet with clients. Although his son is on track to become a full-fledged partner and designer, Seymour is the first to admit that working with family has its ups and downs. “Even though we are similar and think the same way, we have moments when we want to knock each other’s heads off,” he says with a laugh. “But we try to work out our differences by talking the problem through.” And if all else fails, father and son can always resort to their mutual interest in kendo, the Japanese version of fencing, where Zachary—the more experienced fighter of the two—has the upper hand.

Family-run enterprises, which range from small local dry cleaners to publicly traded retail giants like Walmart, account for at least 80% of North American businesses, according to the Family Firm Institute, and anecdotal evidence suggests that many design firms are also a family affair, run by married couples, siblings or, like the Seymour Design Group, a parent and adult child. These design firms often share key characteristics that help them defuse tensions so that their businesses and family relationships can thrive.

Some are addressing the greatest challenge any family business faces—grooming a successor—while others wrestle with how to keep the business from intruding when the workday is over. Most importantly, all successful family businesses understand that “they are about more than just making money,” says Torsten Pieper, an assistant professor at Kennesaw State University’s Cox Family Enterprise Center. “They are also about shared values and family pride.”

Someone to Watch Over Me

When designer Andy McDonald is asked what’s the best part about working with his wife Marie, who manages

the office and its finances, he’s only half kidding when he replies: “She brings home the salary I pay her.” Pooling resources in hard times can give family design firms an edge, but the greatest benefit may just be that no one offers more trusted advice than a family member.

My brother Mark “has the same goal as I do to make a living from this business,” says designer Stephen Mathis. “He’s definitely on my side.” When the stock plan portion of their company, Residential Designs Inc., took a hit during the recession, Stephen consulted with his brother about the best way



Courtesy Mathis family

Before he died, George Mathis saw his dream come true: his two sons working together in the design firm they would inherit.

to keep the business going. They not only each cut back on their personal spending, but also shifted more of their business to modifying stock plans, which in good years they had outsourced.

Trust among family members is particularly important when it comes to money. While some design firms split the proceeds equally among relatives who are also business partners, others pay family members who work for them a set salary or a contracted amount. At his wife Diane’s insistence, Richard Emigh even draws up a contract for any computer drafting that his daughter Donna Emigh Floor does for him. “You have to have paperwork to fall back on in case you forget what you said,” says Diane, who does the office’s bookkeeping and believes contracts are important with any employees, whether they’re related or not.

Wives like Diane who handle the finances for their husband’s design firm are another common theme. At Studer Residential Design, two wives are in charge of the money. While Paul Studer’s wife does the firm’s billing, his brother Michael’s wife handles the accounts receivable. “Having one wife beating on you to make sure enough



billing is going out and the other wife beating on you to make sure that the money is coming in is probably the reason why we're still in business," jokes Michael Studer.

Strength Through Discord

Families with healthy relationships breed healthy businesses, but that doesn't mean that conflicts won't occasionally arise or that family members won't get on each other's nerves. The McDonalds, for instance, often disagree about where and when to spend money on advertising their firm. Sometimes she wins the argument and sometimes he does.

These kinds of disagreements can help build better businesses when families deal with their differences respectfully and honestly, says family business expert Pieper. The Studer siblings and their brother-in-law Mike Frimming, who is the design firm's third partner, know that even when they disagree, each person believes his opinion is in the best interests of the company. "Sometimes it ends up being a compromise, which later turns out to be the best way to go," says Michael Studer.

Criticizing a family member's work can also produce sticky situations so that families often go to great lengths to defuse those tensions before they escalate into permanent rifts. David Seymour, at his wife Patty's insistence, deliberately picked a neutral zone—the family's kitchen—to hash out differences with Zachary over his work habits, including the amount of time he spent online checking Facebook and email. "When you do criticize, you have to do it in a way that doesn't get them upset," adds Richard Emigh, who knows when he's gone too far because he'll get feedback from his daughter through his wife.

The Mathis brothers minimize conflicts by simply staying out of each other's hair. They accomplish that with a clear division of duties. Stephen handles all the design work, while Mark is in charge of marketing and selling stock plans. Those divisions also play to each person's strengths so that the brothers have come to appreciate one another more. "He's not good at design and I'm not good at what he does," says Stephen, who is two years older than Mark. Because Mark lives in Baton Rouge, La., he works mostly from home

and only visits the office in Hattiesburg, Miss., once every two weeks, a setup that also helps keep the peace.

