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10TH ANNUAL • 30

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DESIGN INSPIRATIONS • 48

Stylish Butler's Pantries

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Kitchen Highlights Fresh Take on the Past

BY KIM BERNDTSON

Period-inspired materials and architectural details give this newly reimagined kitchen a sense of history, while a contemporary layout, appliances and functionality make it work for modern living.

NEW HAVEN, CT — For a century-old home, a successful renovation isn't necessarily about restoring everything to the way it once was. Sometimes, it's more about understanding the character of the architecture, identifying what makes it special and then interpreting that character through a contemporary lens.

That was the approach behind this whole-house renovation in North Haven, CT, where Jonathan Gordon reimagined a historic home with Mediterranean Revival and Italianate Revival influences for contemporary living, without sacrificing its sense of history.

"My clients had been admiring the home for quite some time before they purchased it," says the owner/lead designer of Design by the Jonathans in New Haven and Darien as well as Westchester, NY. "They knew it would be a sizable project because it was most recently renovated in the 1980s. But they were drawn to the home's character and untapped potential, as well as its location in an enclave of historic homes."

Although historic, the house was surprisingly plain in its original form, as the designer discovered after finding

photographs that documented its early interiors. Those images provided an important reference point and gave Gordon an unusual opportunity. Rather than recreate a specific historical interior, he could interpret the era, adding architectural details that felt as though they had always been part of the house while balancing them with selections suited to modern-day living.

The designer, who worked with Leland Torrence Enterprises, found inspiration for the project in an unexpected place...Paris.

"I read an article about an old Parisian hotel that was being updated with modern furniture and finishes, while keeping the architecture," he recalls. "I pitched the idea about preserving the feeling of an old house while introducing elements that clearly belong to the present. My clients loved it!"



TIN CEILING
Establishes a strong architectural presence

CHARCOAL-COLORED CABINETRY
Adds 'oomph' without full saturation

CENTERPIECE ISLAND
Provides the majority of the kitchen's countertop work space



THOUGHTFUL BALANCE

While the concept seemed simple, executing it required a thoughtful balance of period-inspired materials and architectural details with contemporary appliances, furnishings and functionality.

For example, the kitchen is completely new, but it feels as though it belongs to the past. Its layout, however, is decidedly contemporary. The original kitchen was a small galley tucked behind a wall. A brick service chimney ran through the middle of the room, further limiting the layout. Removing both opened up the space, creating a more functional kitchen.

However, it also introduced a design challenge. Because of the home's many passageways and sight lines, there was surprisingly little wall space for cabinetry and its associated storage and worktop surfaces.

One solution was to include a large 10'-long island as the centerpiece. Topped with Calacatta Gold marble, it provides the majority of the kitchen's countertop work space as well as storage. The perimeter cabinetry, some of which was kept shallow to preserve circulation around the island, provides additional storage. A pantry tucked behind the refrigerator/freezer and beneath the stairs to the second floor provides even more.

"It is a full kitchen with plenty of storage for all the expected kitchen staples, with room for multiple cooks, seating and appliances," he relates. "We were able to include everything, it was just very, very carefully thought out."



Because of the home's many passageways and sight lines, there was surprisingly little wall space for cabinetry, so Jonathan Gordon included a centerpiece island that provides the majority of the kitchen's countertop work space as well as storage.

The juxtaposition of modern with more historical elements makes this kitchen design successful. The matte black faucet is one of the selections that ups the contemporary quotient for the space.

Copper serves as a unifying thread throughout the kitchen, appearing in elements such as accents on the hood, range and faucet as well as the apron-front sink, refrigerator/freezer hardware, mesh cabinetry inserts and tin ceiling.



PERIOD CHARACTER/MODERN FUNCTION

The kitchen's period-inspired character comes primarily from the materials and detailing incorporated throughout the space. For instance, an octagonal tin coffered ceiling, made from new tin from American Tin Ceilings, establishes a strong architectural presence overhead and echoes the geometry of the home's exterior.

"Tin wouldn't necessarily have been used as a ceiling in a home in the 1920s," he relates. "It was more of a commercial finish, but it felt 'of the era' so it works well in the space."

Interestingly, the dimensional coffers also make the relatively low ceiling feel taller, which was an important consideration given the homeowners' height.

"We utilized some interesting optical illusions," he says, explaining that the beams were lowered by about four inches. "It seems counterintuitive, but by lowering the beams, we were actually able to make the ceiling feel higher. Also, the visual interest of the patterned tin makes the room feel more expansive by drawing a contrast between the size of the pattern versus the overall room."



■ The cabinetry's dark charcoal hue is pulled across several elements in the kitchen, including in the range and custom ventilation hood with copper accents that also tie into the overall design.

BATHROOM SHOWCASES A STUDY IN CONTRAST

The old-meets-new philosophy continues in the primary bathroom, where Jonathan Gordon paired period-inspired materials and furnishings with distinctly contemporary elements.

A custom antique-style apothecary vanity with character-grade walnut anchors the room with a furniture-like presence that gives the space a sense of history, as do the wall-mount, traditional gooseneck faucets. In contrast, modern Murano glass vessel sinks create a deliberate juxtaposition of old and new, giving the entire vanity a collected, layered character.

"The contrast between the vanity, faucets and sinks keeps the space from feeling like a reproduction," he explains.

A marble hexagonal mosaic tile floor adds another period-inspired layer, while a Calacatta Monet marble backsplash provides a richly veined backdrop behind the vanity. Extending the stone from the countertop to the ceiling creates an unexpected pairing, combining a traditional material with a treatment that would not have been typical in a 1920s home.

Gordon carried the marble into the shower, where its dramatic veining adds richness and visual weight, while the clean-lined enclosure and bronze plumbing fixtures keep the space feeling current. The marble also creates a visual connection between the shower and vanity, while the showerheads echo the wall-mount faucets and towel warmer to help the various elements read as part of one cohesive space.



The EHL Kitchens cabinetry also reinforces the room's character with a traditional sensibility that feels at home within the architecture. However, its tailored construction and modern functionality keep the kitchen firmly rooted in the present.

The cabinetry's dark charcoal hue is pulled across to the custom CopperSmith ventilation hood, Bertazzoni range and the True Caliber refrigerator and freezer. Dark tones are also repeated in the parquet floor, creating a striking contrast to the white ceiling and off-white base cabinetry and island.

"We wanted to give the space a bit of 'oomph' with the dark colors, but we didn't want to necessarily saturate it with color," Gordon states.

Copper serves as a unifying thread throughout the kitchen, appearing in elements such as accents on the ventilation hood, range and faucet from Waterstone Faucets as well as the Native Trails apron-front sink, refrigerator/freezer hardware and mesh cabinetry inserts. Copper also shows

through as the underlying metal in the tin ceiling. Gordon deliberately contrasted the metal with brass in the Visual Comfort pendant above the island.

"The pendant is a more modern piece," he relates. "It plays wonderfully with the modern faucet beneath it, with both upping the contemporary quotient for the space."

The juxtaposition of the modern with more historical elements is what makes the space successful.

"The room isn't trying to convince anyone that it is an untouched historic kitchen, nor is it a completely contemporary space," Gordon stresses. "Mixing old with new has to be done very carefully. If you just throw an antique into the middle of a modern space, it's irony. That can work, but that isn't what these clients wanted. They didn't want the antique elements to feel ironic. Instead, they wanted them to be a true homage to the home itself. So, every element contributes to that larger conversation between the past and present." ■