Striking the right balance of home life and work is particularly critical for married couples. The McDonalds came to that conclusion after Andy got a rude awakening—literally. "I once tapped him on the shoulder at 3 a.m., when he was sound asleep, to ask if he had remembered to make the changes on such-and-such plan," says Marie, who used to be much more manic about the business than her laid-back husband. "There was a time when I talked about it 24/7," she says. Now, the closest she'll come to discussing design work after hours is to rent a movie with interesting architecture in the background.

A Lasting Legacy

Only 30% of family-owned businesses get passed down to the second generation, and an even smaller number make it to a third generation. But design firms who manage to pass the reins on to their children have the potential to strengthen their family ties as well as their businesses. The Seymours and Emighs, for instance, already benefit from having a younger generation on board with more sophisticated computer skills than the parents. Before his brother joined the family business a few years ago, Stephen Mathis worked for 20 years with his father George, a designer who started the firm. Stephen recalls how he brought a younger generation's perspective to the business by designing houses with less formal spaces than the ones his father did.

Parents also take great pride in having their children join the family business. "Dad's dream was to have us all work together," says Stephen, whose father passed away two years ago after seeing his dream finally come true. Donna Emigh Floor says her father practically beams whenever he introduces her to other building professionals. "Wherever we go, he always says this is my daughter," says Donna. But the legacy that Stephen thinks his father left behind transcends even the business that he and Mark inherited. Like most brothers, the Mathises fought and bickered plenty while growing up, but the business, which gives them a common interest, has drawn them closer together. Without it, "we might not talk as often," says Stephen. Instead, he says, "We talk every day." ■

Exploring the Potential of Short Basements

Closed crawl spaces boost energy efficiency in raised-floor homes

By Catherine Siskos

When traditional housing developments began making a comeback a decade ago, no one expected crawl spaces to hitch a ride on those coat tails. Long dismissed as breeding grounds for pests and mold, crawl spaces are considered costly, inefficient platforms for today's more energy-conscious homes. Then came hurricanes and heavy rainstorms, and from New Orleans to Nashville, the advantage of crawl spaces has become more apparent: Houses with raised floors are better protected from floods. But, at the same time, "we don't want to go back to building drafty houses," says Bob Clark, a raised-floor project manager for APA—the Engineered Wood Association, which advocates raised-floor homes in part to promote wood framing.

Advances in building science offer an alternative—a closed crawl space sealed off from outside air, pests and moisture. Some designs have even been adapted for flood plains, where closed crawl spaces are still rare. More impressive, though, are the savings in home heating and cooling costs, which average between 15% and 18%, says Maria Mauceri, a building science associate at Advanced Energy, a nonprofit group that studies energy-efficient building techniques, including closing the crawl space. Information about constructing the spaces consistently generates the most hits on Advanced Energy's website (www.advancedenergy.org), she says. As state and federal governments adopt more stringent building codes for energy efficiency, that interest is only likely to grow. "Building professionals are seeking every way possible to reach those mandates," says Clark. "That's why closed crawl spaces are catching on."

Building Better Crawl Spaces

While the concept of closing a crawl space isn't new, the practice didn't make sense until designers and builders had a better handle on how to seal a house without trapping moisture inside as well. Barely 11 years ago, newspapers were reporting a veritable epidemic of mold in new homes and tracing the cause to tightly sealed buildings that didn't allow moisture to dry out when leaks or other problems occurred. Today's homes do a better job of balancing insulation with ventilation, and closed-crawl-space construction has borrowed heavily from those techniques.

The spaces are like short basements, with a polyethylene vapor retarder placed over a dirt floor and up the stem walls, which can be built from cinderblocks, concrete, structural insulated panels or treated wood. Built-in mechanical ventilation, either one that is separate or part of the home's own HVAC system, acts as a dehumidifier to remove moisture from the tightly insulated space. Some systems reset automatically after a power outage to resume keeping the area dry. Meanwhile, the crawl space can be accessed for home repairs, including electrical and plumbing work. While Advanced Energy prefers to see a



APA—The Engineered Wood Association

Consumers often prefer the stately presence of raised-floor homes, which sit up higher than those built on a slab.



height of at least three feet, some crawl spaces offer more head room. Clark has seen spaces built on a slope with graduated ceilings that stand six feet high at the tallest end.

Houses with unsealed crawl spaces can be retrofitted and closed off, but the greatest potential lies with new construction. Like any raised-floor home, houses with closed crawl spaces cost between 5% and 10% more to build than slab-on-grade construction, although some builders have found that they can recoup that investment in the higher prices the houses typically fetch, says Cathy Kaake, an engineer and certified flood plains manager for the Southern Forest Products Association. Consumers often prefer the stately presence of raised-floor homes, which sit up higher than those built on a slab.

In a flood plain, where raised-floor homes are typically built on piers or piles and the area beneath the house is left open, closed crawl spaces may not be as practical. Flood vents in a closed crawl space are designed to pop

open under water and then close when the floodwaters recede, but “there needs to be a slope and proper drainage so that the water can get back out,” says Clark. “It’s a fairly new concept.” Afterwards, homeowners will still need to dry out the crawl space and make repairs.

The Climate Test

But outside of flood plains, how did closed crawl spaces compare to their traditional vented counterparts? In hot, humid Baton Rouge, La., and cold, dry Flagstaff, Ariz., Advanced Energy tested the performance of these enclosed spaces, varying the placement of insulation and ductwork, and found some striking results. On the not-so-positive side were higher levels of radon in some Flagstaff homes with closed crawl spaces, an unexpected hazard that was addressed by re-venting the space or adding an exhaust fan.

As a tool for repelling and controlling moisture, however, the spaces were highly effective. Even in a steamy

Five Questions To Ask Your Designer

- 1. Do you have six years or more of building design experience?
- 2. Do you follow performance standards set forth by the building design industry?
- 3. Are you required to have eight hours of continued education each year?
- 4. Did you pass a two day proficiency exam?
- 5. Are you a Certified Professional Building Designer?



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In flood plains, closed crawl spaces have vents in the stem wall, which are designed to pop open under water and then close when the floodwaters recede.

Louisiana summer, relative humidity barely exceeded 60% in a closed crawl space, compared with 80% or higher levels of humidity in the traditional vented spaces, which acted as the study’s controls. In dryer climates like Flagstaff’s, relative humidity registered below 50% in the closed spaces, compared with less than 70% for those that were unsealed. Even more striking, plumbing

leaks—including one that resulted in puddles of water on the crawl space floor—didn’t affect relative humidity levels, although the dehumidifier was probably forced to work harder to keep the air dry.

Energy savings in cold temperatures were particularly impressive, but the placement of insulation and ductwork mattered. In Flagstaff, all ductwork was in the closed crawl space, and houses that insulated the floor above the enclosed space performed the best, using 20% less heat than the controls. When only the foundation walls of the closed crawl spaces were insulated, the homes used 50% more energy. “Wall-insulated closed crawl spaces had an energy penalty,” says Mauceri. The energy saved from keeping the ductwork in the warmer crawl space wasn’t enough to offset the amount of heat that escaped from the house into that space, she says. In Baton Rouge, the effect was just the opposite. Homes with ductwork in wall-insulated crawl spaces performed the best year-round, using 6% less energy. ■

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A cache of stone, leftover from when the home was built in the 1950s, was used to construct the garage and a connecting breezeway (facing page) almost 60 years later.



Mike Moore

AN INVISIBLE TOUCH

THE BEST ADDITIONS BLEND IN SEAMLESSLY WITH NO TRACE OF THE DESIGNER'S HANDIWORK

By Catherine Siskos

Designing an entire house from scratch is never easy, but the real tests of a designer's skills are unquestionably additions. Like a talented seamstress, a designer must stitch together multiple parts of a house despite vast changes in tastes, life styles, materials, construction techniques and building codes in the years, decades or centuries since the existing home was built. All of that, of course, plays second fiddle to a designer's number one mission: satisfying the client's needs and budget.

The ultimate affront is that success is measured by whether anyone realizes that the designer was even there, because the best additions are invisible. They blend in so seamlessly with the existing





John Tsantes

A new entry hall was added by enclosing the front portico, and the original L-shaped stairway was straightened, with molding on one side of the penultimate step added to match that of the other steps.

house that it's hard to tell where the original design ends and the addition begins. "When the project is done, it should feel like it was always there," says Marc O'Grady of Marc O'Grady Design.

The additions profiled below have that feel, though each designer faced different hurdles and employed different strategies to achieve a seamless look. What these designers shared in common was their attention to size, scale and detail so that the additions, including one that tripled the size of the home, didn't overpower the existing structures.

Ready to Build On

Every now and then, designers encounter houses that were built with future additions in mind. That was exactly

what Mark Reichel found when he was asked to expand a 1930s Spanish-style house in Minneapolis. "Whoever built it planned on putting an addition because the house was off-centered on the lot, which never happens," says Reichel. Having 30 feet of space to one side allowed Reichel to tack on a two-story wing that balanced out the home. He simply matched the addition's size and appearance to that of an existing wing at the opposite end. In back of the house, a carport was enclosed as a garage with a trellised terrace added on top.

As with most additions, the devil was in the details. Custom-made Pella windows duplicated the grid pattern of the old steel casements but with thicker panes to improve their energy efficiency. Keeping the windows of the new wing level with those on the other side was trickier because modern building codes required a more generous header than when the home was first built. So Reichel raised the roof of the new wing to match the

home's central bay, which had a higher roofline, and softened the new roof's brighter color by mixing in old clay tiles that he found in salvage yards. Because the client also wanted an outdoor living space, Reichel added the terrace above the garage, complete with an overhead trellis that attached to the building side rather than the garage roof, which couldn't be penetrated.

Mike Moore of Four Points Design also found a ready-to-build-on house when one of his clients wanted to add a detached garage to a 1950s stone home. The original builder had left behind a veritable gold mine of matching stone that worked out to be the exact amount needed for a two-car garage. Like those on the house, the rafters on the garage were exposed at the ends with detailed cuts of wood that Moore matched. A breezeway connected the house to the garage, which was angled "so that it didn't look like we were extending the house," he says.

The new three-story A-framed addition was placed perpendicular and to the left of the original A-framed home, which was built over a garage, tripling the house's size.



David DiSpirito



Mark Reichel

Because modern building codes required a more generous header than when the home was first built, the roof of the new wing on the right was raised to keep the second-floor windows level with those on the original wing.

Supersize It

A house that had to grow dramatically was the problem David DiSpirito of Homesite Inc. faced. His clients wanted to triple the size of their lofted home, which sat atop a two-car garage, so that the entire house would total more than 3,000 square feet. Supersized additions are tough to pull off, but the original 1980s home was a plain A-frame structure, with a generous lot and room to grow on three levels.

To minimize the footprint, DiSpirito packed the square footage into a three-story A-frame addition placed perpendicular to one side of the existing house, with an extended deck that nearly surrounded the entire building, linking old with new. Because the house sat up high off the ground and had a steep pitched roof, there was room for two floors—one below and one above—the main level. The trick was keeping each of the three floors in the addition level with their counterparts in the existing home.



David Whiteley

A complicated roofline called for simplifying the addition of the first bay on the left.

For a seamless look, DiSpirito enlivened the addition and the existing home's austere façade with new siding and trim, and used two-story dormers to break up the large expanse of roof. "Sometimes, you have to bring the details of the addition back to the main house instead of the other way around," he says. And because the owners could afford to re-roof the original home, matching asphalt shingles hid the building seams in plain sight.

Simple Lines

To compensate for the busy design of his clients' Texas home, David Whiteley kept the addition relatively simple while retaining a few select details for continuity. The 1990s house had a jagged roofline as well as multiple pediments over the arched windows and doors. Meanwhile, the owners wanted to enlarge the 3,000-square-foot house by another 2,200 square feet to add additional rooms and baths on two floors along with a deep porch in back that served as an outdoor kitchen.

In front, the addition sat slightly further back from the rest of the house with a lower roofline, as if in deference to the existing home. The addition kept the same unusual arched window with the pediment overhead, while in back the porch's columns matched those flanking the front door. Over the porch, which jugged out, new dormer windows copied the home's prevailing window style but in a cleaner, more streamlined way. The addition had the added benefit of being entirely self-contained with

a generator, separate wiring, air conditioning and circuit breaker panels. "If there's a hurricane and the power goes out, all they have to do is flip the switch and they can live in that part of the house indefinitely," says Whiteley.

Seamless Indoors

When his clients wanted to extend the foyer of their 1930s Colonial Revival home so that visitors didn't enter directly into the living room, O'Grady devised what he thought was a minimalist solution: Enclose the existing front portico to create a new foyer. With its pediment overhead and narrow windows flanking the front door, the enclosed portico suited the home's architecture, kept the same footprint as before and put the space to better use. "We try to keep as much of the existing house and add on only in places where it makes sense," says O'Grady.

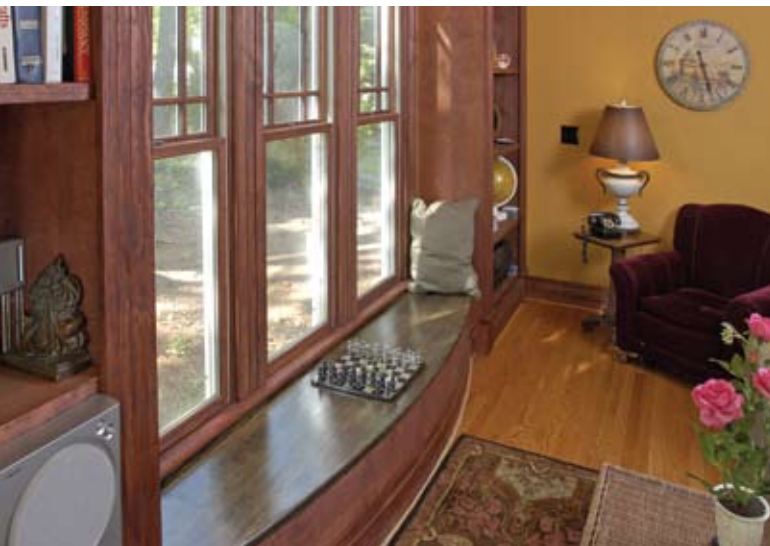
But creating a seamless look indoors required tackling the cramped, dark hodgepodge of the old foyer. A staircase that turned sharply at a right angle near the bottom was boxed in on one side by a hall closet, while the narrow lower landing served as an entrance to another room, which originally had been the garage. Anyone entering or exiting that room had to go up and then down a few steps through the landing.

To open up the space, O'Grady removed the closet and lower landing so that he could straighten the stairs. Meanwhile, he raised the floor of the adjoining room, making it level with the foyer, and widened the open doorway. Where the old and new foyers met, another broad open doorway helped define the new front

hall, setting it slightly apart, even as it expanded and brightened the original foyer further indoors. For a uniform appearance, the floors in the adjoining room and both foyers were sanded and refinished to match, and even used the same species of wood. As an added touch, a decorative molding on one side of the penultimate step was re-created to match the rest of the stairs.

Not all clients, though, want an addition to keep the house's architectural style indoors. Many want a traditional exterior with a modern interior, says Adam Cohen of Structures Design Build, who prefers the design to be consistent indoors and out. "I like to set a mood and keep a mood," he says, "particularly for pre-1940 houses, which usually have a lot of detail and character to begin with." Otherwise, the effect is just too jarring. Cohen is willing to add new features indoors if they can be found in other houses of a similar era or style. For instance, when his clients wanted a large family room tacked on to a 1912 house, Cohen included built-in bookshelves and window seats even though the original house lacked them. What is considered seamless can often be subjective, he admits. "The important thing is to honor what was started." ■

Adding new features, like this window seat, works as long as they can be found in other houses of a similar era or style.



Adam Cohen



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Seven Ways to Go Green at the Office

A designer shares her tips for practicing sustainable working

By Jenny Pippin

With so much attention paid to building greener houses these days, it's easy for designers to forget that sustainability really begins at the office. The place where most of us toil 40 hours each week may be the most paper-laden, water-wasting, energy-hogging location that we're ever likely to spend time in. Meanwhile, a few simple practices like recycling office paper or turning off your computer at night cost little or nothing for businesses to implement. (Running your business alone, as most designers do, doesn't let you off the hook either.) If anything, the same measures that help conserve energy and eliminate waste are also the ones that end up saving money in the long run. Even better, your green practices at work can help you attract clients because consumers like to be associated with businesses that do good things for the environment. So here are seven ways to practice sustainable working:

Lose the Paper

Although they can churn out the pages, computers can also eliminate the need for paper altogether. Electronic planners and calendars, for instance, can help you keep track of your appointments. Invoices and marketing materials can be emailed rather than snail-mailed, while online services such as MyFax.com allow faxes to be sent directly to your PC where they can be read on the monitor. In those rare instances when you need to send an old-fashioned letter on paper, use letterhead that you can print in house and easily make changes to instead of a ready-made supply from a professional printer. If your business's address or phone number should change, you won't be stuck with boxes of letterhead that you can't use.

Turn off the Juice

Just like the houses you design, your office should make the best use of natural light, and when daylight isn't enough, use energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulbs in desk lamps or other light fixtures. Replacing just one incandescent bulb with a compact fluorescent bulb reduces carbon dioxide emissions by more than 300 pounds each year. Any outdoor security lights should

have a motion detector installed so that the lights only switch on when someone walks by. An electric audit, which some utility companies offer, can pinpoint other energy savings and assess whether the amount and quality of light is sufficient for the task performed.

Change the Setting

If your office has a thermostat, it should be programmed so that it switches to the most energy-efficient setting an hour before you leave at the end of the day and resumes keeping the office at a more comfortable temperature 30 minutes before you or any employees arrive each morning. Turning the thermostat down two degrees in winter and up two degrees in summer reduces carbon dioxide emissions by about 2,000 pounds a year. And don't forget to reset the thermostat for your water heater so that it's no higher than 120 degrees Fahrenheit. That reduces emissions by 550 pounds each year, while wrapping an insulation blanket around the water heater cuts emissions by an additional 1,000 pounds annually.

Go with Low Flow

The same tactics for conserving water in houses also apply to offices, including switching to low-flow bathroom fixtures such as faucets and toilets. But in one instance, it makes more sense economically and environmentally to use more tap water—when it's a beverage. If the price of bottled water doesn't concern you, consider the environmental costs of producing and transporting the almost nine billion gallons of bottled water that thirsty Americans consumed in 2007. The sensible alternative is to put a filter on the faucet and drink tap water instead.

Use a Little Remote Control

Many designers may not realize it, but they've already adopted green working practices by running their businesses out of their home. But even if your design firm is based somewhere else, set a good example for your employees by carpooling or biking to work, or let them telecommute once or twice a week.



Wes Stearns, Artist Eye Photography

The author's office makes the best use of natural light. An electric audit can help pinpoint other energy savings and determine if the light is sufficient for the task performed.

Today's technologies make it easier than ever for far-flung employees to stay in touch remotely with instant messaging or video conferencing calls that use an Internet connection and software like Skype, which can be downloaded free. Some technology companies like Vonage can also help your firm stay connected to clients whenever you and your staff are working offsite by setting up your firm's phone so that it rings in multiple locations simultaneously. That way, you don't miss any important phone calls, and your clients never realize that you're working from home.

Clean the Air

A 1989 EPA study found that when an office's indoor air quality improved so did employee productivity. The best way to maintain healthy air quality is to limit the amount of indoor pollutants, particularly volatile organic compounds, which some furnishings and building

finishes emit. Instead, choose low or no VOC furnishings and building finishes, especially those used in flooring, carpeting, paint, adhesives and sealants. Regularly changing or cleaning the filters in HVAC systems is also a good idea, and for an inexpensive low-tech way to purify the air, try bringing in some potted plants.

Shop Locally

Whenever possible, choose products and services from local businesses. That not only reduces transportation costs, it also pumps dollars into your local economy and helps you build strong business relationships in your own community. Eventually, those businesses may return the favor by seeking out your services or by passing along your name to their customers. ■

Jenny Pippin, a green design and building consultant, practices sustainable working at her firm Pippin Home Designs (www.pippinhomedesigns.com) in Sherrills Ford, North Carolina. This article is adapted from a series of lectures that she has given on green building.



Footsteps to the Past

Architectural and period details transform a 1980s kitchen to look like a 1920s original

By Jim Wright

It's not everyday that updating a home also requires turning back the clock 90 years, but as part of a larger remodeling project that included an addition, my clients wanted a period kitchen to match their 1920s two-story stone and shingle house. The existing kitchen was definitely of another vintage—classic 1980s—with clunky track lights and dark wood cabinets that made the room seem cramped and uninviting, the antithesis of what a kitchen of any era should be. The new period kitchen, which expanded into an existing dining nook, also needed to fit in smoothly with an adjacent single-story addition for a new casual dining space and mudroom.

All of this required careful thought and even a little research. After all, what exactly did a 1920s kitchen look like, and how authentic did the room need to be in order to project the warmth, ambience and period likeness that my clients sought without sacrificing utility? The answer lay in a combination of details, architectural features and realistic compromise that often serves as the key to solving so many design puzzles.

A 1920s Ambience

One question, at least, could be answered right off the bat: Modern-looking, up-to-date kitchen appliances were a must. Even though modern stoves and fridges can be purchased in a retro style, that option was too costly for my clients, who were on a fixed budget. Because they wanted a new kitchen that looked like it was original to the home, other features would have to evoke the 1920s. That decade was the beginning of the modern kitchen, when fitted cabinets and countertops first started replacing the pantry-dressers and central worktables that had been the mainstays of 19th-century cooks.



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Working with my client, the remodeling contractor and his interior design staff developed the custom-made 1920s-style cabinets, which were painted off-white, as the originals would have been. Here, no attention to detail was spared. The cabinets and drawers have period-appropriate hardware, such as glass knobs and nickel-plated library-pull handles. The sink cabinet, especially, evokes the era with its molding accents

Custom-made cabinets with period-appropriate hardware, molding and furniture feet capture the charm of another era. Inset: Elliptical archways united the addition with the rest of the home so that the 1920s kitchen didn't abruptly stop with a modern doorway onto adjoining rooms.



Residential Designed Solutions

The addition's shed roof has a reverse dormer so that a second-floor window isn't obstructed.

and furniture feet. For added emphasis, the cabinet was offset up to six inches so that it gently protrudes from the surrounding cupboards. A few upper cabinets have divided-light glass doors to display dishes, and directly beneath, spice drawers serve 21st-century cooks using old-fashioned packaging.

Other period touches include butcher-block countertops and a simple backsplash of white subway tile. An interior designer selected the brown floor tiles, which have the rustic look of brick pavers and were specifically chosen to blend in with the hardwood floors found elsewhere in the house. (The homeowners didn't want a startling change in floor color and material that began at the kitchen doorway.) Large schoolhouse lights as well as a pendant fixture with an acorn globe brighten the kitchen and also lend authenticity to the space.

Timeless Accents

While period kitchen fixtures went a long way toward transforming the space, architectural details also help give the impression that the room and its new dining area have

always been there. The kitchen's existing large sash window looked especially out of place for a 1920s kitchen so it was replaced by two smaller side-by-side sash windows over the sink. To enhance the effect, the contractor and his trim carpenters aligned the check rail in the double hung windows with the bottom of the upper cabinets as well as with the wainscoting cap along adjacent walls. Although they're small details, they contribute to the kitchen's timeless feel, as if decades hadn't passed and the room was much like it was in the 1920s.

In some ways, that timeless look was easier to re-create in the kitchen than with the addition, which raised new difficulties even as it resolved old ones. For instance, the new informal dining space blocked the existing formal dining room, eliminating its rear window and the view of a new terrace. So that the dining room wouldn't be cut off, an elliptical arched doorway replaced the window, opening up the space to the kitchen's informal eating area and its view of the terrace. The style of arched doorway was chosen because it matched an existing archway that separated the foyer from the stair hall. The same arched style was repeated for the mudroom's entryway and for two other cased openings between the foyer and kitchen. That architectural detail helped unite the addition with the rest of the home so that the 1920s kitchen didn't abruptly stop with a modern doorway onto adjoining rooms.

The addition's ceiling, however, threatened to undermine the whole effect. For the ceiling to match the height of the kitchen and look original to the home, the eave of the single-story addition had to be raised, making it too high for a second-floor bedroom window. The solution was a new shed roof with a reverse dormer (also known as a panned window) that had a shallow pitch for rainwater to drain. Although the bedroom window has a restricted angle of view, it is still largely unobstructed and meets all current requirements for ventilation and egress. It is also a shining example of how design barriers can often be overcome with a little ingenuity and compromise. ■

Jim Wright is the founder and president of Residential Designed Solutions (www.rdshomedesign.com) in Columbus, Ohio, where he specializes in one-of-a-kind designs for houses of any era.



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